

To Break Our Chains

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# To Break Our Chains

Social Cohesiveness and Modern Democracy

*By*

Jerome Braun



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*On the cover:* T-shirt vending stall in Moscow, Russia, 2010. Photograph by Thomas Anderson.

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## INTRODUCTION

Part of the mystique of American life has always been that we practice the golden mean of Aristotelian ethics, by having middle-class values that are considered the ideal, even if not always practiced, by all people including the rich and the poor. Even though we put on a pedestal the knowledge characteristic of the modern world because of our infatuation with science, there is also a certain sentimental appreciation for the past when people were closer to each other and there was less bureaucracy. In other words, we recognize the advantages of a bureaucratized society for economic growth and its costs in terms of a loss in chances for close personal, or even just neighborly, relationships.

In fact America is in many ways less of a bureaucratic society, more concerned with protecting the diversity of local cultures against the social engineering schemes of central government, than is traditionally found in, for example, Europe. Though the following description was probably more true 200 years ago, the force of cultural momentum still has weight, so in many ways Arab, and to a large extent Islamic, societies are pre-feudal, Europe is feudal or better yet described as having the remnants of feudalism, and American society is post-feudal.

Such distinctions are important because of what is gained and lost from modernization. In particular, while we in the modern world now live in a cornucopia of material goods, our personal relationships have been weakening. In fact increasingly people relate "rationally" to the vast majority of people they meet as if they are mere instrumentalities for achieving more and more material goods. The effect is usually one of great confusion, and many of the social philosophies of our time reflect this confusion between means and ends, and between the sacred and the profane. Traditionally societies use rituals, both well as well as badly, as psychological reminders and psychological sustainers of social relationships, that enforce boundaries of an ontological sort (existential feelings of personal existence that are psychologically felt, and thus are of prime importance for the stability of the personality). That is why so commonly traditional societies, but modern societies also, distinguish between the sacred (that which is most powerful and can be used with care as a building block of the human experience) and the profane (that which interferes with the human experience,

often a kind of waste product as it were, which is why excrement is almost always profane, while sex as a building block of self-esteem if handled well is part of the sacred).

Long ago such issues were known and dealt with, though not exactly in the same way or to the same degree. Something that I will discuss later in this book, but that bears repeating, is that in the classic commentaries on 18th century English law, *Blackstone's Commentaries* (1765) as described for the modern reader in *The Mysterious Science of the Law: An Essay on Blackstone's Commentaries* (Boorstin 1996) it is clear that in the 18th century positive law was assumed to be built upon a base of natural law that reflected what was considered to be God-given human nature. They assumed one could learn from the simpler laws of the past, laws admittedly superseded by the artificial laws made necessary by the complexities of division of labor and of a modern economy, just because these simple laws showed the natural order of human nature unadorned.

As Sociology in the 19th century developed out of these ideas of their 18th century forebears, for example in Ferdinand Tonnies, *Community and Society* (*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*) (Tonnies 1993), it was clear many scholars such as Tonnies assumed that communities more easily served the motives governing human nature than bureaucratic associations even though economic advance required the latter, and even though it was no longer assumed that the "natural" goals of human emotions driving "natural" collectivities would be ultimately enforced. It was also no longer taken for granted that society would be able to do this enforcement with a little divine prodding and inspiration. Though we in the present time no longer romanticize the past as much as was common during the 18th and 19th centuries, the general critique that the effects of modernization have costs as well as benefits still holds. A quite good introduction on the present-day interpretation of the effects of social evolution with emphasis on the nature of traditional societies that were in the direct line of precedence to modern societies is *Pre-Industrial Societies: Anatomy of the Pre-Modern World* (Crone 2003).

By the time we reach the modern world it is assumed for the most part that our ability to return the institutions serving our human nature to their roots is quite limited. There are many scholars who believe this is the case. The postmodernists especially assume that since they never see "natural" human nature or just emotionality of the sort once more obviously seen in simpler societies, that it doesn't exist, or at least



we can act as if it doesn't. Many of them assume that almost all aspects of human nature are equally artificial and socially constructed, and being the creations of politics can be changed easily by politics. Meanwhile religious fundamentalists hunger to serve natural law, often under the guise of religious law, though they themselves have so often forgotten the wisdom and the conditions of their ancestors that they no longer remember the past that they are trying to reclaim.

To the extent that social science can be used to extend the reach of our rationality, it requires users of social science who believe in the value of such rationality, and who also have a practical sense of what is useful and what isn't. The latter cannot be taken for granted. Creating a way of life that avoids the necessity for extreme measures for emotional relief, a way of life that ensures the avoidance of extremes of emotional impulsiveness (somewhat more common in traditional societies) and emotional repression (somewhat more common in modern societies) should be the goal for modern morality and modern religion, it should be considered the avoidance of idolatry (making sacred what is not sacred) in our time.

Part I of this book, called *Values and Character: On How to Make Tragedy Unnecessary*, includes many practical insights, but the main emphasis is an overview on how values, in both a social and moral sense, influence the development of personal character in a psychological sense. They certainly impinge on prospects for Democracy in producing a social and cultural environment, which is why there is a chapter called "Prospects for Democracy: Individualism/Collectivism as Sources of Association/Community" and a rather practical illustration of these phenomena in "The Place of Optimism in American Life." The other chapters in Part I speak for themselves as they deal with the alienation of the individual, or its overcoming in the development of individual rationality, or both as in "The Rationality of Psychological Fulfillment in Adolescents' Lives: The Production of Personal Relationships and Self-Identity." The last few chapters in Part I on "Nihilism: East and West," "Making Friends in the Non-Western World," and "Aspects of Hysteria in America, Brazil, Germany, and Africa," deal with issues of values and relationships between people in a way that is comparative across history and across cultures.

One reason the most up-to-date societies are often described as being "postmodern" is because there is decreasing faith that increasing technology is an unmixed blessing, and that social change will result in social progress. As shown in my later chapter on "What Does the

Working Class Really Want?” found in Part II on Practical Issues, there are strong tendencies in present-day society for authoritarianism on the job, controlled by the rules of bureaucracy rather than by the mutual accommodations of personal relationships. Meanwhile we use the productive powers of technology to increase our own personal narcissism off the job, which is one reason for the creation and selling of youth culture that so often encourages narcissism (which is often created by adults for youth to manipulative them, usually just to make money off of them, given that they don’t have the responsibilities of adulthood).

One purpose of Part II on Practical Issues is to illustrate such social tendencies, not by an overly rigid and dogmatic schema, but by showing the links between phenomena that reflect the impingement of social environments on people, but also freedom of action and individual agency as well. Admittedly these essays have a stand-alone quality to them, because I am trying to develop pragmatic critical theory that describe classes of phenomena that are not merely elaborations on a common theme. Nevertheless these essays build upon the more broadly-based, somewhat theoretical, ideas from Part I before. In fact if one would wish to describe critical theory in a broad perspective not limited to the work of the Frankfurt School of Sociology and their intellectual descendants, it could be used to describe any general social science theory that is relatively complex and sophisticated, that aims toward moral exhortations, and is concerned with holistic analyses of society. This is what the chapters in this book aim for, including these rather practical essays that do not assume that all working-class people are powerless and that all elites are powerful in all places at all times. They do assume however that conditions often do favor elites over the masses at many places at many times as an inherent condition of societies characterized by extreme differences in power and in wealth.

“Figurehead Politicians and Democracy” and “Social Engineering and Public Relations Stunts” emphasize more American political culture and the obstacles to true democracy as the expression of the will of the people as it is expressed in the American political context, though hopefully readers will be able to draw their own conclusions about the applicability of American conditions to other societies through these essays. Other chapters on “Liberalism at the Crossroads,” “The ‘Star’ System in America,” and “What is Happiness? The Loss of Human Nature in Psychiatry” all point at social phenomena for which increasing tendencies toward individual narcissism are a direct result

of political and social evolution being manipulated by powerful interests. They do this usually for their own benefit rather than as a result of concern for the common good, that *res publica* that was once considered the definitive characteristic of government that served the will of the people, from which the term “republic” is derived.

Part II on Practical Issues illustrates the more theoretical arguments of Part I on values and character that precedes it, while Part III on justice and freedom deals again with rather practical goals but now within a broad, holistic context. Part IV which is the conclusion shows how to discover the common good given modern societies that have far fewer cultural and even moral commonalities, at least in terms of rituals and customs, than their predecessors. “Liberal and Authoritarian Versions of Democracy” emphasizes how different societies may emphasize individualism and personal liberty or collectivism and social order (the latter hopefully for the purpose of social justice), but in reality the ideal of most societies is a golden mean that avoids both extremes. Admittedly particular societies have their cultural assumptions which inform their prejudices and they approach this ideal from different directions. I illustrate the practical results of such cultural prejudices in such chapters as “The Ecological Society” and in two chapters that directly discuss American social history regarding labor problems, and implicitly alienation and lack of self-fulfillment in the life of the American worker, in “Plutocracy and the Labor Movement” and “Industrial Democracy for the 21st Century.”

I conclude Part III with “The Great Weakness of American Government” which is a meditation on American politics in cross-cultural perspective and on how America is known for its short-term political solutions, for good and for ill. As the ideal of American democracy, government by the people, weakens, because of sheer size and anonymity in the society, and because of the controlling nature of modern bureaucracies in general, this tends to result in government for the people instead, though this seems to be an even bigger problem in some other societies. As to how much longer we in the US will be able to muddle through to success by providing lots and lots of patches for our problems, and lots and lots of jobs, only time will tell.

To give you a taste for many of the points made in “The Great Weakness of American Government,” though America has certain ideals (our middle-class traditions essentially) on how to combine traditional values regarding personal relationships with the bureaucratic requirements of a modern economy and society, we in some ways seem

to be forgetting the details of these traditions. These details are beginning to fade away as they cease to be living traditions passed on from generation to generation, and the entertainment propensities of the mass media certainly encourage this tendency. Other societies of course often have a rather different mix of traditions. Part of the difference is their aristocratic traditions are often stronger than ours, and also often their peasant traditions, or even tribal traditions, are stronger than anything that we have that are comparable.

One effect is that in many societies, particularly modernizing traditional societies, often have a rather weak middle class. This is mainly because they typically don't have the historical opportunities for economic independence nor do they have the moral self-righteousness which is the American heritage from the Reformation for this class. Instead they don't stand for much other than their own economic interests, and certainly don't seek to be the leaders of society, unlike in American society. The end result is that their middle class tend to ally themselves above all with the leaders of the rich, and occasionally, often under revolutionary circumstances, with the leaders of the poor.

In America the middle-class ideal is to combine the best of the upper and lower class ways of life, rather than the worst, the standards and idealism of the rich and the earthy realism of the poor rather than the arrogance of the rich and the escapist fearfulness of the poor. In Europe on the other hand, particularly Continental Europe, in many ways intellectuals are the third class that come up with compromises between the rich and the poor, and the middle class, those who are middling in influence and wealth, are just another interest group and not a particularly influential one. In fact in all modern societies nowadays both the religious and those who believe that people can exist only tied to their exertions and nothing else, face the same problems, the decline of an environment, both physical and social, at a human scale that people can feel at home in.

*Conflict in Africa* (Bozeman 1976) describes some of the results of modernization on traditional societies. These are societies that were, and to a large extent still are, integrated in their communities based on oral culture (there is a great deal of illiteracy), on the psychology of living in a perpetual present, and are greatly motivated by a feeling of psychological presence that comes from interpersonal interactions, not abstract thought. There is no doubt room for mythological thought, as witnessed in traditional tribal religions, but even this reflects psychological needs more than abstract speculations. The good effect of

all of this is that people tend to avoid the influence of ideas that have been developed outside of real-life contexts and so that reflects empty intellectuality (mythological ideas are often used to explain what we would use science to explain, as well as the ultimate questions that science cannot explain). The bad effect is that ideas very much carry with them the results of interpersonal influences and the loyalties of personal relationships. Virtuous leaders thus influence the characters of the people in a virtuous direction, immoral leaders produce a psychological environment where followers adapt to an environment of immorality.

What individuals get out of the group is a supportive environment which is conducive to the full expression of feelings. When the group is virtuous and loving such emotional expressiveness is like being within the bosom of a loving family. When the group is no longer virtuous and loving then individuals go through life as if in an unrealistic, escapist dream, expressing emotional needs but getting no beneficial feedback from others or from the expression of group values. Then instead wishful thinking runs rampant, and culture (rituals, art, values) does not reinforce realistic attitudes, but rather wishful thinking.

In emotionally expressive cultures, there are often individual expressions of wishful thinking, or perhaps just angst, but the social environment corrects such errors (similarly, in a metaphorical sense, the body roots out cancers). In decadent, emotionally expressive societies often individual irrationality is encouraged by others and by the culture, or at the very least not discouraged, often because the "virtuous" people have so little influence on society.

The same issue arises in more modern, anonymous, bureaucratized societies except that social solidarity and communication is innately weaker, and the independent knowledge and initiatives of particular segments (often bureaucratic sectors) of society are more pronounced. Under certain circumstances the mass of middle-class individuals (which in some societies include the majority of people, in other societies not) are the ones who take initiative politically, and in the process develop plans through intellectual analysis, since social consensus and communal understandings are more poorly developed than in more traditional societies. Under other circumstances government bureaucrats, private business bureaucrats, the idle rich, intellectuals, university professors, religious bureaucrats, the military elite all may take initiative, with the rest of society communicating with them (in rational

or not-so-rational ways), or the rest of society may remaining mute and passive, which is often the case.

Traditional societies with their biases toward holistic knowledge may produce wisdom and virtue, or may not. "Wise" bureaucratized societies may produce a holistic approach to the problems of living, or may not. Obviously a golden mean is possible, though up to now rarely reached, and at the very least we can still learn from each other. Holistic societies are less easily corrupted in a moralistic sense, but when it occurs the effect is more total, a bureaucratized society is more easily corrupted because of the self-servingness of its bureaucratic fragments, but since it is not a particularly integrated society in a psychological sense it takes a while for such decadence to spread through society at large. This offers hope to modern society, though not forever. It is also true holistic societies and bureaucratized societies often do not exist in their pure forms. Bureaucratization does arise in previously simple tribal societies, as with the rise of kingdoms to deal with constant warfare and to produce the benefits of a society which has greater tools to work with than mere communal custom. Bureaucratized societies do have their "backward" traditional sectors, filled with poor and "superstitious" peasants, and may even regress in that direction. Life is complicated.

In summary regarding the useful psychological understandings that underlay this book, though traditional societies often fear the effects of being hyperemotional and thus impulsive, or sometimes give in to it, the modern version of this more likely results from attempts to compensate for emotional repression through use of artificial stimulants. They are used inappropriately, as if a whole way of life can be built out of such stimulation. That is the modern, perhaps even more so the postmodern, version of wishful thinking. What can be used temporarily and as a kind of medicine in small doses is often used as a substitute for real life. It is modern technology and modern mass media that enable this to happen. It is not that escapism and irrationality did not exist in earlier societies. It is that we have developed more effective means for acting on this irrationality and escapism. That is one effect of increasing narcissism in modern societies.

This introduction to the vagaries of community life, and the vagaries of social evolution, will hopefully prepare you for the discussion of how such issues play themselves out in modern societies, of which America is considered a model, though by some not a model to be emulated. I think America is a model to be emulated, but only also by

learning from its mistakes. Another book by me, *How America is Different, But Becoming Less So: Pragmatic Critical Theory and Social Change* is in some ways in the tradition of the work of Max Weber, and though it discusses among other things the return of an European-style class system to America with the ending of the (social and economic) frontier, like Weber's work it sets the theoretical groundwork for a pragmatic analysis of social and cultural, and even political change, but it doesn't really go into the practical details.

Hopefully, this book on the other hand is post-Weberian so that it really does go into more practical details. The emphasis is on the relationship between social cohesiveness and community, and how they both set the environment for a practical and effective democratic society, in both a political and a social sense. Of course any particular society doesn't necessarily have both; in fact political democracy may exist to correct the problems that come from social inequality, and social democracy in the sense of social equality may exist and because of this the society may stagnate and have a desire not to have much politics at all, which precludes the need for political democracy. But it is possible to have a certain amount of both. And in the circumstances of present-day America, and in much of the modern world as well, it is probably a good thing to have a certain amount of both social and political democracy. But how much, that depends on what the people of a society feel they need. This book doesn't provide a blueprint, just a guide, a companion if you will, on the journey. So I hope you enjoy the journey.





PART I

VALUES AND CHARACTER: ON HOW  
TO MAKE TRAGEDY UNNECESSARY



## CHAPTER ONE

### VALUES FROM A PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

One way to look at the change in social environment that produces human values is to notice that the traditional, intimate social environment known as community was and is one where people know each other in depth, while the modern, bureaucratized social environment known as association is one where certain specialists know about certain things in depth, and the mass of people do not share common knowledge about much of anything. Oddly enough, in traditional communities people may in fact work independently of each other, yet in a similar manner and so empathize with each other, while in modern bureaucratized society people work interdependently in organizations characterized by division of labor, and so do not particularly empathize with each other. Like in a monarchy, they may become that much more dependent on the generalist who coordinates them, who becomes their ruler.

Ever since the days of the great 19th century sociologists, such figures as Ferdinand Tönnies, Emile Durkheim from whom the above analysis is taken from his book *The Division of Labor in Society*, Max Weber, Georg Simmel (whom I especially enjoy), and, yes, even Karl Marx, there has been discussion and fear that the industrial operations of the modern world that expand our productive powers will also make our personal relationships that much less humane. To a large extent this is because of the bureaucratization of society required.

On the other hand, bureaucratization, and specialization of function and, yes, economic efficiency have reached the point that the “postmodernists” claim that new communities can now arise, lifestyle communities built around consumption interests, as opposed to bureaucratic communities built around economic functions. In general, authoritarian societies such as those of Eastern Europe and East Asia evolved out of societies built on familial alliances, where in the family emphasis on loyalty and overall attention to duty was tempered by personal interaction. When the state became a “fatherland” or a “motherland” such authoritarian loyalties now had few limits. Individualistic and some say narcissistic societies such as the USA

started with revolts against unjust authorities, usually government elites, who were accused of both inefficiency and immorality. The result was a culture for the mass of people based on moralistic individualism, in theory if not always in practice, that has started to evolve after years of emphasis on economic growth into something more akin to hedonistic individualism.

Another way of looking at this evolution is to see it in psychological terms. Much of the world's social environments in the past and even now are conducive to producing hysterical personalities in the sense that emotional expression (sometimes of a rather extreme, even anti-social, sort) is common. Partly this is because interpersonal closeness allows people to "blow off steam" without permanent damage to social relationships, that is unless the end result is "running amok" in which case there are possibly permanent consequences. Nevertheless, hysterical outbreaks are less dangerous when the result is arguing with one's neighbor than when it is voting for an extremist, violence-prone political party, a result which is not unknown in Eastern Europe and in East Asia, among other places. The assumption of political democracy that voters have immense self-control and rationality is less true in societies prone to mass hysteria, but then social decisions in such societies tend to come from achieving social consensus no matter how long it takes, not from voting; either that or letting "rational" elites run society. The latter is the case because getting involved in political events beyond their scope of interest in daily life is meaningless to people for whom politics beyond the immediate communal level is irrelevant.

In more modern societies, such as commonly found in Anglo-American culture areas though now spreading to the rest of the world, both social anonymity through the expansion of larger and larger communities, and the bureaucratization and division of labor of the work environment, encourage a need for extreme self-control. You might call it the production of successfully "neurotic" personalities. Everyday life in an emotional sense is increasingly one where people hold their feelings in, and then, finally, eventually, release them through some sort of consumption of commodities, even if it is just the artificially-induced emotions that come about through the recreation industries.

The ability to plan ahead, and defer gratification, is obviously greatly developed in such societies. The price is a kind of alienation from one's feelings, somewhat similar to muscles getting flabby through lack of

use. Irrationality still occurs, but it is less likely the irrationality of individual or mass hysteria. It is more likely to be the irrationality of no longer relating to “natural” relationships and the emotions that would flow from them, but instead becoming dependent upon the only emotions that a bureaucratized, anonymous society allows.

To take some examples from American life, many people no longer relate to their real-life neighbors, but this doesn't prevent them from relating to fictional characters on TV. Also high school students in America often have a poor sense of camaraderie, the social sense of neighborliness is another way of putting it, and develop personalities rooted in their hobbies, so that athletes for the most part cannot relate and share common interests except with fellow athletes, artistic types with fellow artists, class clowns with class clowns, etc. For such people, life as a whole cannot be dealt with, as opposed to, let's call it one's job, even if it is just the job of amusing oneself. Finally, a third example is the way dating in America, by its very lack of seriousness as compared to traditional courtship, encourages people judging each other, not according to standards of character but by extreme standards of objectification, the “who is cute, who is popular, who entertains me?” standard of human morality.

How is this evolution in America's social environment, which has its parallels in other modern societies, this evolution of human nature in a nutshell, reflected in standards for values? Let's see where this takes us. One issue is the arising of an increased reliance on fantasy in modern life, partly because everyday reality is not particularly emotionally satisfying. To be more exact, traditional societies tend to combine emotionally-driven and more mercenary sources of social bonding, for example in marriages, differently than is found in the modern world. This is because the modern world is one of functional specialization, where for example work relationships tend to be purely instrumental, and as if to compensate private relationships, particularly marriages, tend to be idealized as the un-work relationships. But whether such romantic ideals are practiced, or just are ideals that exist as a venue for entertainment more than anything else, remains an important issue to achieve self-fulfillment.

True, the modern world does produce individuals whose bureaucratic specialty, in their private as well as their public lives, seems to be that of enunciating idealisms. It is also true that there are rich people who really do seek to fulfill cultural ideals in all their complex fullness. But this doesn't mean less socially favored people will try to do so.

In fact America was once rather unique in the way the working class, and especially the middle-class segment of it, had rebelled against their so-called social betters by asserting that the elites were often hypocrites, and that the working class was the true repository of virtue and wisdom in society. This culture of moralistic individualism has been declining, and like most of the rest of the world, our working class now expects little from the rest of society except to be left in peace. This is because their overall expectations for social justice and self-fulfillment are not particularly optimistic, and they believe a realistic alternative is for a little entertainment, a little escapism, and for some of them quite a lot. In fact the range between idealist and cynic as cultural options that people imbibe and even practice seems to be greater in more complex societies than in simple societies. The modern world seems especially to offer greater opportunities for social morality, our very wealth and bureaucratic expertise allows us to allocate wealth from society at large in complex ways, but offers fewer opportunities for interpersonal morality, except in a fantasy-driven, idealistic sense, since our opportunities for social closeness seem to be evaporating. That's why bureaucracies have become so important.

This also produces a dilemma, since such social closeness is the only way for society at large to produce a steering mechanism for society; to use our typical way of describing this, that is to produce democracy. This is true of America and all other bureaucratized societies. Otherwise the mass of people will not be able or to be concerned enough to set standards and to try to enforce standards upon their bureaucratic masters. It is the only way democracy through the ongoing actions of communal discussion, that is to say democracy by the people, can impinge on democracy for the people, which in the modern world takes the form of bureaucratization. Without opportunities for interpersonal closeness, and resulting interpersonal morality, people just won't care, and so the bureaucrats will set their own standards. It is not that their standards are all that bad, as ideals. It is that without checks and balances they will have an incentive to be self-serving. For that matter this is also the case for the various communities and the various sectors of particular communities that they serve when the influence of these benefactors is not counterbalanced by the influence of other groups.

Part and parcel of interpreting interpersonal obligations is interpreting these obligations with an eye on the common good (the *res publica* from which the word "republic" derives) so that morality is understood to reflect each individual's contribution to the good of society at large,

and not just the interests of their own little clique. Yet without an overall feeling of community, and this means seeing the nation as a whole as a kind of community or at least a potential community, there will be little incentive to do so.

In short, bureaucracies know how to put an agenda into effect, but it takes communities to care enough to set that agenda. Otherwise the communities of effected bureaucrats will set their own agendas, and that in fact seems to be what is happening in modern societies. That is why bureaucratization weakens the national community and in most cases local communities, and while it improves the efficiency of information-gathering in some ways which political democracy is dependent on, it also interferes with social solidarity except among cliques for which their own self-serving attitudes and behavior is often taken for granted by society at large, whose main line of defense has traditionally been a culture of public morality.

So if values rooted in interpersonal morality seem to be declining, what can modern writers teach us about it? Much writing in this area offers more escapism and entertainment than anything else, which is why politics and political discussion is so often driven by a drive for power more than a drive for truth, but some writers offer more.

In *The Genesis of Values* (Joas 2000) Hans Joas recounts the attempts of various social science and philosophical thinkers to “save the phenomenon,” to justify values in a world which makes values seem irrelevant because they are relevant to people, not to things, and not to people who are treated like things. He starts with some ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, who offers a morality fit only for leaders, never for followers. Perhaps Nietzsche wanted to encourage more self-confidence among bureaucrats, so they could think of themselves as being like Homeric heroes. Nietzsche not only takes the deterministic, atheistic position that there is no God, but that there is no free will either in the religious sense, since that interpretation only gives the individual an opportunity to exercise this will correctly or suffer the consequences of punishment. Instead for him the only free will is that exercised by elite individuals who overcome obstacles, and often others in the process. What he admires is literally the achievement ethic, but now removed from any religious justification. In the modern world many individuals in practice, if not in theory, agree.

As to the issue of pragmatism, Hans Joas discusses his take on the values of William James, a psychologist and philosopher who taught at Harvard around the end of the 19th century and who was the prime

expositor of the philosophical movement of Pragmatism, which is not the same thing as actually being pragmatic, but that's another story. In any case, William James believed in free will as a psychological reality, and in pragmatically determining the effectiveness of these individual decisions, as opposed to merely judging them by predetermined categories. In a sense he was like Nietzsche in admiring assertiveness, but he primarily differed in the kinds of things he admired to be assertive about. Thus for William James religious feeling is a psychological reality whether or not it is objectively valid, and for him it wasn't worthwhile to get worked up about whether one feels it is objectively valid or not, unlike Nietzsche who felt certain it wasn't. Much like the feeling of love that must exist as faith in the possibility of love or it will not even be attempted, so does religious psychology require faith in its possibility for it to have a possibility to exist.

The ideas of William James are also different from the ideas of Emile Durkheim, who is also discussed by Hans Jonas, since Durkheim attempts to treat values as the outgrowth of the feelings produced by social occasions, so that he believed eventually social occasions will become a replacement for religion, and all that will be left will be the effervescence produced by social rituals. William James does the opposite, justifies individual religious longings even at the level of mystical longings, even when society no longer has reason to encourage them.

All these thinkers, and others discussed by Prof. Joas, try to deal with basic processes of the creation of the self, and they all seem to come up with explanations that are incomplete. Just as the sacred is both adored and feared, so is morality both rooted in "the good" which is defined by its desirability, and "the right," that is duty which is worthy, not in a hedonistic sense, but because it is a tool for something higher. Thus character can never be defined only in shallow "living in a perpetual present" terms. Yet the mix between self-satisfaction and fulfillment of duty has become increasingly ambiguous, if not irrelevant, in the modern world, among the writers discussed in this book, as well as among the public at large.

For example, both Durkheim and James emphasize the place in creating values of the temporary loss of self that leads to contact with powers which can reinvigorate it, but not in a practical sense that can distinguish between healthy individualism and fascistic "looking for a cause to believe in" in Durkheim's case, or between healthy religiosity and escapist ecstasy in James's case. Both writers are too analytical in their descriptions to be useful for conditions other than the very basic



conditions they describe, which like Platonic forms are true of everything and of nothing. Even the other writers discussed in this book, all of whom wrote later than James and Durkheim, cannot come up with more concrete descriptions of values other than that they produce a kind of equilibrium between working out of personal interest toward “the good” and working out of a sense of duty, which produces meaning and is felt as benefiting oneself even if it is really benefiting others.

In fact many social theorists find it difficult to distinguish between aesthetic and religious feelings. Both produce self-actualization, but the religious person tends to be more self-effacing, concerned with duty, while aesthetic feelings can be anchored in morality, but more likely than not are more anchored in entertainment and the search for pleasure, not as a means to achieve union with greater goals in life, but merely pleasure for its own sake, a taste of pleasure requiring a sense of self for which simple egotism is quite sufficient. True, aesthetic interests can be used to intellectually explore moral alternatives, but not necessarily realistically, and quite often merely in an entertaining way. To be realistic about life is a different talent, as it is to be morally concerned, all of which together can be used and transferred into artistic exploration, but rarely originates there.

Prof. Joas concludes and discovers what many of us know already, that all societies require social bonds that are based on fluctuating amounts of duty and pleasure. Too much of one leads to not enough of the other. Some examples, and social theorists often don't give a lot of examples so these are my own, are middle-class people in America who use work to stave off depression, and working-class people from the same society who channel their interests, in effect their personalities, toward pleasurable addictions (that are at least psychologically addicting) as if nothing else of value is available. The ability to face reality realistically, and this requires some ability to be in touch with and evaluate one's own feelings, is what gives people options in their lives, and is the practical sign of character. Socially, this produces a society not filled with hysteria (typically fear) or narcissism (typically vainglory) but something in-between. These issues dealing with the psychology of personal maturity in the service of realistic self-fulfillment will be a common theme in the rest of this book.

One way to look at social philosophers is to say that in general they would make Plato proud. They tend to discuss universal ideals within a Platonic limbo, often specializing in developing models of utopias, and rarely discussing concrete questions with relevance for real people.

So let's do something different, let's discuss the practice of values, not in hypothetical worlds, but in the real world of constraints, and emotions, and wealth, or the lack of it.

In many ways the modern world is better at producing social morality than interpersonal morality, which means there is much social wealth to argue over, more bureaucratic expertise to facilitate spending or redistributing it, but less social closeness and even intimacy which would allow us to understand each other and so have the concrete information necessary to give content to more theoretical speculations. In fact while modern bureaucracies are efficient for engineering reasons alone, that is why cars are produced in factories and not in families' basements, this is true for each bureaucracy as a whole, not necessarily for its parts which may be filled with dead weight who are not held accountable just because members concentrate on their own specialized jobs, and not on communicating with each other in a spirit of community. Thus they, and the people they serve, literally don't know each other very well. It is this division of labor which makes modern society richer than previous societies, but which doesn't know itself enough to know how to spend this wealth according to its citizens' deepest desires. The specialization which allows society to produce wealth prevents the deep communication necessary to set an agenda on how to spend this money of the commonwealth (the traditional translation of the word *res publica*). Social philosophers who endlessly tell us how important it is to have communication between the various segments of society also usually don't tell us how to do it.

One result of this state of affairs has been the rise of an intellectual movement called "postmodernism" which is a fancy way of them saying social change does not necessarily produce progress. These scholars and writers are often post-Marxist in orientation, and are typically found in literature, cultural studies, and sociology departments in universities, though less often found among the people they write about. The postmodernists pay much attention to, not gaining popular access to the means of production as the Marxists want and which they no doubt sympathize with though they have pretty much given up on this, but instead gaining for us popular access to the means of consumption. For them the artificial world of commodity consumption, and particularly the world produced by our recreation industries, has become our true reality, indistinguishable from traditional families, communities, and interpersonal relationships, as they produce their own forms, perhaps more vapid, but immensely more entertaining. For them the

world of the college student, of endless partying, endless dating, or just sex, of endlessly being supported by parents or the nanny state, is the best we can hope for, and even is the wave of the future. As to who will pay for all of this, they usually aren't found in economics departments.

Thus postmodern ethics is not about conforming to a world of limited options, but about enjoying what exists in large numbers, the consumer goods and entertainment modes of modern society, and more or less ignoring what exists in smaller and smaller numbers, the close interpersonal relationships that require loyalty because when broken cannot easily be replaced. Postmodernity takes for granted that what cannot be treated like a commodity, and so easily replaced, or even be thrown away, cannot be worth much. It is obviously a hyperindividualistic attitude, with little resonance for more traditional societies than those of America and Western Europe, though they may be evolving in our direction. Postmodern ethics is all about "authenticity" of the self, autonomy in the sense of making oneself into a work of art, or in other words something akin to squaring the circle, an impossibility. In fact art can only be fantasized over, not lived, no more than one can step into a painting.

Thus once again, this time among the postmodernists, the difference between moral values and aesthetic values is confused, mainly because in an anonymous, bureaucratized society people don't know enough about each other to take each other seriously, at least among intellectual faddists. Instead, we continue to have that bane of scholarship, single-factor schools of thought, that people are mainly driven by economic interests a la Marx, sexual interests a la Freud, by resentment of the masses against those ruling them a la Nietzsche, or should be interested in resolving lack of social integration a la Durkheim, or should be interested in resolving, or somehow both accepting and resisting, the modern world, the loss of individualism in an anonymous, bureaucratized, technologically-advanced but not necessarily humane society a la Heidegger. All of these are used to develop any number of theoretical value systems, but hardly any that reflect the multiplicity of motives that exist in the real world, particularly in various ecological niches. The result is often not very pragmatic, and often very elitist, as elites act as if creating values is part of their jobs, but talking to their neighbors isn't.

Now that we know about the Platonic speculations of some academic bureaucrats, what about politicians? Do they represent the rest

of us? Occasionally. They also often target small groups among their constituents who are a swing vote, just because it is cheaper to help them than to offer help to a large part of the population, such as poor people in general.

Let's get beyond the Platonic absurdities of those academic bureaucrats who consider "make yourself into a work of art" to be pragmatic advice, as well as beyond the cynicism and public relations stunts of political hacks which I will discuss later in this book. What are some of the real options, or at least the typical options, that people have, particularly as determined by cultural expectations.

For example, the USA has always been a nation that prided itself on not being ruled by feudal hierarchies, but by people who earned their position in society. This is not to say there is no place exercising disproportionate legitimate authority in this or any other society. Let's take the place which Oxford and Cambridge have in the intellectual life of Great Britain. These institutions at least in an informal sense are at the top of a pyramid of intellectual prestige, but this whole intellectual community is also small enough to maintain a culture that reveres competence, so that the academic life of Great Britain combines hierarchy with competence. In fact the number of academic institutions is kept small enough, or has been until recently, that the "elite" will have some possibility of maintaining personal relationships, and for reasons of personal honor will wish to maintain their standards of competence. There are of course societies where hierarchies exercise authority without maintaining high standards of competence. Sometimes, the very fact that they monitor society is considered sufficient, maintaining standards that they may or may not enforce upon themselves. For them the alternative would be considered even worse, not new centers of authority, but anarchy.

We in the USA often forget how many cultures around the world are based less on self-control than on other-control, that individuals who stop having a feeling of social closeness, and being controlled by legitimate authority, will often act out in quite unpredictable, often quite dangerous ways. The delegitimization of traditional authority in Germany after World War I did not produce self-control in the mass of population, but often the opposite. When Latin American immigrants come to the US the weakening of authoritarian family and church control over their children doesn't automatically produce self-control. Often what it produces is a lost generation seeking to find their identity of social closeness in gangs. While some intellectuals in their own

naïve way may see such weakening of parental authority as automatically being a good thing, the result is often not better monitoring, but almost no monitoring at all. It is also true that these young immigrants, though in some ways becoming Americanized, in many cases will resist developing American-style self-control because they see it as denying the inherited values they still continue to hold dear. In their native lands emotionality was monitored by the older generation. In America they are expected to hold their emotions in, and after earning money, purging their emotions through opportunities offered by spending money. Many will find this alienation from their emotions to be too high a price to pay to be considered modern, or as some would say “postmodern” Americans.

Old-line Americans tend to learn to restrain their high school tendencies toward bullying when as adults they learn that making and spending money is the only true way to act out their emotional needs. Yet those who grow up in more macho cultures often merely learn that strategic use of social hierarchies never becomes outdated, especially if you can get the benefits of being at the top of the heap, and then can enjoy the intimacy of being honored and adored by your followers. If anything, American youth seem to be getting tired of, and rebellious against, perpetually holding their emotions in, and channeling them toward what’s available, which is often not direct but indirect and involves spending money. They increasingly seek social mobility to get groupies, to become adored by a public, to get a posse to do the dirty work for them, all the prerequisites of macho cultures which we once left behind, but may be arising once again in America, with the reinvigorating here of a sense of hierarchy, and the increasing importance of bureaucracy, as opposed to community, in running American life.

Once bureaucracy deferred to community, and not the other way around, and in both bureaucracy and community competency was very much defined in moralistic terms. This hallmark of American culture, its puritanism you might say, may be being replaced by a more traditional attitude toward hierarchy found in much of the world, that even if it isn’t particularly competent or just will produce order, but on its own terms. If the leaders of society in America start thinking of themselves as being macho, or going even beyond that and demanding obedience, then we will have returned to something that we thought we left behind long ago.

The USA has traditionally tried to produce social order without as strict a sense of hierarchy as in many other complex cultures, so that

competence will be constantly earned rather than be inferred by one's social position (which produces social order through their social monitoring, if nothing else). Many societies limit competition to small groups of competitors for fear that too much information overload will destroy orderly competition in the first place. We in the US have tried to honor competence instead of hierarchy, and the end result has often been to define competence so that it can be earned in an anonymous, mass society, and so can be thrown open to masses of people, instead of small, select social groups on the Oxford and Cambridge model. Unfortunately this often involves defining down of competency. What is judged in this large, anonymous market, as opposed to the small, intimate market on the British model, is often "image" which is the ability to impress people whom you don't know well. To the extent that competency is required at all, extreme division of labor on the American model makes it easy for everyone to attain this minimal competency. This is so because almost no one is expected to gain a broad competency on the Oxford and Cambridge model.

To take an example of these two factors, look at the way British movie stars tend to be known for being technically proficient, while American movie stars merely have to be liked by the public, liked, not admired for their acting. For that matter the way they get to maintain minimal technical standards of competence is to specialize in one kind of character, and then do it over and over again. This tendency toward extreme specialization is very common as an American way of doing business, and organizing society, which makes it unnecessary for any individual to learn extreme competence, since jobs have become so minutely subdivided that most anyone can learn to do them adequately. This is quite different from the culture of the American frontier and the autonomy and independence it fostered.

Thus even American business managers, especially managers of big companies, increasingly do not know the nooks and crannies of the businesses they manage. They have become financial experts who like bankers can interpret financial reports, but otherwise often know little about their companies. For that matter university deans are increasingly knowledgeable about fund raising, and not about the intellectual fields they supervise. The problems of large, anonymous markets as opposed to small, intimate markets, of having either too little information or too much is fairly obvious in American academia, and publish or perish is just one result.

It would seem that in complex, modern societies some societies have hierarchy, which produce social order if nothing else, some societies have hierarchies plus competence, and societies like America try to produce ever changing hierarchies through the application of markets, in theory anyway. In practice in our large, anonymous markets which so often suffer from either too little or too much information, we instead have image-management and a defining down of competency which is helped through extreme division of labor and bureaucratization.

Thus America increasingly combines hierarchy and competence in ways different from many other societies, and in some ways from its own past. Hierarchy is not that which monitors an organization to maintain social order, and competence is not technical ability. Instead hierarchy becomes a temporary affair of subordination that may change as markets change, and competence is that which is recognized in large, anonymous markets where people don't know each other very well. The result can be organizations that are run on image, and leaders who bring prestige to organizations, but little else. Yet it is enough if the public expects no more than this. That is why when hyperspecialists rely on burden of proof reasoning, based on just their own knowledge and nothing else, we shouldn't necessarily jump to agree.

This is not what America originally meant by authority earning its position of power. But it works if people expect celebrityhood from actors, not technical ability, it works if people expect babysitting from college, not quality education, it works if stockholders expect stunts to drive up stock prices, not efficient management. At one time the USA defined democracy as fair competition, and that hierarchy would be justified by the competence of the holders of their positions of authority. By throwing open positions of authority to endless competition there was always the danger of being overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of people competing, something which the meritocratic societies of Europe tend to try to avoid, and sometimes this reinforces the snobishness of their elites. But the opposite extreme of producing a mass society that communicates so badly that a leader becomes defined as literally one who presents a good image, not competence, is not a good thing either. Then all organizations would in effect be ruled by politicians, whether they are in government or not, image-mongers who take the credit for things they do not contribute to. If that happens



society will continue to coast along on its own momentum, the real work being done by the technocrats underneath, the agendas being set not by leaders nor statesmen, but by the entertainers who pose as them.

It is also true a society divided into winners and losers, but where winners do not win on the basis of competence and certainly not on the basis of superior morality, will not be one where the agendas set forward by these leaders will have much room for justice. Public relations stunts, yes; justice for the mass of people, no. You will read more about this later in this book in such chapters as “Figurehead Politicians and Democracy” and “Social Engineering and Public Relations Stunts.” It will not be a big surprise that compassion in such an anonymous society will be just another image, filled with hot-air, like an old balloon to be discarded when the party is over.

A fascinating book by the late British scholar and writer, Isaiah Berlin, perhaps the best of his career, is *The Roots of Romanticism* (Berlin 1999). One point he strongly makes is that with the end of the Age of Reason in 18th century Europe, that formative period for the founding of the American republic, came a failure of nerve among European intellectuals. Perhaps it came into prominence with the failure ultimately of the French Revolution. These intellectuals no longer believed in an universal order accessible to reason, reaffirming the rules of nature and religion so that the intellectual classes could in exercising their reason create, not a utopia, but an environment conducive for fulfilling human potential. Instead they saw around them time-servers, lackeys, those who served monarchies, then republics, then monarchies again. Now these “romantics” more than ever before began to idealize character, not knowledge as the basis for character, but character in the sense of strong convictions that would withstand pressures for social conformity and that would produce dreams of what could not be achieved except by producing martyrs or revolutionaries. This cynicism parading as idealism, this lack of faith in fellow citizens but plenty of faith in fellow idealists, produced eventually much talking about democracy, but very little democracy.

This attitude still exists. It would be a pity if our political class cannot do better, not by trying to gain power over others, but by practicing a democracy that makes it unnecessary. They can start to be true leaders by trying to be the true generalists that leadership requires, trying to understand society in its true complexity so they can work for the common weal, the common good. Otherwise, they will become just



another form of hyperspecialist, their specialty being merely running for office.

It's also unfortunate if a particularly American virtue, easy communication between the leaders and the led so as to reach a democratic consensus, one congruent with the manners, morals, and customs of the mass of people (and uplifting their morals in the process) is disappearing. It's replacement by intellectual fads from elites is no substitute. To take an example, universities should be a place for intellectual discussion and debate, not for gamesmanship by intellectual bureaucrats.

I should make clear that in this Tocqueville-style analysis that I am making, I do not mean to praise British society overall at the expense of American society. There is much about the British class-system, for example, that we in the US are glad to be rid of. They sometimes overemphasize a certain clubbiness that prevents anonymity and information-overload at the expense of producing just plain snobbishness, as socially successful people are sometimes too good at rubbing-it-in among those they consider to be too different from them, sometimes calling it maintaining standards when it is just showing-off or being intolerant. Yet at one time we shared certain aspects of British culture, a respect for authority based on competence and virtue for example, that may well be diminishing, and if anything a British-style class system based on off-the-job attitudes that produces snobbishness for its own sake may be developing here, snobbishness that may be starting to infest on-the-job competence as well. That kind of social evolution we can do without, as if the Hollywood "star" system and its cult of celebrity, and you'll read about this later in the book also, will become the model for American life in general.

Later in this book you will find amplification of some of the themes found in this chapter. For example, if you want more information on hysteria as it develops in various culture areas read my "Aspects of Hysteria in America, Brazil, Germany, and Africa." You may also be interested in a detailed analysis of the way individual rationality and self-fulfillment can develop together in "The Rationality of Psychological Fulfillment in Adolescents' Lives: The Production of Personal Relationships and Self-Identity."

Just to emphasize what a holistic political sociology should look like, and culture and personality issues are one aspect of this, one should clearly differentiate between micro-level individual motivations (the kind that produce personalities or sometimes just streams

of consciousness), intermediate-level social motivations that take place in informal groups and communities, much driven by processes of social conformity as well as bargaining (market-driven) processes, both of which produce social coordination, and macro-level group motivations determined greatly by the specialized concerns, and abilities, of bureaucratic managers. There are also general cultural ideals that influence individual (micro-level), social (intermediate-level), and societal (macro-level) motivations as models for attitudes and behavior, and as value-laden ideas that offer at least goals (ends) even when not detailed enough to offer means.

One way to describe the effects of social evolution, is that in more modern, and thus more complex, societies, instrumental behaviors and the motivations that go with them (what Max Weber described as *zweckrationality* or instrumental rationality) become much more important so that the ultimate goals for instrumental behavior, the ultimate goals for living in fact, become less important to the culture and to the people influenced by the culture on a day to day basis. In other words a sense of the sacred becomes relegated to the private hours of one's life, a source for speculation or even entertainment, but less a motivating factor in day to day life where it becomes part of the background, not the foreground, of everyday culture.

In more traditional societies substantive goals (what Max Weber called *wertrationality* or value rationality) is more in the foreground of the culture, and usually tied to emphasizing the importance of personal rather than impersonal social relationships. These personal relationships are multivalent in the sense that they serve many purposes, but for that reason alone they are emotionally very important, while specialized relationships of the modern sort, often found in bureaucratic settings, or bureaucratized communities (such as modern communities as opposed to traditional tribes) can be very important, but more for being indispensable in an economic sense and less so in an emotional sense. Thus in the modern setting means can very much become ends, and all the tools of the modern economy be they job functions, social class positions, or just reliance on commodity consumption as the major source of happiness are examples of this. True, in the modern setting one can develop substantive goals that are very emotionally important, such as romantic longings, but even this is usually a kind of specialized goal, sometimes achieved in reality, but often fulfilled in entertainment venues just because they are so difficult to fulfill in reality.

The chapters found later in this book will explore many of these issues, and hopefully with pragmatic insights useful for the reader. Social change can lead to social evolution and sometimes this can be change for the better, though obviously not always. The pragmatic means for nudging social evolution in the right direction has much to do with what politics, and political sociology, is all about, as well as much of what you will read about in this book.



## CHAPTER TWO

### ALIENATION: THE SHORT VERSION

In terms of cultural ideals, less so in terms of cultural practices which reflected the European class system, 18th century American society and European society of the same era were much alike. However all these societies were at a point of equilibrium in terms of cultural evolution, and American society eventually evolved in the direction of increased individualism, and at least some European societies evolved in the direction of increased authoritarianism.

By now of course, all European societies have removed themselves from social order enforced by totalitarianism and now are becoming more like America culturally, though still with less emphasis on individualism than we have. Structurally of course, they were class-ridden at the end of World War II, and still are. For that matter, America with the ending of the social and economic frontier has seen a rebuilding of an European-style class system here. Thus Europe culturally has become more like America, and America structurally has become more like Europe, but there is probably less convergence now in both areas than there was in the mid-18th century.

One way to see how atomized American society has become is to compare it with a society that has plenty of problems of its own, but is less atomized. Let's say they're just more sociable.

French society can be described as emphasizing occasions for vanity, among other accomplishments. Such occasions in American life tend to be looked down upon, having an air of disreputable anachronism, like the days when rich, old families had servants who fawned upon them, or nowadays when bosses get the ego boost of having employees constantly smiling and agreeing with them, something which Americans may do on the job but find degrading off the job. Off the job is when they are merely socializing, unless of course they are brown-nosing for social advancement. The French mode of members of various social and ideological groupings meeting and essentially appealing to each other's vanity, and often scapegoating those that are not present, is understandable but relatively rare in the American context. Nevertheless such occasions for vanity, be it among ideological

academics, or celebrities and their entourages, or similar gatherings of people obsessed with their own lifestyles, seem to be increasing in America.

As of now American society is just too atomized for such sociability occasions to occur on a regular basis and Americans, in their competitive individualism, tend to find such fawning demeaning. It is no surprise such occasions take a back seat to literally opportunities to compete, as if the major relationship atomized individuals have is to compete with each other. Thus in the American South students often want to be allowed to pray before football games, since they like the idea that God wants them to do what they want to do anyway, compete. It is also true that in America lack of personal closeness means that people take for granted that tension release comes more from things, less from emotional expression with others. These things may be liquor, trophies, sexual conquests, or turning to God, but they aren't relationships with people. In effect we are not greatly tempted toward relationships based on vanity since fulfillment of vanity is a very weak source of accomplishment in our society, most accomplishments having little to do with people in fact, unless you consider competing with them a personal relationship. The only exception to this is not really an exception, since the best opportunity to be loved by others nowadays is considered to be becoming some sort of entertainer, and then you're still relating to strangers.

I should add these kinds of safe sociability occasions so common in France (though of course not the only kind) are not only occasions for vanity, but also occasions for showing off whatever is *au courant*, be it intellectual systems, political ideas, or anything that falls under the category of fashionable. No doubt such activities, somewhat in the realm of posturing, reflect an aristocratic ethos based partly on their history, where even nowadays the relatively powerless play up to the more powerful and the powerful expect to be played up to, and in either case showing off one's cultural and educational attainments comes easier than showing off other kinds of attainments. The idle rich which historically have served as their "celebrity" class often were not good at the kinds of attainments America's business class takes for granted. Yet such tendencies exist in "idle rich" circles in the US too, and their posturing may soon be filtering down to the masses.

A slight variation upon this theme is where the rich and powerful don't even claim to have accomplishments in the cultural realm, by at least being stylish, but are merely proud of their ancestors' successes

and by default their inherited positions in society. This was the cause of the fabled Spanish arrogance in the 18th century, when major accomplishment was all in the past, and pride could no longer be earned, only inherited. It too is a possibility for America in the future if inherited social position becomes more and more the controlling factor in determining social power, like all those artists living off trust funds, and all those politicians who are related to other politicians.

I don't mean to downgrade the benefits of sociability occasions. They don't have to be merely based on mutual vanities, and they are a respite for being honored only for success through competition, when opportunities for intimacy and sharing, and certainly compassion and concern, are even more lacking. There is an animal vitality of course in competition, but it is the greatest vanity of all to consider that a lifetime of trophies can substitute for what is lacking, opportunities for intimacy and sharing, and certainly compassion and concern. For that matter sociability can be based on more unhealthy motives than just vanity. More extreme types of escapism, even perversions of a sado-masochistic sort, or at the very least jealousies and hatreds, can bind social groupings in opposition to others. Such extreme attitudes and behaviors are discussed later in this book. Nevertheless whatever despicable motives bound together the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920's and 1930's, they neither sought to develop the pseudo-science nor the political adventurism (to the same degree anyway) of their fascist counterparts in Europe.

This is not altogether a big surprise. There are many societies where a sense of social order maintained by a religious tradition, when that tradition declined, nevertheless coasted along on the basis of sheer cultural conformity, nationalism in fact. In many such historical cases moral standards did probably somewhat decline as well. America is not a nationalistic society in the same sense, and the decline of social unity that follows the decline of religion here leads less to seeking secular substitutes for religion in the form of nationalism, and more to the rise of individual addictions. These often take such forms as drugs, liquor, sexual adventurism, and workaholicism. Religion in America, particularly in Protestant areas, is less thought of as something rational people do when they plan their lives together, but more of an individual's leap of faith, and the alternative to these other addictions. Members of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1930's may have lived out their fantasies, but they were rather simple fantasies at that. They no more wanted to live through society, and sought to overturn the present social order in

order to do so, than did anyone else in America. One benefit from individualism is that you expect little from society, so even when elements of society are hated, that hatred is moderated by low expectations of anything better, at least from society if not from one's own individual life.

A similar phenomenon is how in Quebec many of the Mediterranean immigrant groups are sympathetic to the British element of that society, not because they enjoy their company, they in fact probably enjoy more the company of the French, but the French being sociable will pester them and try to get them to leave their native quirks behind and fit in totally into Quebecois society, while the British with their extreme reserve will leave them alone. After a number of generations have passed they may in fact lose enough of their native culture so that they feel obligated to fit into Anglo culture (if they are English-speaking) or French culture (if they are French-speaking), and at that point they may feel they have made a good bargain, or they may feel trapped. In any case assimilation into the host culture tends to take a few generations there as well as in America just because few immigrants wish to give up their native cultures in one fell swoop. Their descendants may feel sorry that they gave up what they never really knew, but by then it will be too late, or they may even feel relieved, it being hard to mourn what you never really knew.

It is true that cultural imperatives, such as religious ideals and its corollary, dislike of those that do not follow these ideals, as well as loyalties to whatever provides structure to society and especially government, can be taken to absurd extremes. For example social structure can be based on the hierarchies of bureaucracies, the individualism expressed in market competition, or even the middle position between extreme individualism and extreme authoritarianism. The latter is found in tribal societies where families, and to a certain extent individuals, are relatively independent yet coordinate their actions according to communal custom just because they have no other way of creating communal structure. They do this to avoid the extremes of a society that is atomized into its constituent components, and its opposite, the authoritarianism of rigid bureaucracies where individuals function like parts of a machine. The former extreme is avoided since this offers no source of social solidarity other than trade and economic consumption, a weak source of solidarity in subsistence economies, while the latter extreme is avoided since this offers no say how this machine (also known as society) functions, which would



mean they then would be at the mercy of their rulers, the guiding mechanisms of this machine.

In some ways America is an archaic society since we, like tribal societies who find themselves part of large empires, tend to have more faith in our local communities than in our distant rulers, whom we don't expect will be part of our everyday lives, and like it that way. However, frontier conditions in America lasted only a few generations, not the hundreds and hundreds of years of true tribal societies. Communal autonomy in America is constantly being sapped of its influence to be replaced by bureaucratic conformity or the shallowness of market competition essentially among strangers.

In fact the authoritarian societies of Europe are examples of societies where the decay of feudal loyalties, which had tied the led to their leaders in a somewhat personal fashion, and the loss of communal customs, led to their replacement by ever stronger bureaucratic controls and resulting enforced loyalties. The concentric circles of loyalty from family to community to central government, which had once been based on somewhat personal loyalties, became replaced by concentric circles of impersonal bureaucratic loyalties. Not concern, compassion, or even mutual self-interest became the core of these bureaucratic loyalties, but something more rigid and impersonal, since there was a very weak basis for mutual concern and mutual communication to set the cultural contents of these bureaucratic social loyalties. This is a good way to look at the history of monarchy in those areas, where "elective" monarchies or at least monarchies bound by communal traditions and the requirements to listen to councils of communal advisors became replaced by absolute rulers.

The specialists who composed the parts of government, like parts of a machine, worked under the directive of the generalist who set the agenda for them, the generalist who once had functioned under certain checks and balances provided by society at large, but as government began to replace society as the source of authority these checks and balances evaporated and the generalist ruler increasingly functioned without constraints. At that point the people at the bottom were expected to be loyal absolutely, which is the same thing as saying if they had a good monarch they took orders, and if they had a bad monarch they took orders.

The modern era in these areas has seen the replacement of absolute monarchy, but not the replacement necessarily of elites. They are still societies where perhaps 20% of the population gain fame and fortune,

and socially are often quite obnoxious to the other 80% of the population that they in some respects rule over, if for no other reason because they have access, formally or informally, to bureaucratic authority over them. Obviously different societies differ in the extent to which such differences in power and wealth result in abuse, and America is one place where social cohesiveness, and to a certain extent social order, is sacrificed in order to prevent elites from becoming even more powerful than they are already.

Improving the moral quality and ability of elites as a substitute for just keeping even more power out of their hands is considered a viable alternative to tyranny in some societies, but not in America. Partly this is because we are so big and clumsy and anonymous to begin with, more like an empire than a nation in some ways, which was already recognized in the 18th century at its founding. True, the traditional cultural basis for justifying extreme authoritarianism (for example, the divine right of kings) has disappeared everywhere, but modern versions of the same phenomena be it as fascism or communism, or even just the cult of celebrity, still occur too often for comfort.

There seems to be a place for both the sublime and the absurd in human affairs. *From Alexander to Cleopatra: The Hellenistic World* (Grant 1990) reveals a mass society with enough similarities to our own to offer a standing warning. The Greek city-states had developed the mechanisms of representative government in both democratic and aristocratic forms, and a philosophical tradition that at least intellectually had developed analyses of morality, for example in the work of Aristotle, that have barely been surpassed even in our own day. After the loss of their freedom to their Macedonian conquerors and finding themselves as part of the kingdoms founded by the generals of Alexander the Great after his death, these ideals became objects of intellectual contemplation and nothing more. These generals and those that succeeded them not only became kings through such sordid means as conspiracy and war, but in addition the politics they practiced was basically devoted to their own aggrandizement. Though they carried public respect at times when they sought fame through grandiose public works projects, it was also not beneath them to induce loyalty from their captive publics by claiming for themselves the divine right of kings in the most literal sense; that is they often claimed to be gods.

Thus did the intellectual attainments of the Greek city-states not sink in with the population at large, but instead were treated like museum artifacts for the entertainment of intellectual elites. Meanwhile

the common practices, certainly as encouraged by their avaricious governments, became marked by that old trinity of miracle, mystery, and authority. Increasingly for example religion, let alone popular politics which became nonexistent, had to provide succor for a community life dominated by avaricious, often immoral, elites. Whatever growth there was in the economy, the economic output was far from equitably distributed, but even more important, the feeling that society no longer imposed or enforced a common morality created tremendous feelings of bitterness, hopelessness, and even guilt, for if fewer and fewer people felt they would be punished for their sins in this life, this just made their fear of punishment in the afterlife even stronger. Increasingly a lack of belief in the efficacy of the gods showing concern for this life became replaced by interest in salvation cults, where people could get purified from the ever-increasing load of guilt they carried from their immoral or just hopeless communal lives. They sought the succor provided by an increasing belief that just because there is no justice in this life, then it must come in the next.

The modern world evolved out of this state of affairs and we now have our ancient traditions, though they were once new, that just because there seems to be little justice in the world we will be justified by our moral integrity in some other way, not by the works of man, but in a more spiritual way. Certainly in the authoritarian societies of the modern era, where personal efficacy is also weak and where a fatalistic acceptance of the rule of an unworthy elite is often taken for granted, the results are often religious solutions remarkably similar to those of the Hellenistic era even if the most extreme excess, such as belief in the divine right of rulers, comes back only in spurts, to eventually be defeated and added to the list of things the cowardly masses and their avaricious leaders get to be ashamed of.

But even societies such as the USA have commonly experienced a sense of moral failure, even though our core culture was in fact once based on moral renewal. It arose from those Protestant traditions based historically on a revolt against imperious elites who claimed virtue for themselves and sinfulness for the masses whom they got to monitor, and thus to enforce rules upon them which they often failed to practice themselves. The Protestant tradition that first arose in Britain but attained fruition in the United States accentuated eventually the opposite, that the masses were more likely to be objective, rational and moral than their aristocratic leaders. That tradition of the elites of the Roman Empire, that they were worthy to rule because their followers weren't,

eventually was replaced after many generations of attempting to inculcate virtue in the masses by a belief that that attempt had succeeded, or at least succeeded better than among the elites who tended to exaggerate their virtue in order to maintain their power. Instead in America from now on they would have to prove their worthiness to rule.

Soon however, the moral cohesiveness of the Protestant sects in the US splintered, and where each once sought to become communal-wide state religions themselves, even if it was to be attained in market-fashion by individual choices and not imposed by bureaucratic fiat, soon even this expectation evaporated. Instead the religious tradition of modern America parallels the atomization and lack of cohesiveness of society at large. Sects increasingly tend to appeal to market shares, not by encouraging people to transcend their secular lives as much as by encouraging them to take for granted and often to admire, and thus to further deepen their support, for their secular lives, or at best to believe their way of life can be transcended in the next world though not in this. These sects, even when nowadays they have become mainstream churches, no longer have the complexity of worldview of the earlier state churches who sought to rule over the morals and solve the problems of society at large, and which these sects once sought to replace. Protestant sects which often appeal to upper-class, middle-class, and lower-class constituencies respectively, or to particular local, often ethnically-based constituencies, no longer have the hypocrisies of the state religions. They now have the hypocrisies of those who no longer even seek to understand the big communal picture.

For example, state churches often fostered a certain intellectuality among the elite, both in the upper bureaucracy of the church and in the upper bureaucracy of the state, even when they fostered a devotion to miracle, mystery, and authority among the masses. They often looked the other way when the masses acted out their frustrations in blind rage, or more likely, blind hedonism, for they knew they would go to the state church as well as to the state elites for absolution. At the same time the masses would recognize that their (weak) characters were such that they would never seek to rule themselves, let alone the state. Thus was the cultural and communal and even religious bases for political democracy a dead letter in these societies.

But in the US the reverse was true, the mass of people regained their dignity, by no longer feeling they were dependent on the paternalism of elites because of their own moral unworthiness. Yet this did not last long either, and soon an individualism based on self-control,

admittedly amplified and given content in communities that were for a while less bureaucratically-based and more communities of equals, became replaced by an individualism better described as individual isolation, and with it its existential corollary, existential fatigue.

In such weak American communities the very elementary and pleasant communal camaraderie which the peasant communities of Europe once had and which even today they long for there, was under pressure. Of course in Europe such communal feeling was often distorted by hatreds of other communities, ignorant superstitions, and a very basic bread and circuses attitude toward life which left to elites to ponder the bigger issues of public morality and political platforms. Instead a pervasive competitiveness and materialism began to pervade American culture, and even to displace earlier Protestant traditions. Instead of Protestant churches being there to refine the crude emotionality of the masses, it was discovered that increasingly the masses in their communities were now rather unemotional to begin with, and to attract them the entertainment functions of the churches became ever more important to provide an emotional outlet for them. The Protestant churches decreasingly tried in any major way to refine the elites who at least by default remained the everyday rulers of the community, but they did not particularly try to uplift the culture of the masses either. One effect was to downgrade the intellectual side of morality and of problem-solving in general. The practical effect, particularly in the more working-class oriented Protestant churches, was that more and more problems of the human condition were solved by leaps of faith, not small leaps of faith concerning the basic attributes of human existence, but bigger and bigger leaps of faith that substituted for vast swatches of knowledge.

Thus does American-style missionary activity by and for a working-class constituency decreasingly have intellectual content overlaying a core of faith, but instead is increasingly based on emotional arousal pure and simple. Those who increasingly feel emotionally disconnected to their communities of birth now seek emotional connection any way they can, often with communities sold to them by missionaries of both a religious and a secular sort. But in doing so they often seek to leave the complexities and discomforts, especially emotional discomforts, of modern life behind. Meanwhile once again as occurred so many times in the past they leave to intellectual elites the responsibilities for seeking solutions to the problems of society at large, problems sometimes caused by other intellectual elites.

It is no wonder such missionary activities are often aimed at publics who are both desperate and hysterical, those who first aimed at lives of hedonism, and now seek more effective means of emotional escapism. There are similar Fundamentalisms all over the world nowadays, though in other cultures they may actually seek to take over the government, while in America they are satisfied at being a counterculture, though retaining many aspects of the secular culture they oppose.

The same hunger for emotionality is also expressed in the American obsession with mass entertainment, as if relating to fictional people can substitute for relating to the real-life people that are no longer available. For that matter, young people, those sensitive souls, increasingly rely on “fantasy-induced emotionality,” be it through sports, or music, or drama, or just the mass spectacles of their fads in speech and clothing and attitude, as if there is no longer any other means to bond with people, you might call it to make friends, other than through an emotionality that is no longer shared naturally but must be created artificially. You might say in authoritarian societies it is easy to keep friends, through loyalty, but hard to make them, while in individualistic (often edging into narcissistic) societies such as America it is fairly easy to make a lot of acquaintanceships, but harder to make close friends. For that matter, authoritarian societies tend to have religions so based on communal conformity that it is hard to separate religion from nationalism, while in America community as a basis for religion is so weak, that often a life of individual grasping seems so natural, that religion often becomes a second choice after the failure of a life of hedonism. The result is often a choice that places such weight on a leap of faith because there is so little communal feeling, and sometimes even basic rationality, on which to build a sense of community other than this.

Increasingly the authoritarian areas of the world are becoming culturally Americanized, not just through copying us but because of similar conditions of life, while America’s social structure and loyalties are becoming increasingly authoritarian and returning to those old traditions, rule by elites and bread and circuses for the masses, that have been the basis for bureaucratic rule of society for centuries, ever since the ending of the original tribal democracies. While we teach the authoritarian societies how to have more effective bread and circuses, which reflects our own need for “fantasy-induced emotionality” we fail to teach them what originally counterbalanced that tendency of ours, the existential aloneness that produced at least among some of us an

obsession with individual moral rectitude, our version of individual dignity, as if we each turned to God alone just because we had no faith in those intermediaries who had proved unworthy. Meanwhile the authoritarian societies of course are busy teaching us to feed our hunger for meaning because of communities that no longer fulfill us by suggesting a return to rule by elites, by default if not by active subservience, and through them a return to subservience to myth, miracle, and authority.

This was once recognized at the time of the American Revolution as an alternative that would serve as the source not of our freedom but of our slavery. There still is time for us to learn the best of each other's cultures or the worst, America's own democratic and individualistic culture or much of the industrialized world's version which is authoritarian and communal (or collectivistic). There are also cultures much more traditional than either of these two choices, but these are tribal societies and peasant societies which combine individualism and collectivism in ways less bureaucratic than the modern world does. They have their own problems but we are rarely interested enough to learn from their successes or their failures.

By the way, if you haven't figured it out already, European-style bureaucratization and an European-style class system, and the kinds of cultural interests in the various sections of the population that come with it, seem to be most highly developed among people in America's "blue" states that tend to support the Democratic Party. The peculiarities of American-style individualism arising out of its Protestant roots seem to be most highly developed in the "red" states which are also the most Protestant states and just happen to be those states where people tend now to support the Republican Party. Or haven't you noticed?





### CHAPTER THREE

#### PROSPECTS FOR DEMOCRACY: INDIVIDUALISM/COLLECTIVISM AS SOURCES OF ASSOCIATION/COMMUNITY

It is a pity that the Federalist Papers, George Washington's last Address to the Nation, and Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (Tocqueville 2000) are considered models of political analysis, while starting somewhere in the last half of the 19th century Americans got used to politicians and their advisors spoon-feeding us with pabulum instead of analysis. Woodrow Wilson had some responsibility for the failures of democracy in the generation after World War I, the first of our many Wars to End All Wars. By telling how easy it is to have a Democracy, he got the Germans to surrender easily enough, without us having to cross the Rhine, then for years afterward they would elaborate on "stab in the back" doctrines once they decided they had been tricked and maybe they shouldn't have surrendered so easily, partly because they discovered that democracy doesn't really come that easy. It was to a large extent the good sense of European leadership after World War II that got at least Western and now Eastern Europe to cooperate, finally. We were gracious with our Marshall Plan to rebuild the European economy, and created markets for ourselves at the same time, but our political advice was they thought excessively simple, as it has been throughout the last century. It is the kind which President George W. Bush exemplified with his "They hate us for our freedom" explanation of why so much of the rest of the world is not like us; if only it were so simple life would be a lot easier.

Let's start from the beginning. Even in the 18th and early 19th centuries in Europe and America it was understood that the ancient republics were more than debating societies, and relied on patriotism and communal feeling to articulate issues, even though without party politics demagoguery was exceedingly common. For a long time monarchy, especially a limited monarchy in the British mode, was idealized because it reduced the need for politics. For example, David Hume, the 18th century British philosopher and historian, was a monarchist for whom politics was so difficult to run properly that inherited leadership

at the top of the executive branch was considered a viable substitute. He likewise believed in the necessity of political patronage to grease the wheels of government in those areas where politics was unavoidable. He also believed that government should rely on the people's self-interest, on the ambition of notables, on processes of social conformity, and when necessary the use of force. This is all found in *Explaining America: The Federalist* (Wills 1981).

For a while anyway, after the Revolution America's top political leaders were more idealistic than their British counterparts and thought politics could be run without resort to figurehead leaders or complex patronage schemes. This didn't last long, and the same things we criticized about the British Political Establishment, especially their resort to patronage schemes to serve the interests of professional politicians who forever lived off the public trough instead of being amateur politicians who would serve their neighbors and then get out, returned with a vengeance. For this analysis I am heavily in debt to *Presidents Above Party: The First American Presidency, 1789–1829* (Ketcham 1987).

As for the differences between ancient and modern democracy, they reflect the modern concept of limited government. In effect it is believed, especially in America, that democratic government should not be stressed by expecting too much from it. Partly this reflects the religious inheritance of our culture producing a sense of sin that doesn't trust leader or led to be given too much power for fear it will be abused. Also, because we have representative democracy rather than direct democracy, this induces an aristocratic element in society, producing rule by notables at least in terms of wealth and power.

Thus the question remains "Who will guard the guardians?" How effective are the controls which the mass of people have over those who represent them? Is democracy really the functional equivalent of monarchy? Then people vote for candidates which they know little about, and this offers legitimacy to their rule as they pretty much do whatever they want, like in an elected monarchy. Or is democracy where people also set the agendas which they then vote on and thus legitimate through the act of voting? In the 18th century it was easy for elites to lose honor, partly by appearing to be dishonorable in a society at large that monitored such things (at least in Anglo-American culture, if less so in Continental Europe), partly through the checks and balances of fellow elite members who monitored and competed with them.

The American ideal of republican virtue was taken from its British source, that the notables of the community should be chosen by

acclamation to represent the community in government, and in a sense should be amateurs rather than professional politicians in order not to have the incentive to forever feed off the public trough which was the mother's milk of patronage machines. At the time of the American Revolution it was thought that British political culture had become hypocritical because rule of communities by their notables had become replaced by political machines. At least through the administration of President John Quincy Adams there was some belief at the top of our government that presidents should emphasize the common good as their ultimate goal, and not build up their personal power through patronage machines, that their intellectual arguments should be credible and serve the same end, and that ultimately leaders should try to represent the common good as articulated by the mass of people for whom ongoing communication between the leaders and the led was considered a sign of a healthy community. What was opposed was manipulation of the community through sophistries, the foolish ritualism more apropos to decadent monarchies, and catering to special interests who would support patronage machines. All this would induce passivity in the mass of citizens. These values were ideals of the ancient republics as well, and the falling away from these ideals in the Roman Republic especially was a standing warning for dangers ahead for modern republics.

Of course nowadays the extreme anonymity of modern society, which makes communication between the leaders and the led difficult, full communication as opposed to propaganda and slogans bandied about in polls, gives an incentive for leaders who are trying to sell themselves to the public at large to engage in what amounts to public relations stunts; as opposed of course to sincere concern with issues. There will be more about this later in this book. In extreme cases some leaders think of character like an advertising agency thinks of a target market, they don't care what people do as long as money can be made off of them, or in the case of politicians, power can be gotten from them.

Perhaps that is why so many presidential candidates are the closest thing to movie stars that their parties can come up with, while the vice presidential candidate is a party stalwart who has worked his way up the party ranks, unless of course the party has run out of charismatic candidates with their last one, and so by default the party stalwart gets to run. This seems to be the trend in the modern era: Eisenhower and Nixon; Kennedy and Lyndon Baines Johnson; Reagan

and Bush; Clinton and Gore; G.W. Bush and Cheney; Obama and Biden. Even when John Kerry was running for president against his charismatically-challenged opponents in the Democratic primaries, the media basically ignored them all, and when Kerry ended up doing the best, finally the media started covering candidates in depth by doing what they like to do, like trying but failing to create a Jackie Kennedy-like clone out of the persona of John Kerry's wife, Theresa. True, the media love glamour, and love simplistic tales of victims and their oppressors, which is one reason we have the 10:00 p.m. news. The latest crimes of violence are certainly tragedies for the people involved, but why is it of importance for strangers to know? It seems titillation is the media's most important product. But I digress.

Democratic input as a countervailing force to self-serving political cliques is so important here just because an aristocratic sense of honor is so weak among our leadership class, having been replaced by ambitions, obsessions, intellectual fads, and self-interest, especially the interest of being reelected by courting swing voters and special interests, while assuming the mass of voters will remain passive and mute. The Republicans, like the Whigs of 18th century Britain, represent the business elite, which means they get the votes of small town moralists and property owners, but the party defers to the interests of big business. The Democrats, like the Tories of 18th century Britain, represent the cultural elite, which means they get the votes of the urban working class, but they defer to the interests of the professional classes, above all the Legal and Education Establishments, those who make money off of ever expanding government budgets.

One reason for the growing "intellectualization" of government functions is that the role of government is increasingly to throw money at problems rather than to at least start off by being impartial observers of how communities function. Since the recipients of this money will say almost anything to get more, it becomes necessary to appoint rather intellectual bureaucrats to survey the situation and make recommendations as a substitute for getting answers from the recipients themselves. Nevertheless these "intellectuals" are often quite naïve in their own way. The "intellectualization" of government policies is the direct result of government being far removed in experience and perspective from the people they serve, so that intellectualizing and ideology are used to fill in the gaps, which is a quite definite mixed blessing.

Once what Thomas Jefferson feared for America was what Europe already had, figurehead rulers, which is another way of saying not very competent ones, or ones who took the credit for other people's work.

In fact since his time conservatives and liberals have in many ways reversed positions. Conservatives who were then obsessed with proving their honor and their worthiness to rule, by maintaining standards for themselves though probably more for the people they ruled, now seek less a leadership role and more the opportunity simply to enjoy their wealth in peace. Liberals who once attacked activist government led by the rich (as Thomas Jefferson certainly did) because these liberals believed they already had a functioning civil society and a relatively moralistic culture that set standards for that society, so that they believed that the rich needed monitoring more than the poor, now lead the movement for paternalistic government. However, for them programs for helping the poor are almost always based purely on trickle-down economics that mostly trickles down through the pockets of the professional classes. The poor may get more services, but professionals get the money for providing them.

The end result is that when society at large decreasingly functions as a community and more like a giant bureaucracy, concerning many aspects of this society we tend to become very judgmental because essentially we know the human condition very poorly in the anonymous spaces of our society. This is certainly true of our leaders. Outside of our area of expertise we decreasingly know how to conceive mistake and error, or what it means to be short-sighted or ignorant or naïve or bitterly escapist or foolish or having any vices at all, and this is particularly true of our leaders. In general they only know everyone constitutes a market for something and leave it at that.

This is the most important reason why we have become so tolerant of late in modern societies, not out of concern but the opposite, out of almost total lack of concern for the lives of strangers. We have taken a virtue, tolerance, to an extreme because we are in many ways now an extremist society in our self-centeredness, our loneliness, and our desire to seek happiness through recreation. We seek to recreate not our everyday life which too many find repugnant, but a more fantasy-filled version of it, lived through the world of entertainment even if nowhere else. Those who use a religious language would call it the new idolatry. The exception that proves the rule is that we still have our moralistic fads, our opportunities to feel self-righteous, but when the mass media get a hold of them they tend not to be conceived or to be coordinated in a well-thought-out fashion.

It should be remembered that individualism in societies, which at an extreme can produce narcissistic individuals, and collectivism in societies which at an extreme can produce authoritarian individuals,

are only opposites at the extremes, and also tend to be extremely unstable. Cultures that are individualistic and so endorse individual achievement may also emphasize achievements that have a strong moral component and involve playing by the rules. Collectivistic cultures can focus on social order that allows and even encourages self-development and self-expression. Paradoxically, extremely individualistic societies often encourage winner-take-all competition that results in the ending of individualism and the enthronement of an elite, and extremely collectivistic societies often encourage social conformity to such a degree that the people who really become empowered are the leaders. In either case the end result is the same. Elites rule for their own benefit.

Nowadays there is much less difference than was once the case of the masses in America being better able to monitor and discipline their leaders than in Western Europe. Also, while once we had much higher rates of social mobility than there, now it is pretty much the same. What is left is that Western Europe tends to be more bureaucratized and elite-driven than the US, their gaining strength from an intrusive government, while the US has both the benefits of less government intrusiveness such as lower taxes and the costs such as poorer mass transit, simply because we expect so little from government. To a certain extent there is less need for us to monitor our leaders because we don't trust them to take much initiative in the first place. Of course the result is often big business and not the mass of people who fill in the gaps caused by government not taking much initiative. Though this is not the American ideal, it has become the reality.

The transformation of values into something initiated by bureaucratic specialists rather than communally-based generalists, either that or abstract intellectualizing by ivory tower intellectuals, that can be the foundation of intellectual fads but only take effect through bureaucratic enforcement, all this leads to what may be called the nihilism of modernity. As a matter of fact modern society when it comes to values is often governed by bureaucratic decision-making that is basically burden of proof reasoning, that is to say "guesses" which work when the leap is small and much is known beforehand on how probabilities play out. It works less well when the leap is large and very little is known beforehand. In other words our leaders increasingly don't believe like Aristotle that a shoemaker can make a shoe, but it takes the wearer to know if it fits.

The question then arises how are the interests of elites, even political elites who stand for election, different from the interests of those whom they claim to represent? An extreme case is the way the European aristocracy evolved into a leisure class, figurehead rulers in fact. One cause for the French Revolution was the way the middle class had to support economically even when their own interests were ignored what amounts to two aristocracies, the old, traditional, idle rich aristocracy, and the newer, governmental bureaucracy who were starting to develop elitist pretensions of their own. In fact the growth of a strong central government produced in addition to bureaucratic efficiencies the need for a generalist to set an agenda for all these specialists, and this generalist was increasingly not accountable to anyone. In this way absolute monarchy developed in Europe.

The other way of running a government is not through bureaucratic specialization, but through communal decision-making directly, as in pure democracy which doesn't involve the intermediary of representatives. An approximation of this is in communal government which occurs among small, local populations. This approximates pure democracy and with it the full and complete communication that is required for pure democracy. That doesn't occur very often either, except in small communities such as those of tribal societies. The great invention of the America Constitution was to formalize with checks and balances the relation between the nationwide, bureaucratized government, and the local governments which would be much more communally-based. The big danger of modern American politics is that local government because of large population densities will become like smaller versions of the Federal government, with all the tendencies toward bureaucratization, distance from the community, and manipulation by elites and special interests.

European politics often was and is a product of an alliance of upper-class intellectuals with working-class leaders and their followers, sometimes directly with the working class through use of the mass media, unlike the more typical middle-class leadership in America which so often dragged upper-class and working-class support along with it. In a sense European societies have traditionally acted as if they were two-class societies, the rich and the poor, and the middle class were just another interest group. This was also not a particularly influential one, and one that sought leadership from the other groups. America is a society which tends self-consciously to espouse middle-class norms and interests as a kind of compromise between the interests of the rich

and the poor. This is because the rich and poor usually would like to live like the middle class if they could, and consider their own class position to be a kind of accident of history and not something to cling to ideologically, the way it is done in Europe with the middle class there being the ones who are left out who feel they don't really fit in anywhere. This is the American tradition dating back to the frontier period, and we may be evolving in the European direction because of the ending of the social and economic frontier, just as Europe is copying our methods of mass recreation as if we in America are the pioneers of mass society.

America is in some ways an archaic society, since though it never had the experience of extreme democracy of the sort found in tribes or even city-states, it for a long time resisted extreme centralization of government, and culturally tended to espouse middle-class norms that like many traditional societies espoused "the golden mean" made famous by Aristotle as the best basis for communal integration, and not the narrow interests of those most prone to being short-sighted, the very rich and the very poor. But the increase of what I call the nihilism of modernity, reflecting both the decline of frontier-type opportunities for social mobility and the increasing bureaucratization of society, is weakening both direct communal influence in the sense of direct democracy on government such as at the level of local government, as well as the influence of middle-class values and standards.

American-style democracy is good at preventing tyranny, and is less efficient at producing ongoing social order. In fact it relies on ongoing cultural traditions, especially among its aggressive middle class, and doesn't necessarily adapt well when such traditions weaken or disappear. It is possible to reinforce social order through bureaucratic means, which is a species of paternalism and tends to be elite-driven. This is common in Europe. It is also possible to not pay attention to many issues not relevant to economic growth, which is a very common present-day American approach to potential cultural conflict, and fits in well with traditions of limited government. Around the world, traditionally limited government has been very concerned with enforcing communal customs, if not morality in the abstract sense, and less concerned with fostering economic growth which they could do little about except through extreme measures, war being the most obvious. Modern America has gotten things reversed.

Both Europe and America tend to rely on democratic input as a last resort, that is to say direct input from the masses. Though this is



somewhat more likely in America because of the the middle class as a facilitator, but even this mostly doesn't become evident except during times of crisis. The European version of this are intellectuals reaching out to the masses.

During times of stability, what is most evident is the tendency toward paternalism in Europe, which the poor may or may not really want depending on circumstances, and the tendency toward catch-up in America, you can call it inefficient paternalism. Unfortunately for America, a certain amount of paternalism does reinvigorate the poor, unlike the middle class who usually don't need it. Our tendency toward benign neglect of the poor weakens their social order, as in our slums, worse than those of Europe. However, paternalism can create dependency and weaken the sense of initiative of those receiving it, which is a common perception by Americans of the working class of Europe.

Intellectuals reaching out to the masses may be considered Europe's version of America's three class society, with intellectuals being the third class that facilitates compromise between the rich and the poor. This is the case for many societies around the world. Though it is possible for the rich and the poor to communicate and compromise directly, it is difficult unless everyone lives close to each other, which sometimes exists in rural conditions.

The primacy which European politics gives to paternalism and its at the very least mixed feelings about liberal, materialistic, anonymous, competitive and ultimately individualistic society reflects a kind of political crystalization based on a 19th century cultural critique, the elites' reaction to modernization and their idealization of intimate community which they hoped to create from the nation at large with themselves at the helm. The primacy which American politics gives to market liberalism and its rejection of a bureaucratically structured, non-competitive, paternalistic society likewise reflects a kind of cultural crystalization derived from the 18th century Age of Reason and their elites' reaction to religious wars and the remnants of feudalism and their idealization of what paternalistic elites rejected, the growth fostered by economically-oriented, market-driven associations. Both points of view tend to push bureaucracy to do more than it is capable of doing, be it governmental bureaucracy in the first case or the bureaucracies of private enterprise in the second. Both points of view idealize community, but do little to foster it.

In Europe the community (often the State defined as a community) is maintained through social order imposed from the top down for the

most part. In America local community, as opposed to the State being defined as a community, is idealized, but when the local communities weaken there is little anyone knows what to do about it. For all the idealization of democracy in both Europe and America, there is little enthusiasm among elites for expansion of direct, as opposed to representative, democracy.

Regarding what works, sometimes what works is a democracy based on upper-class reformers speaking for the poor. They often propose not just to mediate conflict but to end it through their own social engineering. Sometimes their plans don't work, because they don't understand the poor as well as they think they do. The same holds true for a democracy based on the poor speaking up to those slightly richer and the rich speaking down to those slightly poorer, and the middle class being familiar with both points of view and coming up with compromise solutions, usually with a strongly moralistic flavor, which sometimes works and sometimes not.

The paradox of democracy in the US is that a tradition of limited government limits pressures on government having to do much, and in fact relies on a tradition of virtue and self-control which is expected to be inculcated in the local community and sometimes just in the family, but if this doesn't occur government at large will not do much to replace it. The paradox of authoritarianism in Europe is that the extreme desire for social order induces deference to elites unless such leaders cannot produce, almost "guarantee" social order, in which case new leaders are sought. Europeans have very high expectations by American standards of these leaders, too high according to us. It is an evolution out of a very traditional situation, much like some descriptions of traditional African monarchies as being "tyranny tempered by rebellion." Modern societies in general tend to be large and anonymous, not small and intimate in a sense conducive to acting out all the psychological quirks that arise in intimate settings, that disappear in bureaucratized settings, and that paradoxically reappear in simplified form in mob settings of the sort that modern mass media encourage, producing the "faddishness" of much modern cultural life.

We will have to see if traditional leaders in Third World countries nowadays can have the same effective influence on society as do middle-class leaders in America, with the same loyalties to traditional values but also a primary concern for economic achievement. Or will there be pressure for them to be replaced, perhaps by European-style intellectuals who like traditional leaders want more order in society than can be produced by economic processes alone?

We in America accept the workings of the anonymous economic workplace without much judgment for the same reason we accept the workings of the political marketplace without much judgment. The workings of the marketplace are supposed to create power and thus to create values in the socially effective sense that other sources of values and power (such as social solidarity or even community consensus) cannot. In traditional societies, however, politics in terms of communal consensus (and more rarely in terms of elections) is an alternative to markets, or intermingles with markets as a way of most likely preserving values, not creating them anew.

Thus political families in traditional societies tend to be from prestigious and acclaimed families. Politics loses one source of legitimacy when it is seen as a means for “unknown” families to rise in prestige and power, partly because it is thought to then be functioning in an arbitrary manner, allowing families to be self-serving for their own advancement rather than using their wealth to serve the people. While we in America think it is naïve to expect leaders to forego gaining additional wealth to serve the public selflessly and without concern for personal ambition, many in traditional societies think it is naïve of Americans to choose leaders who are not in a position to use their wealth selflessly for the common good. Instead we in America assume public officials will go into public service obviously for reasons of self-interest and to boost the economic interests of their families, as well as the public good. We in America act as if the market is a sufficient mode of discipline to keep leaders in line. More traditional societies often believe that the discipline of communal reputation, a concern for honor in the community, is possibly even more necessary to keep leaders in line.

Even discussions of such questions arise less often in America, mainly because we are less likely to bring into politics attitudes about values other than those that are created in the political marketplace itself; the exceptions are those middle-class puritanical values that are losing their strength in modern American life, which results in much regret in certain circles. Europe culturally tends to be in an in-between situation, submitting to the dictates of the marketplace in both an economic and a political sense, but having nostalgia and longings for sources of values other than those created by the marketplace itself. This was once the traditional value system of America as well, but nowadays we have even less faith that social consensus can be achieved other than through economic growth and the workings of economic and political marketplaces than Europe has.

The result is often to transmute means into ends, as many common values are sacrificed to economic growth, but very few in the opposite direction. That is why we in America fear to strain our democratic consensus by expecting too much from it, other than working toward economic growth. Now it seems we may be going one step further and working toward a consumption-oriented, narcissistic society, which Europe is doing also but more slowly except among certain elites and intellectual groups who are pretty narcissistic to begin with. Other elites and other intellectual groups lead the discussions in opposition to these cultural changes.

We of course justify our state of affairs by saying that cultural change, other than that induced by the marketplace which trends to be both fast and faddish, is expected to be slow but sure, reflecting both moral and democratic values, values that percolate ever so slowly in the depths of a society that takes ever so slowly to reach consensus, on anything other than expanding the economy. The practical effect is that America tends, at least now, to be a disorderly society as well as a rich one. Americans tend to be stressed by failures in those areas of life where happiness cannot be bought, lack of loyalty in intimate groupings (overly rigid loyalty being a problem in much of the rest of the world), lack of a firm understanding of social and even economic realities because of poor communication among strangers (weak sense of community), and lack of emotional satisfaction among people who tend to channel their emotions into competition and consuming commodities. In essence these are the kinds of loneliness and exploitation common among strangers and acquaintances as opposed to the kinds of loneliness and exploitation common among hypocritical intimates and among strangers whose social lives are so rigid they cannot even become acquaintances.

As of now, Europe idealizes community, and practices bureaucratic rule of society even more than we do in the US, and by doing so often attempts to control economic markets. The US idealizes community and practices economic growth as the supreme value and often the substitute for other values, using bureaucracies, both public and private, to manage market conditions but less often to substitute for them.

At the time of the writing of the Constitution we had an ideal, a British ideal in fact, that the leaders of society should be honorable, and even the government bureaucrats should be intermediaries between the leaders and the led. In doing so they would enable the

nation at large to determine what are the practical consequences of limited government, that is to say what the government should do, and what it shouldn't. When patronage government returned with a vengeance here, it became common to literally throw money at problems, as if the spending of money and the creation of jobs is more important than the solving of problems, such as by creating social order. In Europe bureaucrats are often technically proficient, not patronage hacks, but are not good communicators with the population. They are facilitators, in the old days of the will of the monarchy, in modern times of the will of whichever ideological parties, dominated by "intellectuals," come to power.

The end result is that communal decision-making, the true source of the democratic will of the people, is weak in all modern societies. In fact politicians of all stripes take advantage of this fact, perhaps especially those, like extreme nationalists and extreme socialists, who claim to speak for the mass of people because they have no interest in letting them speak for themselves, and like patronage hacks who seek to buy public support by literally throwing money at problems. Regarding our own situation, in a sense the disorderliness of American society creates lots and lots of jobs. Perhaps having more lawyers and psychologists per capita than any other society is not such a good thing, or at least Europe doesn't think so. However we have traditionally believed, it is not a matter that "activist intellectuals" should not have any influence on society, it is that they should not have the only influence.

If anything, the Islamic world being more traditional, has even greater hopes than America that traditional leaders and not "activists" should set the standards for society. However, 18th century America did have high hopes that not only would the very top leaders of society prove to be gentlemen and gentlewomen, but unlike Continental Europe there were high moral expectations attached also, though competency was still more important than being morally pure or setting a religious example.

In fact, in both Anglo-American and Islamic cultures, both being rather puritanical, aristocratic accomplishments do not by themselves produce enough prestige to produce a legitimacy to rule over others. One effect is that when a sense of local community breaks down, which interferes with the motivations of local leaders to enforce morality and the common good through concern for their public reputations, and because of emotional ties to their community, there is little in terms of traditions to replace what otherwise aristocratic snobbery would have

provided, a motivation for such leaders to rule wisely by appealing to their snobbish pride. This is even more true of leaders of the distant central government who are even more far removed emotionally from the people they rule over. The loss of the ideal of paternalism up to now has been less of a problem in Latin culture, so perhaps the increasing Hispanization of American life will provide an increased sense of chivalry among our leadership class, or perhaps, as is so common in Latin America, more lip service. It seems countries with aristocratic traditions have their own hypocrisies, and Hispanic cultures must often face the gap between the traditions of chivalry held by their elites and the realities of machismo and false honor.

The kind of economic system America has, and the importance it is given for structuring society, requires lots and lots people to have enough rationality and self-control to allow markets and political elections to work well. Also a cultural expectation of equality off the job, because cultural attainments in the aristocratic sense are not particularly admired, just the ability to gain wealth which everybody can appreciate, produces a certain simplicity to the cultural basis for social status.

Latin culture in general is in a middle position, between Anglo-American Protestant culture and Islam, since it is all about forgiving of failure. I know, thoughts about failure are depressing for us to contemplate, but Catholic attitudes toward sin do have some practical effects. Regarding Latin culture, it admires the ability to achieve economic success, but it is forgiving when it is not achieved. It admires family values, but it is forgiving when it is not achieved. It truly accepts as a realistic compromise with the limitations of human existence "bread and circuses" as the practical goal for working-class life. It also takes social hierarchy for granted as the basis for social order, and though local rulers are considered preferable, there is a fatalistic acceptance of the privileges of power in human affairs, not a religiously-based fatalism, though that often occurs also though probably less so than in Islam, but a secular fatalism that derives from conformity to communities that are bureaucratized enough to produce large differences in power. Here complex social patronage networks always are considered in the final tally of social status and power, and people seek each other out to become part of such patronage networks or at least judge each other accordingly.

On the other hand immigrants fit well in American society, not because they are welcomed into the hearts and minds of native-born

Americans, but because they are ignored. Other, more authoritarian societies, including Latin societies, often try to get immigrants or at least their leaders to assimilate sufficiently so that natives will be comfortable socializing with them. They can also deal with immigrants by ignoring them, or you can also call it respecting their privacy, but that is probably not their first choice; while it is the first choice in Anglo-American culture areas.

That is also why racial segregation came so easy to Anglo-American culture where ignoring people who are different was until very recently second nature, and occasionally, select individuals would seek out foreigners for the exotic entertainments they offered. Respecting individuals as individuals was also sometimes tried. The segregation of Latin societies was and is more culturally than racially based because the nosiness of sociable people is such that what interests them are patronage networks and networks of cross-cutting loyalties and determining where individuals fit into such hierarchies, not merely learning whether individuals are different from them and then minding their own business.

True, in these hierarchical societies power from on top can stigmatize certain "outsiders" for political reasons, and then the mass of people will be under pressure to obey. This happened when the Spanish Crown and the Spanish Inquisition decided to end good relations in Spain among Christians, Jews, and Muslims in 1492. But racial segregation in the American South after the Civil War was pushed by middle-class people who were often socially uncomfortable even with fellow whites, let alone with blacks. However their primary reason was a political and economic one, they wanted to stigmatize the ex-slaves so they couldn't vote and would remain a docile labor force. It is not surprising then that racial tensions, as opposed to class tensions, have been more significant in American history than in Latin American societies, even those that once had slavery.

There are processes of social stigmatization in Islamic societies as well, but it is less often the result of bureaucratic command, or from American-style sheer uncomfortableness with outsiders who don't assimilate and so the American solution is to leave them alone as they do with most people who are different from them. While all these solutions are possible in Islamic societies, more likely are inbred, hereditary social loyalties which can assimilate outsiders but are not interested in doing so to the degree espoused by Catholic societies, who can mind their own business but not to the degree espoused by Anglo-American

societies, but instead can produce alliances or rivalries, sometimes between individuals, but more likely between groups. The result, as in many traditional societies is many deeply-felt loyalties, which in practical terms means many feuds, and many blood-brotherhood type loyalties.

All three ways of ordering society, the individualistic emphasis on economic rationality and individual independence found in America, saved by a social sense based strongly on acquaintanceship such as at work and on the safety net of family, now frayed, the somewhat more collectivistic emphasis on “pure” interpersonal relationships in Islamic societies, often hereditary in nature as an outgrowth of family, and the compromising attitude of Latin culture toward accepting alternatives to these above goals, relying on the safety net of bureaucracy and elites to integrate society when individual responsibility (especially of the common people) cannot be relied on, all these things can be carried to unrealistic extremes. The ideal in the sense of the “golden mean” between extremes is probably identical in all these culture areas, it is the cultural understanding of what is practical, and what should be aimed for, that differs. Also what differs is the cultural understanding of timing, when it is culturally legitimate to just give up, to accept the inescapability of human weakness and ignorance, and try to accept what members of other cultures consider unacceptable, at least for some time longer.

I’ll get to politics. But for now it should be remembered there is the issue of protecting cultural ideals through a “rose-colored” view of reality. Latins are probably the most romantic when it comes to relations between the sexes, Americans are probably next in romanticism about this. However they are the most romantic when it comes to idealizing individualism, and democratic culture and government. Muslims in general are probably the least romantic when it comes to idealizing romantic relationships between the sexes, particularly outside of marriage, and the most romantic when it comes to idealizing the family, including the extended family. How well people protect their ideals through fantasies, as well as how well they practice their ideals, is a separate question, one which is dealt with in many of my writings on culture and personality.

In a sense both Islamic and Anglo-American Protestant cultures admire sincerity in social relationships as their ideal (a communion of the “real” selves), the Islamic world seeking this out of primordial relationships, often hereditary, the Anglo-American world out of achieved



relationships, but often predictable ones like neighbors and friends. The Latin world functions in communities of social and bureaucratic complexity (not on-the-job “dependence” and off-the-job “independence” as in America), so dependency and image-mongering (“role-playing”) for them will always be part of developing social relationships. This is so even though they have primordial loyalties as well, and “sincere” relationships, particularly of a romantic sort.

The American extreme of relative social isolation as reducing the tensions of social ambiguities (partly caused by the lack of fit between on the job social hierarchies and off the job social independence) and the Latin extreme of the equivalent of feudal incorporation into social networks, which reduces the tensions of social rivalries, both cause people to know their place in society. Both when taken to an extreme can have unhealthy political and social effects. A healthy social and political environment is somewhere in-between.

Actually, America’s frontier had its similarities to the tribal frontiers of Islamic societies, even though the people of the American frontier preferred to end their frontier status rather quickly, so that the American frontier did not last hundreds of years, but once major settlement started just decades. America now is tempted toward extremes of atomization in communal life, and bureaucratization on the job. It will be interesting to see if America can be a model for the rest of the world, or whether the rest of the world can be a model for America, or more likely a mixture of both.

All this goes to show the value of the golden mean, that excessive individualism in the form of an atomized society can destroy social solidarities as in America, but so can social hierarchies of such strength that individual personalities remain hidden beneath loyalty based on power as in the Latin world. It is difficult to say where Islamic societies fit into this scheme of things, since their ideals in some ways are pre-bureaucratic. Whatever problems exist among them because of family and communal rivalries, modernization may tempt them toward individualistic or collectivistic extremes. No one knows what the end result will be. All this taken together shows the real-world experience of social relationships, the limitations and the potentials, you might call it the existential reality of social relationships, no matter what the culture.

But back to American politics, in a sense the entertainment, the recreational, and the narcissistic aspects of virtue (the kind that allows one to feel self-righteous, but never guilty) have become emphasized in

American society, and with it the entertainment aspects of politics. It seems to be correct to say as part of our cycles of history we go back and forth from being non-judgmental to excessively judgmental, with the former being more the case nowadays, but in either case we no longer have great reservoirs of public trust for our governing class, something I discuss in more detail in my essays dealing with political culture. The politicians in turn try to allay this distrust with ever more attempts at “spin.” “Spin” which is a combination of excuse-making, distorting, and outright lying, was perfected to handle the scandals of “celebrities” by discussing their lives with the media in a manner to accentuate the entertainment value of their actions and to minimize drawing any conclusions and learning anything.

With such an emphasis on image, is it any wonder that the temptation is to rely on image as a substitute for competence among our leadership class? Like the monarchs of Europe who eventually became more important as a place in an organizational chart than for what they did, the temptation is for our leaders, in America but not only in America, to become figureheads too, merely fronts for the “advisors” who provide them with ideas but whose ideas they are not competent to judge. It is these advisors who have become intellectual “celebrities” in their own right.

Again, once ensuring the independence of what would otherwise be the dependent classes, which is basically the working class in general, and continuously judging the honor, and the competence, of the leadership classes, that they remain worthy to rule, was what Thomas Jefferson considered to be the goal of American politics, and by inference for politics around the world. What he feared for America was what Europe already had, figurehead rulers. It would be a real pity if what he feared should come to pass, not only in America but in all modernizing societies.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CHARACTER AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Many of the themes found in the previous chapter on “Prospects for Democracy: Individualism/Collectivism as Sources of Association/Community” will now be repeated here with the emphasis on how values reflect what an aroused citizenry, or an apathetic citizenry, are concerned about or not, and why. It is here where the motives resulting from qualities of character growing up within specialized social environments will have specific political effects.

Thus *What is Democracy?* (Touraine 1997) in not untypical fashion for such books describes democratic society as one which follows democratic political procedures, but doesn’t describe how effective these communicative procedures are, and also doesn’t describe what they are communicating about, what differentiates the concerns of a democratic society from the concerns of an undemocratic society. In many respects what he describes is apropos to all political societies, he just adds that the mass of people should be listened to. What makes them worth listening to partly reflects their own interests, but more important their knowledge of their own circumstances, even if not anyone else’s.

By stipulation he defines such a society as one composed of the State which guarantees the structure of the polity through its Chief Executive, political society which is the world of democratic competition structured through elections of political parties and then through legislative debate and their voting, and civil society which is society bound together by values and institutions principally concerned with values. If this reminds the reader of the medieval estates of the monarch who structured the political system through executive power, the commons who tended to be concerned with economic interests, and the nobility and the church who enforced honor and values respectively, it is no big surprise. For that matter, this description of political society is also mirrored in the modern world by the executive, legislative and judicial functions (and branches) of government.

Thus society uses politics, and the social interests who exert their power through politics, to maintain social order, through the monarch,

now the chief executive, who unites the nation with administrative diligence, the legislature which produces rules based on competition for power, and civil society which is composed of those institutions oriented not toward competition between interest groups, but the enforcement of values, ultimately administered through the judiciary but there are also other unofficial enforcers of values, incumbent upon everyone. Once these values were based on the manners, morals, and customs of the people, particularly in democratic societies, or were religious in origin in theocracies, and often a combination of both as the source of their legitimacy. Now the judiciary places less emphasis on formally consulting with either the masses in democratic fashion, or religious leaders, but partly this is because such basic values have become standardized over time. Another reason is that new secular elites have arisen to be considered “experts” on values, and conflict between them and their values and more traditional upholders of communal values are now common in modern societies.

A more substantive definition of political democracy, as opposed to social democracy which is where the conditions of living of the mass of people are literally pretty equivalent, is where the mass of people sets and enforces standards upon the ruling classes and not just the other way around. Obviously here the institutions and standards of civil society become very important, for the enforcement of values then becomes a leading concern of society and the mass of people who comprise it, and not merely the technical expertise and the economic advance that comes from it which is left to the concern of experts and the lack of concern of the mass of people.

The weaknesses of the various factions that together form the political class have been obvious through the ages. They tend to arise out of the wealthier portion of the population, and thus to be removed from the common experience. Their reliance on intellectual advisors often does not solve this problem since they often are unclear on how to evaluate these advisors. In fact they are often vulnerable to intellectual fads, such as those that come from the universities, and a reliance on burden of proof reasoning, especially prevalent in the judiciary, often does not help, and even makes things worse. Burden of proof reasoning works in a situation which in reality is so structured that bending over backwards to show preference for one party or one point of view is inherently realistic or fair, but unless the realism of the approach is known ahead of time, it merely becomes a justification for showing bias. Judicial activism is often criticized for its practitioners engaging

in unrealistic and yet dogmatic burden of proof reasoning, particularly when they are not enforcing the traditional values of their society, but new and often idiosyncratic values, or at the very least values that represent the self-serving interests, or just points of view and prejudices, of certain influential factions of society (which in reality these judicial activists represent).

The extreme anonymity of modern society, which makes communications between the leaders and the led, full communication as opposed to slogans bandied about in polls, difficult, gives an incentive for leaders trying to sell themselves to the public to engage in what amounts to public relations stunts. In fact it is not unusual for those trying to get a reputation before the public for their qualities of character to be mostly concerned with fooling the public.

One way to relate the structure of a society to the characters of the people who make up that society is to notice the kinds of things Emile Durkheim emphasized in his famous book, *The Division of Labor in Society* (Durkheim 1997). A society which is relatively undifferentiated will have people who feel they are much alike, or at the very least are bound by common manners, morals, and customs. Social differentiation, especially in the service of economic growth, may produce economic interdependence, but not necessarily psychological or moral interdependence which may in fact decline. In general, bureaucratization of societies which results in coordination of various types of social specialists tends to increase the power of the coordinators, that is the leaders of these bureaucracies. In fact societies usually become more elite-led as they evolve because of bureaucratization except when there are frontier conditions, such as through colonization efforts or the rise of new industries which give people a chance to start over with much more equal access to resources and to power. Of course in the modern world, for example America, even when the powers of elites are somewhat checked by social constraints, this may reflect the checks and balances of efficient bureaucratization, or more likely the increased ability to escape detection in anonymous society, such as by members of unusual subcultures or even criminal elements, rather than the increased access to power and opportunities of frontier society.

One way to describe a healthy society is that, whether it is highly socially differentiated and bureaucratized or not, it is one where the characters of the people involved are not affected in a way to interfere with their ability to run their personal lives in a rational, realistic, and

moral manner. Otherwise, not only will individuals be adversely affected by pressures coming from others, such as various bureaucratic leaders, but the leaders themselves will get bad advice from their followers whose lack of wisdom and irrationality is such that they don't run even their own lives very well. Formal education and advice from specialists, that great benefit from living in a bureaucratized society, sometimes produces an inability to see the whole picture by either the leaders or the led or both, and thus diminishes the ability to perceive social rules and values within an holistic context. Sometimes of course it actually does produce wisdom and the character to use it. In any case, the checks and balances of communal life based on people who have common knowledge and common values are not the checks and balances of bureaucracies composed of specialists who do not have common knowledge, and because of this often do not even have common values. Instead the enforcement or even the concern with values may become the prerogative of other specialists, usually but not always, the leaders.

When society at large decreasingly functions as a community and more like a giant bureaucracy, concerning many aspects of this society we tend to become very ignorant, often going to extremes of being judgmental or very non-judgmental, because essentially we know the human conditions very poorly outside the recesses of our own little clique. At best we deal with outsiders by minding our own business, and often not even that.

Let's take an example of such a micro-environment, existing within the recesses of a bureaucratized society; let's look at inner city gang life. In most social settings friendships change and people draw close to some people and away from others, but this is done privately, not expressed as grand theater with the incredible status consciousness and adrenaline rush that accompanies youth gang rivalries. Expressing status rivalries and acting out self-conflicts over personal identity and self-esteem through drive-by shootings may be an adrenaline rush, but it certainly devalues all the other aspects of friendship relations. For that matter, in American slums, partly because of the general atomization of American life which is just more pronounced among those who don't have a good opportunity for buying happiness, many people have relationships so fragile, so tenuous that they essentially lead loveless lives. It is little surprise that they may be tempted to put all their eggs in one basket, to glorify promiscuity far beyond any standard of rationality, and often other kinds of drug use and escapism while

they're at it, because they think other sources of happiness aren't there, perhaps aren't even real.

It is therefore no surprise the very rich and the very poor often become very self-centered and narcissistic, feeling they have nothing to lose but for opposite reasons. They also become very authoritarian in their loyalty to what produces the core of their lives, the source of their wealth in the case of the idle rich, and their gang loyalties in the case of the idle poor, for example, with unbalanced lives that often come part and parcel with such extreme lifestyles, the result being in many cases lacking a good life and living a lie at the same time.

Of course increasingly low expectations for the basic sources of happiness, basic goodness in relationships between people, and high expectations for ephemera, the escapes into fantasy and the various ways of "getting high," seems to characterize what they think of as realism for people whose reality has become strange indeed. This is a reality filled with short-term rushes of adrenaline, but often long-term heartache, if they allow themselves to feel anything at all. This is true for both the very rich and the very poor, but admittedly the ones who suffer the most from their mistakes, because they have no cushion of money, are the very poor.

To put this into perspective in terms of social evolution once again, personal relationships were once producers of individual character because once both were rather stable in a socially preferred manner, and a feeling of shame for not meeting social expectations (which can work in a detrimental fashion if unhealthy personal relationships have become typical) was the norm in such stable societies. Later on stability of personal relationships became more rare, especially as individuals often moved away from their childhood's close relationships (even family ones) as they grew up. Ideals thus became more abstract and intellectualized, often based on memories of childhood relationships rather than relationships that had continuity throughout one's life. In other words feelings of guilt became the basis, together with the increasing anonymity of society, for the maintenance of individual character. Now of course social relationships are often so tenuous that even memories of childhood relationships are not strong enough to produce character through the reinforcing action of guilt.

In fact narcissistic character structures in atomized societies are becoming more and more the norm, particularly in the most modern societies, yet still fluctuating with blind authoritarian tendencies when blind loyalty is seen as the only source for social stability or for shoring

up a weak personal identity. Individual character as the expression of realism, rationality, and moral concern often falls prey to the fluctuating gap between these two extremes of narcissism and authoritarianism. Often what is often missing for particular individuals are other options, somewhere in the middle between these two extremes, the option of loving relationships for one.

That is one reason the poor people in American slums are often so vulnerable, since they no longer have the security of a stable job on the family farm, or even stable relationships in families, but instead face endless competition to maintain minimal access for fulfillment of their basic human needs. It is no wonder they are often confused and scared, as are the idle rich who eventually discover that money cannot buy happiness, though they may become in a sense addicted to the substitutes that indeed can be bought.

It should be remembered that individualism and collectivism are only opposites at the extremes, and also tend to be extremely unstable. In fact cultures that are individualistic and so endorse individual achievement may also emphasize achievements that have a strong moral component and that involve playing by the rules, while collectivistic (authoritarian for the most part) societies may focus on social order that allows and even encourages self-development and self-expression. Paradoxically, extremely individualistic societies often encourage winner-take-all competition that results in the ending of individualism and the enthronement of an elite, while extremely collectivistic societies often encourage social conformity to such a degree that the people who really become empowered are the leaders who run society. In either case the end result is the same, competition and/or cooperation breaks down and the end result is that elites run the society.

This analysis has a practical effect in understanding the effects of religion, particularly authoritarian and narcissistic religion. Authoritarian societies tend to tie religion to nationalism and make nationalism sacred, while narcissistic societies tend to tie religion to escapism and make entertainment sacred. Societies such as Serbia and Russia develop a certain kind of religious hypocrisy, mistaking religion for nationalism since people hunger for and identify with social order, while societies such as the US tend to mistake religion for narcissism, since people seek to escape from their social isolation by worshiping through a religion that entertains and patronizes them, telling them they should aim to be more of what they are already, ambitious,



self-centered, self-righteous, reaching out to others in ways that do not challenge individual egotism. It's an odd kind of egotism since self-enhancement has only a few outlets, and few of them have to do with real comradeship, so that achievement has to do less with happiness and more with accumulation of things, experiences, and accomplishments, the collector's version of happiness.

In terms of social relationships American culture with its Protestant roots very much emphasizes competition and if all else fails, starting over, but is less strong in emphasizing intimacy, compassion, and justice in ongoing relationships which should be just because they are ongoing. With America's emphasis on structured competition to determine one's place, in games certainly and ideally, though not always in actuality, in society, there is an emphasis on equality but this is more equality of making sure competitors are equally matched, not the equality (better described as equity) of compassion and concern. Since increasingly America is an anonymous and a bureaucratized society, but decreasingly a frontier society, what are some of the results?

One result is that what distinguishes America from Western Europe is decreasing. While once we had much higher rates of social mobility, now it is much the same. To the extent that the core of democracy is the mass of people setting standards for their leaders, and enforcing them, all the trends of bureaucratization cause leaders to monitor and control followers and not the other way around. Though once America was a place where the mass of people monitored their leaders to some degree, differing historically by time and place, and Western Europe in general wasn't to the same degree, nowadays I would say there isn't much of a difference on average between Western Europe and America. What is left is a difference in political culture in that Western Europe tends to be more bureaucratized and elite-led than the US, while the US has the benefits of less government intrusiveness such as lower taxes, and the costs such as poorer mass transit, simply because in America we expect so little from government.

One example of this lack of monitoring of elites by the masses, both because we expect relatively little from government which in the US is cultural, and because the mass of people don't stand up well against elites which is structural and common to all bureaucratized societies, is the way so many parties settle out of court in civil cases because they have so little faith in the efficacy of the judicial process, and in any case cannot bear the expense. Also the reason so few judges, and also politicians for that matter, are disciplined is essentially the same reason all

the professions have a poor reputation for disciplining their own. The public is passive, that great fear of Thomas Jefferson has come to pass, and the professions, all the professions, are scared, not for appearing dishonorable which increasingly holds few terrors for them, but for having the slightest possibility of losing their jobs. The clearest sign that the US, and possibly most modern societies, are no longer honor-bound is that for all the professions the possibility of being disgraced before one's peers, let alone before the public for which there is almost no possibility, is becoming very slight.

In fact the transformation of values into something initiated by bureaucratic specialists rather than communally-based generalists, either that or abstract intellectualizing by ivory tower intellectuals that lay the foundation for intellectual fads, but only take effect through bureaucratic enforcement, this leads to what may be called the nihilism of modernity, unfortunately a common theme in this book. Thus the attitude that what a worker does in private is of no concern unless it effects work performance is relevant to the boss-employee relation, but it is of little relevance for setting standards for public morality and for character in general. Yet this is the attitude, together with the backlash against it, that tends to govern elite-driven discourse on public morality in our anonymous, loosely integrated societies, certainly the US.

In fact modern society when it comes to values is often governed by bureaucratic decision-making that is basically burden of proof reasoning. That is to say what we have are "guesses" which work when the leap is small and much is known beforehand on how probabilities play out, and less well when the leap is large and very little is known beforehand. The result of this kind of thinking, more often than not, are ideological attitudes and discourse reflecting, not holistic knowledge of society at large which was once the hallmark of a democratic society, but increasingly knowledge that reflects the initiatives of leaders and not of followers. Thus social knowledge increasingly reflects the interests and prejudices pertinent to people concerned enough to have an opinion, usually leaders or activists of some sort, as opposed to followers who are too apathetic or dispirited to have any opinion. Agreed, politically this is a two-step process, and eventually some issues becomes placed on the political agenda to be voted on, in terms of selecting representatives and in showing political allegiances, but the issues discussed at these times are almost always ones congenial to these very same elites.

The question therefore arises how are the interests of elites, even political elites who stand for election, different from the interests of those whom they claim to represent? Again, this will be a common theme in this book. An extreme case is the way the European aristocracy evolved into a leisure class, figurehead rulers in fact. For example, one cause for the French Revolution was the way the middle class had to support economically even when their own interests were ignored what amounts to two aristocracies, the old, traditional, idle rich aristocracy, and the newer governmental bureaucracy who were starting to develop elitist pretensions of their own. In fact the growth of central government at all produced in addition to bureaucratic efficiencies the need for a generalist to set an agenda for all these specialists, and this generalist was increasingly not accountable to anyone. The result was the increasing tendency toward absolute monarchy in Europe. I mentioned this before but it bears repeating.

The other way of running a government is not through bureaucratic specialization, but through communal decision-making directly which doesn't involve the intermediary of representatives, or in communal government among small, local populations which approximates this through full and complete communication between the leaders and the led. The great invention of the American Constitution in fact was to formalize with checks and balances the relation between the nationwide, bureaucratized government, and the local governments which would be much more communally-based, hopefully. The big danger of modern politics in the US is that local government will become because of increasing population densities just like smaller versions of the Federal government, with all the tendencies toward bureaucratization, distance from the community, and manipulation by elites and special interests, but without the saving grace of bureaucratic excellence, since there tends to be more prestige in Federal employment, at least at the higher levels, and as a result it is elitist ambition, not democratic oversight, which in the modern world seems to have more effect on producing efficient government, now as in the monarchies of 18th century Europe.

To summarize, initiative in government typically derives from (1) paternalism from elites, (2) limited government derived from local initiatives and responsibilities that combines paternalism from elites, particularly through bureaucratic means, with democratic oversight (that prevents the leaders of bureaucracies from having complete control over their domains, especially when they are in alliance with

general social elites), and (3) direct democratic input from the mass of people that is reflected at the local and/or national levels. Europe originally had all three sources of governmental initiatives as an active presence in society. More recently the increasing bureaucratization of these societies have given great power to the elites who run these bureaucracies, and gain great wealth and power personally, as well as their social allies, so that both groups use these bureaucracies to benefit society in a paternalistic fashion and to protect themselves when the rest of society turns against them. The fact that this occurs, but not very often usually, reflects another interesting fact, that by American standards these are more like two-class rather than three-class societies, because the middle class in much of Europe may exist in a kind of middling position in terms of wealth, but not in terms of cultural influence. Instead the mass of people either accept the influence and initiative of elites, and identify with or at least accept their cultural choices (very common among economically middle-class people), or think of themselves as alienated working-class people who accept the social order of which they are a part, and may on occasion wish to overturn that order and so may adhere to counter-elites in the hope of doing so, but will otherwise think they have little say in running society. Oddly enough, almost all groups long for and expect social order to a great degree, and give societal elites great power in order to produce it, which gives a rather authoritarian flavor to their society and culture. They also withdraw their support and throw it to other authoritarian elites if present elites do not prove up to the task, and social order is threatened. As a rule, with the exception of carefully staged referenda, fine-tuning governmental decisions is not handled by the masses themselves, but through activists who either formally or informally claim to represent them. In a sense these are two-class societies, the ruling class, and those who strongly identify with them, and the working class, who tend to be passive and escapist, that are the followers. To the extent there is a third class that provides compromises between the rich and the poor it is the intellectuals which sometimes thinks of itself as a counterculture, but more often than not arise from the wealthier classes.

In the US on the other hand there is a self-conscious middle stratum of society, the middle class, which serves as a buffer between the rich and the poor, that allows for ease of communication between the top and bottom of society just because the middle class has interests common to both the rich and the poor. Thus political compromises agreeable to the middle class tend to also be compromises that meet

the needs of both the rich and the poor as well. Morally, the values held by the middle class tend to be middle positions that avoid the arrogance of the very rich, and the subservience of the very poor, and thus as an ideal tends to be held in high regard by all sections of society, even if not actually practiced by them.

The end result is that Western Europe especially tends to get the benefits of paternalistic government and its product which is social order, as well as its costs, the result of intellectual fads among elites as well as even more self-serving manipulation. They get social order, which everyone agrees is useful, such as good mass transportation systems, and social order which only the elites imagine is useful, such as the Swedish "anti-spanking law." This would work in a society where everyone had children like those of the Swedish elite who embody self-control in return for expected future elite status, but which makes less sense for working-class families whose children see no such reward in their future, and are strongly tempted to seek emotional release no matter what the cost, for which a strong talking to may not be a deterrent.

Until fairly recently the US was culturally more accessible to direct democratic influence on public policy because it had a strong middle class who could communicate with both the rich and the poor and come up with compromises agreeable to both, something more difficult to achieve in societies where the rich and the poor do not communicate with each other. On the other hand, this ideal is if anything declining in the US, and instead we are increasingly left with the benefits and costs of limited government and less bureaucratic control than is found in Western Europe. This leaves us with our individual freedoms, free from bureaucratic control by default as it were. Nevertheless bureaucratic paternalism is increasing in the US, from the increasing influence of private bureaucracies if not public bureaucracies, and even the latter is increasing though not to European levels.

What is very much weakening, however, though there are occasional attempts at revival, is direct democratic input on social policy, usually arising from the middle-class sectors of the society. As a matter of fact there is always the danger in the American scheme of things that direct democratic input, or at least monitoring and enforcing standards upon the leadership class, is more important in America than in Western Europe because the traditions of aristocratic honor and public service, even among our leaders, are so weak. Even in America of course there are differences in time and place, but at this time and place

our leaders often seem to be self-serving and self-righteous, with various combinations of the two, rather than necessarily knowledgeable about their fellow citizens and self-sacrificing in the patriotic sense. Alan Wolfe in *Does American Democracy Still Work?* (Wolfe 2006) discusses how the frustrations of the average citizen leading to apathy just increases the influence of elites and special interests in politics.

I should add that one way social conflict has been traditionally kept down in the US is by most everyone accepting the middle-class position that government should be concerned mainly with public issues that enhance economic growth, and not with other social issues more directly related to maintaining popular morality or good public order (of the sort militant socialists or militant nationalists might be interested in). In Europe governments might fall or come to power on issues of “national identity” that are kept out of popular debate in the US as a rule. Of course one reason is that until recently most aspects of popular American culture have been congruent with middle-class ideals, and were in fact derived from middle-class traditions. One of those traditions was to keep elitist paternalism at bay as expressed in their continuing attempts to control government. However, the weakening of traditional middle-class moral and cultural influence produces a vacuum which is starting to duplicate in America European-style conflicts over personal and national identity, what pundits call “the culture wars.”

European politics often was and is a product of an alliance of upper-class intellectuals with working-class leaders and their followers, sometimes appealing directly to the working class through the mass media, unlike the more typical middle-class leadership in America which so often dragged upper-class and working-class support with it. But the increase of what I call the nihilism of modernity, reflecting both the decline of frontier-type opportunities for social mobility and the increasing bureaucratization of society, is weakening direct communal influence on government in America, even at the level of local government, as well as the influence of middle-class values and standards for being the pivot point or gyroscope of society.

America is in some ways an archaic society. Though it never had the experience of extreme democracy of the sort found in tribes or even city-states, it for a long time resisted extreme centralization of government and espoused limited government, a division of labor between local and national government, that was common for example in medieval government, but declined with their expansion of centralized

government. America never has glamorized this medieval sort of localism, which has been a temptation of some European elites, but it never had European-style centralism either. Because of this, America never had elites, other than the leaders of the Confederate Rebellion, who ruled through a kind of romantic nationalism, either dreaming of forms of society that existed hundreds of years before, or dreaming of futuristic utopias, all of which have been common in modern European politics. America instead was founded by those seeking a middle position, limited government that through a division of labor between Federal and local governments sought a balance between central and local interests, but with far greater central powers than medieval Europe had. Culturally of course, America has often treated economic determinism as the highest value in contrast historically to certain tendencies in Europe toward romantic nationalism, trying to treat the state as if it is one, big, happy family (often a rather authoritarian family).

Though in America and in Europe there is sometimes deference to the will of the people, to populism, this exists more often in the long run than in the short run, in reaction to a short run dominated by initiatives arising elsewhere. In Europe these initiatives strongly reflect elitist paternalism as well as market forces, in America market forces reflecting business interests are even stronger which benefits consumers when markets work well but also results in inefficient paternalism.

If social mobility starts to decline in the US the question arises: Will the middle class become self-serving and end their alliance with the poor and just become another self-serving interest group? Will they stand alone? Will they strengthen their alliance with the rich? Will they on the other hand strengthen their alliance with the poor against the rich? Or will they seek to restructure society to produce a middle position that claims to be a compromise that serves not only the interests of the middle-income sections of society but everyone, a new version of the common good as it was called in the 18th century? Or will they not take initiative at all and become passive as the middle class in Europe often is, leaving the initiative to the rich, perhaps to the poor though this often degenerates into mob anarchy, or to intellectual activists, who often start selfless but soon enough become much like traditional elites? All this is possible, and more.

In a nutshell European political initiative ends to be more paternalistic and "aristocratic" in the cultural sense, American political initiative tends to reflect biases toward limited government which gives



more power to local government and which allows more play to market forces which actually strengthens business elites when markets are insufficient to discipline them. It is not just passivity, like that of peasants, but in addition there is a tradition of limited government which causes Americans to not expect much from government, as if we want to protect it by not stressing it too much. By default, the activists who do want more and lobby for it are often business elites, and sometimes cultural elites.

Thus American-style democracy is good at preventing tyranny, and is less efficient at producing ongoing social order, again a common theme in this book. In fact it relies on ongoing cultural traditions, especially among its aggressive middle class, and doesn't necessarily adapt well when such traditions weaken or disappear. It is possible to reinforce social order through bureaucratic means, which is a species of paternalism and is elite-driven, and this is common in Europe. It is also possible to not pay attention to many issues not relevant to economic growth, which is a very common American approach to potential cultural conflict, and which is congruent with traditions of limited government. Though both Europe and America tend to rely on democratic input as a last resort, that is to say direct input from the masses, this is somewhat more likely in America because of the existence of the middle class as a facilitator, but even so this mostly doesn't become evident except during times of crisis. The European version of this are "intellectuals" reaching out, often from their base in the upper class, to the masses, usually recommending a type of paternalism which the poor may or may not want depending on circumstances, and the tendency toward catch-up in America, inefficient paternalism if you will. America sometimes forgets a certain amount of paternalism can invigorate the poor, unlike the middle class who often don't need it.

It is also not as if Europe's method of democratic input, an alliance between upper-class reformers and working-class rebels against deference never works. It does work sometimes. Many of Europe's social reforms come from these alliances that arise from time to time. America's version of reform, at least its traditional ideal, a kind of middle-class revolt, also sometimes works, often with a moralistic edge, as in the movement to end slavery, and in all the moralistic crusades that permeate American politics, and that substitute for crusades based on either nationalism or socialism in the European mode. Of course this peculiarity of American culture may be declining, as the end of the frontier, finally, reintroduces an European-style class system



here that may someday overwhelm our cultural peculiarity, our middle-class puritanism, which was never true of everyone but was true of many.

For now, however, democratic input facilitated by the middle-class predilection to seek compromise between the rich and the poor serves well as a barrier to governmental excesses, but it does not serve well to seek out new programs to create social order. Our governmental elites are still not paternalistic enough, still too obsessed with economic growth as the end-all of society, still too middle class in orientation or too insistent that nothing else is possible, to often seek more than that.

It is in local communities, which in America serves as a counterweight to national bureaucracies, as well as in the national arena, that the very moralism of middle-class groups serves as a brake on leadership attempting to rule through simple deceit. That is why we never see in American history anything as extreme as leaders declaring martial law to deal with a crisis which only exists in their own over-blown rhetoric. There have been less extreme cases of rabble-rousing, but nothing that extreme to provide a justification for dictatorship. It is in this manner that the moralism of the middle class, that rudder of society, is most trusted. At the same time middle-class moralism rarely succeeds in getting an intellectual grasp on the full measure of the nation's problems. Of course middle-class people do not think of themselves as having the breadth of vision of monarchs who are acclaimed the more power they grasp for, as if the more problems they solve, the more they are entitled to rule. Middle-class people in America think they are the nation, even when this is not literally true, and do not feel they have to prove themselves by standards other than rather mundane ones.

What can we learn from all of this? As in all complex situations, it all depends. Sometimes what works is a democracy based on upper-class reformers speaking for the poor, as they propose often not just to mediate conflict but to end it thorough social engineering; sometimes not. The same hold true for a democracy based on the poor speaking up to those slightly richer and the rich speaking down to those slightly poorer, and the middle class being familiar with both points of view and coming up with compromise solutions, usually with a strongly moralistic flavor, which sometimes works and sometimes not. If anything, the peculiarities of American middle-class moralism and individualism are probably starting to decay and evolve in the

European direction with the ending of a social and economic frontier that allowed a certain degree of autonomy and even social equality to flourish, as opposed to mere social isolation in an anonymous society, and in some ways narcissism has taken their place as a working ideal. That is why middle-class tolerance for politicians' lying to them, so often praised by elements of the media as a sign of increasing sophistication, is I think a bad thing, not because I think self-righteousness is a good thing, but because the strongest defense against governmental tyranny is that government knows that they shouldn't even try the blatant lies that are always their justification for tyranny.

To just touch upon the psychological effects of our present-day narcissistic society, or at least with the prime examples coming from America's version, and later in the book there will be much more discussion of this, it is one where in effect personal relationships become like consuming commodities, they become standardized, they become short-term in affect, and the participants then move on; it is the expression of a throw-away society in personal relationships. Unlike primitive societies where many areas of life are treated with the utmost awe and resulting emotional arousal, are treated in effect as sacred, perhaps too many, in the most modern societies almost nothing is treated as sacred, other than the need to "kill time" or to have narcissistic satisfaction by consuming commodities in ever greater amounts, even if the end result is not more than to fit in to such a society, that is the egotistical satisfaction that one can indeed compete and then consume. It has become the basis for the sense of identity by fitting in which exists in all cultures no matter what the content, resulting in what the culture espouses as its values, or more likely what hypocrisy the culture tolerates, no matter what the end result will be. Since people have found meaning in endless warfare, in religious persecution, in enslaving one's neighbors; so it is no surprise they they do find meaning in endless consumption almost to the point of satiation, even as they become alienated from human contact and as personal and communal relationships become devalued.

To repeat what I mentioned in the previous chapter, the paradox of democracy in the US is that a tradition of limited government limits pressures on government having to do much, and in fact relies on a tradition of virtue and self-control which is expected to be inculcated in the local community and sometimes just in the family, but if this doesn't occur government at large will not do much to replace it. The paradox of authoritarianism in Europe is that the extreme desire for

social order induces deference to elites unless such leaders cannot produce, almost “guarantee” social order, in which case new leaders are found, with very high expectations by American standards for what these leaders can produce. Nationalistic leaders in Europe at times have acted as if the anonymous state can be treated as if it is a giant local community, and national leaders as if they are like the notables of the local community, both of which assumptions have been treated by traditional American political leaders as an absurdity as their traditional assumption is that national leaders will always be distant bureaucrats and can never match local notables regarding their knowledge and concern for the local community.

Thus Europe idealizes community, but in reality practices bureaucratic rule of society even more than we in the US do, often attempting to control markets. The US idealizes community and practices economic growth as the supreme value and often the substitute for other values, using bureaucracies, both public and private, to manage market conditions but less often to substitute for them. Democratic control of society which attempts to do more than allow individuals to buy products through markets relies on communal decision making. That is to say the led set standards and enforce them on their leaders. This is a greater ideal in America than in Europe, but is practiced poorly nowadays in both, especially since American society seems to be evolving in the European direction with the ending of the social and economic frontier. In fact America needs democratic control of elites more than some other societies because the tradition of aristocratic honor (which isn't all that different from ideals of republican virtue but in a bureaucratized rather than a communal setting), of self-sacrifice for the public good, as a cultural value is nowadays rather weak among our leadership class. I should emphasize here, something that I seem to be mentioning quite often, that a bureaucracy is composed of specialists, but its agenda is almost always set by a generalist, its ruler in effect, so that with specialists usually just staying within their niches and minding their own business, the danger of tyranny by the ruler is quite real.

A community is composed of generalists who communicate directly with each other and reach a consensus, sometimes in the present, sometimes it was done long ago and the tradition is carried from generation to generation, which is the basis for the social contract theory of government. Voting is a kind of compromise between communal and bureaucratic modes of decision-making, since where

communication is not complete enough to produce a consensus what must substitute is formally setting up issues to be discussed, plans to put policies into effect, alternatives, and then an agenda for which plan to be voted on, all of which can be done in a socially beneficial manner, or can be done to serve special interests alone or as a kind of public relations stunt to produce an image among the masses that is better than its reality. In fact political movements often degenerate into caricatures of their ideals when they believe their own hype. As to why such movements so often resort to propaganda and hype is a whole other issue, particularly overlapping with why both politicians and the communications media are often tempted to try to manipulate their audiences through inducing or fulfilling fantasy, a kind of idolatry if you will. Modern politics is filled with such inducement of fantasy, be it nationalistic parties that interfere with communal decision-making by creating scapegoats out of other communities, thus interfering with more realistic solidarity processes between and among communities, or be it socialistic parties that exaggerate the goodwill of new elites, themselves, over old.

The end result is that communal decision-making, the true source of the democratic will of the people, is weak in all modern societies. In fact politicians of all stripes take advantage of this fact, perhaps especially those, like extreme nationalists and extreme socialists, who claim to speak for the mass of people because they have no interest in letting them speak for themselves; it is not a matter that "activists" should not have any influence on society, it is that they should not have the only influence. Only then will communal values be realistically based in community and in healthy social relationships, and will a sense of character, as the actualization of these values, be realistic as well.

Only then will such issues as when slow, individualistically-based, market-oriented, incremental change, and when communitarian (collectivistic) decision-making, which occurs in big chunks because it cannot be done in any other way, are preferable be discussed realistically. In fact the alternatives of "decadent" feudalism and an atomized society are not good ones. When the reasonableness of social ties are no longer understood, when greed and manipulation weakens the ability to have "loving" relations freely given, so that the alternatives to social chaos or manipulative intrigues becomes a blind, quasi-feudalistic loyalty which maintains social relations at a mediocre level, or a simple, consumerist-oriented individualism of the kind found in

an atomized society, these are two extremes most of us would probably want to avoid, if we had a choice. As for the bureaucratization of society, serving the interests of both the private and the public sectors, of this too we should be wary, for this was after all how absolute monarchy developed, as the supreme generalist in charge of government set the agenda for all the bureaucrats underneath.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### ETHICS FOR AN IMPERSONAL AGE

By the end of the 18th century the Founding Fathers of the American Revolution, that succeeded, and the philosophes who prepared the stage for the French Revolution, that ultimately failed, were increasingly thinking of society in general as reflecting the clockwork mechanisms of Newtonian mechanics, and which would be made more efficient as long as the parts of that machine, people, were kept rational in the service of their own interests and that of society at large. As to what these interests were and how to fulfill them, such writers ultimately believed in a great chain of being extending from strong personal relationships based on personal intimacy but not on overall social coordination being kept in check by levels of authority each reporting to the layer above and ultimately to God. Thus by the end of the 18th century a kind of clockwork universe was taken for granted in Western Europe and in America which, even if as the Deists claimed was no longer under the direct intervention of God, which also undercut the divine right of kings as God's mouthpiece, was still governed by His laws so that in ethics as well as in technology 18th century Americans would have felt at home in Augustan Rome or the Athens of Aristotle, and the humanistic literature of those ancient times was by no means considered out of date.

As the 19th century progressed social thought that had taken for granted an intimate base for society in the local community and even in the family began to notice that things were changing. This was very much noticed at the beginning of the 20th century by Max Weber, the German lawyer/economist who sought to correct the simplifications of Marx and Nietzsche, among other things, and in the process helped found Sociology as a quasi-scientific endeavor.

One way to summarize the changes in perspective on the human experience in the last two centuries in the West is to say the 18th century scholarship of Western Europe placed great emphasis on government and economics, the scholarship at the end of the 19th century emphasized to a great extent government and personal life (as exemplified in the work of Marx and Freud), and the scholarship of the

beginning of the 21st century is much more oriented toward discussing personal life treated in an impersonal way as a commodity, in other words personal life in an impersonal environment. The cultural clashes between the proponents of objective reason (whose heyday was the 18th century in Europe and America) and the proponents of “meaning,” those romantics whose heyday was the early 19th century that soon followed and who still persist with similar interests today, eventually resulted in the work of such people as Max Weber who tried to reconcile these two approaches.

That is why he noticed that we increasingly have relativistic ethics in our private lives but absolutist ethics for our leaders, as our social goals are increasingly set, not from the bottom up, but from the top down, in fact is demanded so by the mass of people who increasingly take for granted what Weber called “The Iron Cage of Bureaucracy” (Mitzman 1970). Rather puritanical traditional groups who resist this trend range from local groups in the Islamic world who expect values to be enforced by local custom as interpreted by local influentials interacting with the community, all of this often tribal in origin, and traditional groups in America who also expect values to be enforced by local custom as interpreted by local influentials interacting with the community, in this case middle-class people whose class position makes them particularly interested in issues of self-control and deferring gratification. In the puritanical tradition groups tend to enforce values locally because they do not particularly admire their distant rulers for their aristocratic attainments and do not feel these attainments make them worthy to rule automatically. Obviously there is a certain amount of anti-intellectualism at play here, or at least intellectual rivalries. There are groups within the Catholic and Orthodox Christian worlds who are more used to values being enforced by aristocratic elites, but even they often criticize these elites nowadays as having become vulgar and coarse, perhaps because having become influenced by popular mass culture and because of their own reasons for self-indulgence they are now often figureheads who are no longer worthy of their positions of power. There are also mixed cases nowadays, so that American-style evangelicals are disrupting the cultural unity of Brazil, while in America bureaucratization of society is quite evident and there are mutterings, traditional in our context, against the unworthiness, no matter how educated they are, of those who consider themselves our cultural elite.

So how is Max Weber’s social science different from the social science as it exists today? Basically, he looked with equanimity at the



world of personal community with all its personal rivalries as well as solidarities and kindnesses that was starting to disappear, and the world of impersonal associations where bureaucracies could maximize output, but whether it is worthy to be produced is a distinctly separate question. Max Weber wanted to keep the benefits of personal responsibility and even personal sociability, as well as the benefits of bureaucratic efficiency. Modern social science increasingly conceives of people only as relatively impersonal consumers, and analyzes this situation in either an accepting or a critical vein. Thus the postmodernists in the social sciences and the humanities tend to accept the Marxist critique of modern society, with all its simplicities and lack of nuances with regard to historical details which caused Max Weber to develop his analyses as an alternative, not that he didn't sometimes oversimplify too, reflecting his prejudices and those of his time. Instead of hoping for control over the means of production, they have pretty much given up, and now settle for control over the means of consumption by seeking to expand the welfare state.

Something known ever since ancient times, that the benefits of an increased standard of living must be balanced by the costs, the loss of emotional satisfaction in those areas of life that cannot be bought, faces us as much if not more so than during the time of Max Weber. He had opposed those romantics who came to power, in intellectual circles if nowhere else, after the failure of the French Revolution who reacted with disgust at the timeservers and lackeys who would support any government from democracy to monarchy to dictatorship with equal alacrity. So they, disgusted with the mass of mankind, put "idealists" like themselves on a pedestal, people with "authenticity" whose causes could be acted upon only by an elite, never by the mass of people. Thus was the cult of the revolutionary vanguard born by a new elite who by serving themselves claimed to serve all. It often threatened to cross over to the cult of celebrity, as activists became replaced by poseurs and other high-livers whose aim was always at ending poverty, their own. Max Weber opposed in the intellectual world such poseurs, but also those apparachniks, those bureaucrats, who did their jobs without vision.

Let's look at this in more detail. *Cynicism and Postmodernity* (Bewes 1997) describes the modern version of such poseurs. Bewes describes modern consumer society as producing blasé indifference to it as a source of deep values, but because it is all-encompassing there is an increasing attitude that there is nothing else. All that is left is emotional

withdrawal from it, and developing the thick shell of the ironist, the “wise guy” or know-it-all, in other words the cynic who knows the cost of everything and the value (the human value) of almost nothing. He describes this situation as an intensification of conditions which already existed in the 19th century, and which were known to such thinkers as Hegel and Dostoevsky, even then, and certainly to Max Weber. In shorthand description, for Bewes these are the attitudes of decadence where superficiality is cultivated because knowledge is painful, where relativism is sought out as the norm because what the dandy wants is ever-searching, or more accurately ever-contemplating oneself, because with nothing worth finding, the intellectual contemplation of the acts of searching (the “wise guy” attitude that one knows the score) is all that is left to be savored with some permanence, and the resulting attitude is one of irony, the negative one of “putting down” values and constancies since disdain becomes the true act of appreciating the worth of anonymous, hectic, competitive, non-intimate consumer society. Timothy Bewes says: “Charm, for the dandy, is an infinitely greater virtue than honesty or prudence” (Bewes 1997: 36). In other words it disarms one’s critics, without making them intimates, because that is the best that can be hoped for, to entertain one’s way (both others and oneself) to success. It is the final passing from the world of individualism to the world of narcissism. That is why much of the Third World wants to copy us, since they feel they have no choice and do admire our successes, or why still others feel more comfortable with the America of the 18th century, the America of the Federalist Papers, than the America of today.

Politically, cynical discussions of community recapitulate centuries of ideological evolution in an instant, resulting in longings for societies long gone or that will never come to be, or believe in future developments once the preserve of science fiction writers. The ancient world when it grew out of tribalism and created a world of politics tended to split the world of personal morality (the family which was the world of necessity as well as of personal responsibility) from the world of power (of politics, which offered social change as a goal, but through means distinctly disreputable). The Christian world brought a new hierarchy of values in that the highest value was not entering the world of achievement, politics, but rejecting it with disdain, as monastic isolation offered the highest value, which offered moral purity which even the family couldn’t compete with. Modern cynics dream of these two extremes, the deconstructionists for whom criticisms of the sordid

motives of the everyday world reveal the monastic purity they long for, and the political idealists in the tradition of Hannah Arendt for whom political activism is the true expression of inner being, whether or not it achieves in the practical sense being somewhat irrelevant since aiming for action is exhilarating, no matter that there are few moral standards left to guide these actions anymore (Bewes 1997: 89–103). This is because there are no longer consistent social traditions to give a source for these standards, individual self-assertion having taken its place as the highest value (at least for activist elites, the masses are still as always quite passive and fatalistic).

Max Weber's world was on the cusp of these changes, and he wrote about them with relevance for our era as well. He wrote about a world where society was no longer split between the world of family, and of communities based on families, and the world of politics, but instead of anonymous conglomerates held together by markets and by the bureaucracies that serve markets, and what sometimes supports it and sometimes checks it, the world of politics. In terms of values, it was an increasingly non-theistic world, in some ways almost polytheistic with many competing sources of values poorly integrated and in effect warring with each other, but also going beyond this ancient condition to one of sheer nihilism. In our modern era, when social solidarity, producing individualism of a distinctly moralistic cast seems not quite weighty enough for individual satisfaction, possibly because social solidarity no longer seems quite real enough, then the authenticity of strong feelings seems for cynics to be a goal that needs no justification. This is because there is nothing else out there to warrant justification, to compete with it. In many ways moralistic individualism has evolved among many of our intellectual classes into hedonistic or ascetic narcissism. The latter is found among political radicals for whom self-sacrifice, or better yet sacrificing others, is distinctly pleasurable.

How does this relate to modern social science? Modern social science tends to conceive of people as tools of their environments, so that "rational choice" scholars constantly conceive of people as developing predictable schemes because their goals are so utterly predictable because of environmental constraints, while others emphasize the possibility of living like an artist, so that rebelliousness and even arbitrary unsociability is not looked down upon but almost encouraged as if not fitting into bureaucracies becomes a value of its own. However, such rebelliousness as seen in communities of students and of artists often becomes utterly predictable since human beings like meaningfulness,

not artistic creation for its own sake (except for artists for whom that is their source of identity, which is another way of saying that is their job).

Let me refer once again as I did in my previous chapter on “Character and Civil Society” to Alain Touraine’s book *What Is Democracy?* which is an example of a modern scholar who also talks about the multiple sources of values and power in modern society (Touraine 1997). He talks about civil society as those institutions devoted to values (I suppose he means religion, academia, even the mass media though they also have other motives) which coordinate with those institutions more totally committed to the profit motive. This analysis in many ways recapitulates the medieval European theory of the Estates combining to form Society with the nobility and the Church enforcing honor and values respectively, the common people being concerned with producing wealth, and the monarch being concerned with holding the structure of society together. This also overlaps with Touraine’s distinction that institutions of modern civil society push for values in politics (and I might add the judiciary is their major instrument for the enforcement of values), political society (and I might add the legislature) is the place where economic competition takes its political form, and the state (and I might add the executive branch of government, just as the monarch did earlier) keeps society together. This also reflects the place in society for the values of liberty (enforced by the state), fraternity (enforced by political society), and equality (enforced by civil society). All this analysis is true like a tautology is true, yet except as a memory device offers little progress in analyzing the problems of enforcing such values over what Max Weber did in his time.

Even so, Max Weber tended to offer little more than tidbits of information. Though he certainly did not support tyranny, his work, including his political writings, did little to impede the rise of Hitler. Alan Sica in his book *Max Weber and the New Century* points out that Max Weber knew that traditional societies tended to believe in or were committed to justice in an emotional sense, whether or not they were hypocrites about it, while modern societies are committed to legality, and justice is sometimes thought of as besides the point (Sica 2004: 110). Prof. Sica describes this insight of Weber by saying that modern societies are forever striving to order what in its natural state is less orderly or even random, a process which Weber calls “rationalization” (Sica 2004: 112) which is a way of saying what Weber and the Germany of his time were known for wanting to create, an obsession for them,

that is social order of a modern, bureaucratic sort. This social order tended to be produced by elites from the top down, so that the common people were fatalistic about their ability to control the process, and tended to seek emotional relief from the world of work in other social environments, often having a strong hereditary component or at least offering few alternatives, the world of family and intimate relationships. American culture even in that era was just more optimistic about having choices, sometimes realistically, and sometimes ideologically having its roots in a competitiveness and a need to prove oneself derived ultimately from religion, the famed "Protestant Ethic." The result was that the world of work in America was conceived of as being somewhat voluntary and because of constant mobility acquaintances tried to avoid the stuffiness and harshness of a German-style class system, where people really felt trapped, which there empowered the powerful even if no one else. This also meant in America that the world of acquaintances often could be counted on more than the world of intimates with its strong hereditary component, or at least reliance on long term loyalties was weak in the American scene.

In the modern era the cultural basis for the European class system has weakened, but with the ending of the (economic and social) frontier in America we will probably see a rebuilding of an European-style class system here. Even though Europe is becoming somewhat culturally Americanized, particularly in their adherence to mass modes of recreation, and even though structurally America seems to be redeveloping European-style bureaucratic habits and the culture of an accompanying class system, there is not yet a complete convergence. The result is that cultural tensions remain between a more staid, bureaucratic, class-ridden Europe, and a more free-wheeling, economically expansionist, and just plain disorderly America (one cost of freedom; there also are benefits). The Third World sometimes feel compelled to evolve in either European or American directions, and sometimes want to pick and choose, or even evolve out of their own traditions most of all. At the very least Big Business benefits from limited government in the US, while in Europe Big Government and their commercial allies benefit from (what else?) big government.

In his own time Max Weber tried to avoid the extremes of "rational choice" theorizing as exemplified in the then developing schools of mathematical economics and the aesthetically-based schools of social critique, often tinged with Marxist sympathies. Max Weber emphasized that some motives are so common in a psychological sense that

“rational choice” can be predicted from knowledge of the range of institutionally-determined alternatives (also environmental factors), while some motives are so idiosyncratic or are so culturally unique that outsiders are bound to miss the nuances, so that at best outsiders can develop empathy for the people and learn what occurs after the fact, but this allows little room for predictions beforehand in the scientific sense, especially I might add when behavior reflects mixed motives and individual idiosyncrasies. Max Weber, because of his emphasis on scholarly self-discipline, offered few examples of moral advice in his scholarship, as opposed to his political writings, and gave only hints on how various cultures differed by how well they offered opportunities for “self-actualization.”

Are there modern scholars who exemplify the avoidance of the two extremes of “rational choice” simplicities and the murky depths of aesthetic pseudo-profundities? Let’s see by looking at some modern scholars who write directly on the issue of values in modern society.

One example is an interesting discussion of modern thinkers in the field of social justice, the philosophy of social justice that is, in Paul Ricoeur’s book *The Just* (Ricoeur 2000). One reason such books have influence is because of the decline of the idea of “social contract” as a working assumption, and its replacement by “social contract” as a legal fiction and a hypothetical construct. Once the idea of “social contract” made a certain amount of historical sense since there were primordial social relationships of family and tribe, and primordial value systems often based on religion, that all preceded the state and were more effective in producing individual identity than the state ever could, groupings who in fact created the state. With the decline of such primordial traditions the state has filled in the gap by attempting to mold the character of its citizens, and so theorizing about the effects on individual character of various kinds of social groupings, in particular various kinds of political societies, has become relevant of late, if for no other reason so as to give information to the state to be used as a basis for its attempts at social engineering.

However, despite the hopes of Plato, philosophizing rarely does the trick, it is rarely detailed enough to form a basis for a social contract that can substitute for that based on primordial social loyalties. Nevertheless political elites, particularly those of the modern world, love to try. Paul Ricoeur, as do many other modern philosophers, treats responsibility as an inferred condition, not as personal responsibility anymore, in keeping I might add with a weakening of personal

relationships in general in the modern world, but more as a kind of impersonal responsibility beholding a holder of a bureaucratic or at least a societal role whose responsibility insures a problem from ever arising, the mutual-insurance model of problem-avoidance if not problem-solving. The increasing responsibilities of citizens in the modern world can be conceived as a kind of bureaucratic responsibility, as opposed to the traditional responsibilities that once held between intimates.

Responsibility under such circumstances is not enforced by punishment so much as by bureaucratic order which results in punishment only as the last resort, the first resort being merely the defining of social roles, and the reduction of personal freedom in the process. An expansion of indemnification for error leads soon to an expansion of insuring oneself against any risk. All this is an expansion of the typical business-oriented rather than interpersonal-oriented modes of monitoring social responsibility. At the very least interpersonal responsibility is no longer a matter of inner conscience but of bureaucratic norms. True, lack of sympathy between social groupings such as families and ethnic groups diminishes, unless they are economic or political rivals in this new order, but so also are lost the benefits of having intimate social loyalties at all, often replaced by a "romantic" sometimes realistic, sometimes not, searching for opportunities to create new social ties.

Creating new social ties is obviously more work than being born into them, or having ones that are relatively primordial like neighborliness unless one is overwhelmed like in the modern world by the sheer number of neighbors in the community; especially when adults, as opposed to children, interact with a number of different communities. There is also the psychological issue of just becoming burned out by constantly having to meet new people, so that whole-hearted loyalty becomes a rare type of self-sacrifice, and its weakness, once compensated by family loyalties, is starting to extend to the family. One result is that family loyalty in the West seems to be declining, partly because the welfare state is now expected to take up the slack from weakening families. Also, the existence of bureaucracies created to shore up weak families gives an incentive for trying out new kinds of living arrangements, many of them being predicated upon ease of leaving the relationship. The weakening of basic social standards in interpersonal relationships also means that the powerful can experiment all they want, and the powerless have become very weak when it comes to



interpersonal bargaining. In fact they are becoming forced to bargain when they merely want to be treated with dignity and respect because the alternative of the “social contract” of traditional morality has lost its primordial duties to a large extent, and has been replaced by bargaining between the more and less powerful. The state then is asked to more and more intervene to produce “equality” which is more and more weakening at the interpersonal level, except that as an outsider the state has a tendency to create equality as a bureaucratic category, affecting those who get the attention of the state, but not fine-tuned enough to reflect the concrete circumstances of interpersonal relationships where people tend to want dignity and equity in their interpersonal dealings, not equality by some superficial measure as judged by the state.

A book quite different in style and tone from that of Paul Ricoeur that complements it is *The Death of Character: Moral Education in an Age Without Good or Evil* (Hunter 2000) which emphasizes motivations instead of ethical practices, and emphasizes that increasingly in America our motivations are not the workings of conscience but of narcissism pure and simple. In particular he criticizes American philosophies of education as catering to our national obsession with self-esteem, which is often narcissism and even hedonism under another name, and which reflects a romantic ethos that children are so naturally good that encouraging them to express themselves in pretty much whatever they desire will encourage the path of virtue. For him, a belief that people in isolated, anonymous, competitive social environments will decide to be virtuous just out of a sense of personal achievement is, despite its obvious similarities to the Protestant leap of faith, true perhaps for a small number of people, but is naïve as a prescription for society at large, which perhaps reveals among other things the Calvinist roots of this philosophy in American tradition.

Though Prof. Ricoeur seems to believe in the importance of virtues, he treats them as affecting each other in a kind of Platonic limbo of ideal forms, without giving us a motivation for following them. Prof. Hunter’s pleading is less in the tradition of liberal individualism that Prof. Ricoeur seems to espouse, and is more in tune with the classical arguments for the existence of the sacred, that whatever humans aim for, it must be something so special that as a goal it exists as a direction for human experience and not merely as an amplification of preexisting human experience. For him virtues do not merely arise out of attempts to end personal boredom or as he would say self-actualization, the psychological justification, or attempts to actualize



virtues, the neo-classical justification, or attempts to build upon shared social experiences, the communitarian justification, but out of an existential belief in primordial values. They are then actualized in habit and in rule-following through moral discipline and through moral attachment to social institutions that give opportunities to practice these virtues.

Though this is an argument for the necessity of a sense of the sacred as being an existential underpinning for culture and for what would then be the best reason for being sociable, that which would produce the best outcome for the individual and for society (for Aristotle this is the best basis for friendship), it is barely more concrete in its diagnoses of the problems of society than the points made by Prof. Ricoeur. Prof. Hunter in his book ultimately functions as a kind of preacher, while Prof. Ricoeur in his book functions as an emotionally-detached intellectual commentator. Max Weber in many ways combined both roles, the first in his political commentary which nevertheless offered few defenses against the rise of Hitler, which just shows if he was an oracle he was of the obscurantist kind, and the second in his mainstream writings which in many ways were even more emotionally-detached than the perspective shown by Paul Ricoeur, though giving many more examples of social evolution.

There are as many ways of dealing with the existential underpinnings of society as there are of producing different religions, or secular alternatives for religion. There are also many, many ways for making plans that work, and those that don't. Nevertheless a good rule of thumb is expressed by Shakespeare through his character Hamlet, that the fault is not in the stars, but in ourselves.

It should be noted, part of the tension between America and more traditional societies is that America offers the highest standard of living in history, but in those areas of life that cannot be bought, particularly regarding family and communal pleasures, America is regressing and is often considered a bad example, a kind of attractive nuisance. There is also the jealousy factor. America's standard of living is bought at the price of extreme division of labor in society, and while the cult of celebrity entertains people by letting them identify with celebrities whose lives are quite different from theirs, the actuality of life for the average person is more like that of a cog in a bureaucratic machine. True, America's cultural ideal for the average person is not one of thinking of oneself as a cog in a bureaucratic machine, unlike Europe for example, but it is uncertain whether the cultural tradition or the social reality will win out. The practice of importing immigrants

to do working-class jobs in America and in Europe may be merely deferring having to make the important decision of what the future will be like.

The practical result of the growth of nihilism in modern, particularly American, society is what Stjepan Mestrovic calls “postemotional society” (Mestrovic 1997). Traditional societies take for granted scarcity, but at the same time the pleasures of life are emotional. Providing the proper context to enable the healthy expression of emotion is probably the major goal of life, and certainly in traditional societies where “ambition” of the modern sort based on a complex economy has little meaning. The acting-out of emotions is seen in the multitude of social, and especially religious, rituals, as well as in the expression of everyday repetitive behaviors with valued others in personal relationships. We all recognize this when this produces the expression of intimacy, sexual intimacy being only the most obvious.

Such rituals work because there is an innate emotionality that needs expression. This expression does not work well when expressed arbitrarily, which is why sociability occasions will not work arbitrarily between strangers. Though rituals will help produce an emotional bond, the rituals will not be enough if the basis for commonality is not also there. The same holds true for even more intimate relations of the romantic sort. Rituals in fact set up and enforce boundaries of an ontological sort (existential feelings of personal existence that are psychologically felt, and thus are of prime importance for the stability of the personality), and essentially distinguish between the sacred (that which is most powerful and can be used with care as a building block of the human experience) and the profane (that which interferes with the human experience, often a kind of waste product as it were, which is why excrement is almost always profane, while sex as a building block of self-esteem if handled well is part of the sacred).

The modern world with its emphasis on choices and deferring gratification within the context of a world of strangers (Simmel 2004 and Turner and Rojek 2001) induces personalities so oriented toward evaluating choices that the emotional enjoyment of these choices is often lost in the process. In effect two extremes develop, the intellectual one (and “the intellectual” as a character type) who is forever evaluating choices and rarely acting on them, and the vulgar hedonist (and “the hedonist” as a character type) who is forever stuffing himself into a stupor because consumption has become compulsive just because it has become more a deadening of anxiety or a relief of boredom or even

a force of habit than it is true pleasure. The ends of life are usually quite evident to the members of the most primitive societies, even if the means aren't always there, especially their emphasis on having healthy interpersonal relationships and having an intellectual sense which expresses its "good taste" by carefully distinguishing between the sacred and the profane, all of which sometimes becomes lost in the modern world where the abundance of means, particularly consumer goods, often overwhelms us and causes us to forget what are our ends (the sacred), and our means (the profane).

In particular, while we live in a cornucopia of material goods, we increasingly live in a desert of personal relationships. In fact increasingly people relate "rationally" to the vast majority of people they meet as if they are mere instrumentalities for achieving more and more material goods. The ability to follow the golden rule of Kant and of the Bible, of not using people as a mere means, is difficult to achieve in this environment, and so the difference between the sacred and the profane becomes blurred.

The effect is usually one of great confusion, and many of the social philosophies of our time reflect this confusion between means and ends, and between the sacred and the profane. The postmodernists tend to be like post-Marxists in that while they no longer have faith in socializing the means of production, but they still have hope for socializing the means of consumption, but like the Marxists before them often have muddled ideas on what personal values and what personal responsibilities should govern the clients as well as the rulers of the vast welfare state most of them espouse. That is why they tend to espouse extreme value relativism at the personal level, but extreme absolutism in terms of the expectations of leaders and the powers given them to meet these expectations. In many ways they seek a state (a nation and a state of being) where it is no longer necessary to be good, no longer necessary to have personal responsibility since they assume we all will be able to buy our way out of our problems. The religious fundamentalists are the opposite, they expect more from the community than the community can provide by seeking a racial or ethnic or religious purity which quite possibly never existed, and in any case can only be achieved in the modern anonymous environment by enormous social pressures for conformity, almost always from elites who tend to misuse their powers, and will most likely alienate rather than convert outsiders. By failing to understand the contexts under which even their community functions, their only solution for dealing with

social change coming from outsiders is to wall themselves off from them, or to make war on them.

In practical terms, the postmodernists and the fundamentalists are not intellectual enough, though they are in effect intellectual movements that have given in to despair and often to profound feelings of irrationality because they do not so much understand as much as are confused and frightened by this modern world that so often distorts the relations between means and ends, the sacred and the profane. Again, in practical terms modern societies quite often do not provide effective outlets for emotional expression, which is the claim to fame for the expression of rituals in traditional societies, but take for granted the perpetual stagnation of emotions while waiting for opportunities for their expression, the eventual opportunities often being quite contrived, as in our dependency on mass entertainment to feel alive.

An example of a more serious problem is the weakening of opportunities for courting. Courting for romantic purposes obviously requires a sense of community where people can know about each other, or at least can introduce each other so at least the ones doing the introducing can recognize commonalities between people. One reason "dating" has declined among American college students is because a commitment to getting to know different kinds of people, as opposed to clinging to cliques, has declined. Certain kinds of biases have also declined of course, such as racial bias, but cliquishness as any college student knows is quite extreme, because it is considered not easy but difficult for people in our anonymous society to get to know each other. Instead two extremes have developed, "anybody is good enough," among those who are so frightened by the simultaneous plethora and lack of choices for interpersonal intimacy because of the anonymity of society that they pair off pretty much with the first person who becomes available, and "nobody is good enough," among those who are forever on the prowl because they are either fixated on their endless possibilities, or literally all these people become a kind of blur to them and they themselves don't have differentiated enough personalities to be able to understand and evaluate the varieties of the human experience. Sometimes interchangeable bodies is the most they can understand.

Perhaps for similar reasons college campuses of late have become the home for discussions of "desire" in general, not desire within the concrete circumstances and limitations of the real world, but "desire" in abstract as if it is just another commodity that can be packaged in different ways. Perhaps that is also why "difference" is also so often

discussed on campus, much like the differences that make up consumer choices, even when these are really the differences found among personalities and character traits, sometimes innate and inherent, sometimes rigid and impervious to change, sometimes flexible and malleable for a reason, such as because there are no root values to stand in their way other than change for its own sake as an alternative to boredom. Alternatives to boredom are quite important when emotionality is increasingly not expressed in our modern world except through consumption of commodities, not under “natural” or “healthy” circumstances, but as a kind of rekindling of a fire that is about to go out for lack of fuel.

In the classic commentaries on 18th century English law, *Blackstone's Commentaries* (1765) as described for the modern reader in Daniel J. Boorstin's *The Mysterious Science of the Law: An Essay on Blackstone's Commentaries* (Boorstin 1996) it is clear that in the 18th century positive law was assumed to be built upon a base of natural law that reflected God-given human nature. They assumed one could learn from the simpler laws of the past, laws admittedly superseded by the artificial laws made necessary by the complexities of division of labor and of a modern economy, just because these simple laws showed the natural order of human nature unadorned. As Sociology in the 19th century developed out of these ideas of their 18th century forebears, for example in Ferdinand Tonnies, *Community and Society* (*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*) (Tonnies 1993) it was clear many scholars such as Tonnies assumed that communities more easily served the motives governing human nature than bureaucratic associations even though economic advance required the latter, and even though it was no longer assumed that the divine will would be around to ensure that the “natural” goals of human emotions driving “natural” collectivities would be ultimately enforced, or that society would be able to do this enforcement with a little divine prodding and inspiration.

By the time the modern era rolls around it is assumed for the most part that our own natural ability to return the institutions serving our human nature to their roots is quite limited. There are many of course who assume that since they never see “natural” human nature or just emotionality of the sort once more obviously seen in simpler societies, that it doesn't exist, or at least we can act as if it doesn't. Thus do so many of the postmodernists assume that almost all aspects of human nature are equally artificial and socially constructed, and being the creations of politics can be changed easily by politics, while the

religious fundamentalists hunger to serve natural law, and have themselves so often forgotten the wisdom and the conditions of their ancestors that they no longer know how to do so.

Bryan S. Turner and Chris Rojek in *Society and Culture: Principles of Scarcity and Solidarity* mention: "The Durkheimian tradition contrasted profane economic behavior (individualistic, emotionally disinterested, utilitarian and contractual) and sacred behavior (collectivist, emotionally committed, and ritualistic.)" (Turner and Rojek 2001: 131). One lesson out of our own past was the way the latter could be handled poorly. In our past, and so rejected long ago, the pagan version of sacred behavior was too often to make the sacred out of the profane, in practical terms, to try to create an explosion (a gigantic abundance, an inexhaustible supply) of pleasure (often the pleasure of ecstasy that comes from merging with others or with the divine and losing one's necessary anxieties needed for the maintenance of personal boundaries in the process), all of which it was eventually decided by the culture leaders who so influenced the modern world was not warranted in order to be attuned to the nature of reality.

The modern version of this is where attempts to compensate (to decompress you might say) from emotional repression through use of artificial stimulants are used inappropriately as if a whole way of life can be built out of such stimulation. What can be used temporarily and as a kind of medicine in small doses is used as a substitute for real life. Creating a way of life that to begin with avoids the necessity for such extreme measures for emotional relief, a way of life that ensures the avoidance of the extremes of extreme emotional repression and extreme emotional expression (impulsiveness) should ideally be the goal for modern morality and modern religion, it should be considered the avoidance of idolatry in our time if one were to use a religious language. If however, we do not even know how to ask the right questions let alone how to find the right answers, we will have a hard road ahead of us.

Max Weber in his own day sought to avoid the extremes of aesthetic posturing of the Marxist and Nietzschean sort whose social critiques were better at producing introspective ponderings on pie in the sky utopias or leap in the dark revolutions than pragmatic understandings, and the model building of mathematically-inclined economists and their followers who sought to sell themselves as the business and government advisors par excellence, and given the limitations on data in the real world, were not that much more realistic. An interesting

discussion on the place of Max Weber among his peers can be found in *Fate and Utopia in German Sociology, 1870–1923* (Liebersohn 1988).

Modern-day social science, driven between the extremes of post-modern aesthetically-based kitsch and “rational choice” theory that is as realistic in its assumptions on social complexity as economics is, which is not saying much, perhaps can learn from him. It seems the more things change, the more they remain the same, doesn’t it? True, Max Weber, mandarin German intellectual that he was, lacked the common touch, and by trying to cover so much of the human experience, in order to meet the approbation of his peers, achieved a kind of timelessness just because he did not try to come up with practical proposals that would resonate in the lives of everyday people. Even his attempts to have an influence on German politics (Lassman and Speirs 1994 and Mommsen 1994) could not withstand the irrationalism espoused by his intellectual rivals.

Though he failed to bring Democracy to Germany, look in comparison at America’s admittedly less severe problems, the anonymity of modern American life, the pressures of competition, the cliquishness of followers of various lifestyles, all of which makes it difficult for people to learn from each other and to learn the practical consequences of their decisions until it is too late to change. All of this means we in America are in many ways living off the intellectual capital of our ancestors, either supporting or rebelling against middle-class values which arose in conditions now lost in the mists of time, and thus whose purpose many of us have forgotten. If anything, our alienation from our own past is more extreme than in the Germany that Max Weber grew up in.

But we have one advantage. We can learn from the intellectual pilgrimages of people like Max Weber, both from their successes and their failures, so that we don’t have to repeat them. He did the spade-work, so that we could carry on. As for other societies, they have the benefit of learning from the successes and failures of both Germany and America, and all the other places the brush of history has touched.





## CHAPTER SIX

### THE PLACE OF OPTIMISM IN AMERICAN LIFE

America has been known as the happy land to outsiders, the source of wonder because as Bismarck supposedly said God offers a special benevolence to fools, drunks, and the United States of America. Partly this was because of the physical spaciousness of the land, the chance to start over in the areas just being settled and not filled with too-firmly rooted and avaricious elites, yet, but also for intellectual reasons. American history has always seen a wavering between a pessimistic moralism, when times were rough as during the early Puritan settling of New England, and the culture of the more optimistic of their spiritual descendants, which actually has been more common in American history. More often than not stories of past hardship have been used as a bogeyman to frighten children to build up their characters by showing how tough things once were, and if we aren't careful, might be so again.

Our core political culture of course derives from that successor to Puritanism, the somewhat later Age of Enlightenment which shaped our founders' consciousness and consciences during the 18th century American founding, and in somewhat watered-down form forever afterward. This is what distinguishes us from so much of the rest of the world, the idealistic standards we use to forever judge ourselves through our sense of community, as if it is always being judged by God or fate or the judgment of history, partly because there is no primordial community among us that can demand blind loyalty or can even claim to offer unconditional love in return for such loyalty. Family life isn't even all that strong among us anymore, let alone community life, though community life, and work, and even entertainment, now offer an escape from other more primordial loyalties that just don't serve their traditional functions anymore. No wonder more traditional societies both are attracted and are repulsed by what we offer them, the fullest flowering of materialistic civilization in history.

Let's start at the beginning. Henry F. May's classic book *The Enlightenment in America* (May 1976) describes the intellectual influences at the time of the nation's founding quite well. Our tradition of course was the British Enlightenment, not the French Enlightenment,

though the latter did have some influence. The British and French Enlightenments both reflected philosophical skepticism, but differed by what they were skeptical of. The British Enlightenment was skeptical of elitism directed toward a strong central government and the social engineering that was often the direct result, as well as the dogmatism which justified it. It was experiential because it assumed a tendency toward cooperation based on both tolerance and compromise. The French Enlightenment believed far less in these social virtues, and far more in elite control. Therefore I would say they were cynical rather than just skeptical, though May does prefer the second term.

They believed social engineering was necessary because they thought just “muddling through” in the British mode was far worse. Because they essentially coddled their leaders they tolerated aristocratic vice with bemused skepticism that vice could ever be eliminated, or eventually believed it could only be eliminated by proper social engineering under the control of a new aristocracy of “intellectuals.” The proponents of the French Revolution eventually tried this last step, but it mostly collapsed because of all the other problems faced by the Revolution, and the empire of Napoleon became nothing more than a more efficient monarchy. Perhaps the French Enlightenment would have succeeded better under different conditions, but as it was the intellectuals who used the French Revolution for their own purposes developed a reputation for overreaching, and aristocratic arrogance, their own and that of their rivals, survived to last another day. The failure of so much of the French Revolution seemed to confirm the previous aristocratic belief that government was best run as an endeavor in “efficient paternalism” and to do so there must be compromises with narcissistic aristocrats in order to get them to do their jobs. As May puts it: “In its specifically Parisian form, the Skeptical Enlightenment could not survive the old regime, the milieu of corruption, good manners, tolerance, wit, and sadness” (May 1976: 115).

Yet the British alternative which was based on more “responsible” elites, closer to the people they represented and less driven by their own narcissism, also expected less of society, letting materialism and economic advance substitute for almost every other type of human virtue and human experience. The French admired a broader human experience, then as now, even if only aristocrats or later “intellectuals” could be given the social opportunity to properly experience it.

In summary, as the maldistribution of income grew in France, even as the total amount of wealth increased, trickling down as it were on the heads of the common people, intellectuals dreamed of

bureaucracies that could bring their visions into fruition. This would mean bureaucracies which would ultimately be under democratic control some day, but would in the foreseeable future be under the control of elites. Such hopes did not die with the failure of the Revolution, and the politics of the various French Republics that arose later continued to reflect such dreams.

However by the beginning of the 19th century even those Americans who once had been inspired by the French Revolution had grown disillusioned by its excesses and then by its abysmal failure (its heir after all was Napoleon's Empire), and so chastened our intellectual classes once again stood firm in loyalty to traditional morality, faith in progress, and faith in the educative usefulness of high culture, such as moralistic literature. Of course all these anchors of American culture in our own day have been under attack, and have been ever since that reaction against the French Revolution itself wore off, though America's Victorian era of conventional prudery lasted much longer than Britain's, pretty much until World War I in fact. This did not mean that during this time America was not home to vice, it was just that the culture at large accepted this fact with misgivings. This was one reason moralistic revivals, including such movements as the anti-slavery and the temperance movements, were core movements of cultural revival during this period, succeeding mostly when they did not interfere with but ultimately encouraged economic growth. Our attitude toward vice has traditionally been the same as Britain's, it is allowed to exist, for economic reasons if for no other, but culturally we're not encouraged to enjoy it. Again, this is different from the traditional French attitude, but only a matter of degree. They do have their periods of moralism, and we do have our, traditionally short, periods of hedonism, like our Roaring 20's during the last century.

However, with age, with the growing bureaucratization of society, and an increasing tolerance for narcissism among both our elites and our escapist poor, we in the US may actually be developing more tolerance toward hedonism cum escapism. Thus the forgiving attitude toward moralism by our mass media, and mass media's unforgiving attitude toward true hedonism, may be coming to an end. Britain is starting to go down this path, with the contest between high tone BBC pomposity and the culture of their tabloids seemingly offering victory to their tabloids, but that's another story. To put America's final acceptance of hedonism as a source of national identity, at least in its consumerist form, in context let's look at a society that, ally or not, considers itself now a cultural rival to us.

That society is Pakistan. Just as Pakistan means “The Land of the Pure” which reflects what they think is necessary to make a virtuous society, good moral intentions backed up by good habits practiced in the arena of good social relationships, the American core culture on the other hand now very much reflects an anonymous society so that good intentions, the religious “leap of faith,” is to a large extent no longer backed up by much of anything, or so plenty of Pakistanis think. Our good intentions are often not backed up nowadays by good relationships with people, and sometimes not by good habits either, because both of them are hard to maintain in an anonymous society where escapism has increasingly become our most important product.

True, we still love to hear about sinners who have within them the potential for virtue, which is why much of country and western music tells us tales of woe, sometimes ending with redemption. But in reality many of our “virtuous” people have just as much a potential for being sinners as their leaps of faith are increasingly not reinforced by a sense of like-minded community. Instead they rely on a bubble of optimism, and so what happens when this bubble bursts? This is a question which constantly depresses our intellectual classes. Partly this is because of their increasing dependence on economic bubbles, partly this is because with their increasingly common “postmodern” sense of both community and ethics, they serve the ambitious self above all while often trying to avoid the influence of community and ethics. For them guilt is often just another obstacle on the path to success. So has narcissism found a cultural home in present-day America.

One reason the cultures found in Pakistan and those found in America so often communicate at cross-purposes is they are so different in a developmental, perhaps even in an evolutionary, sense. Pakistan fears that they must go down the same path America has, and so must repeat our mistakes, while America fears retrogressing and falling behind, not only economically, but becoming stuck in ways that traditional, feudal, non-economically advancing societies have always been stuck in. We fear each other’s mistakes, as if there is nothing good we can learn from each other.

This fear of the “other” is even more true of Europe. Europe fears going down our path of competitive individualism, especially since they fear that it is inevitable. Even their existentialist philosophers who worry about “authenticity” of feelings as expressed in an “authentic” culture, and their lowlife counterparts, the political nationalists,

chauvinists, and political opportunists of all sorts who constantly bring politics to a boil by seeking to unite their communities by encouraging hating other communities (with class conflict being another version of this), tend to fear us just as they fear their own future, which they think we represent.

Of course for extremists to avoid the threat we pose would ultimately require an overturning of technological society, and since some of them are quite given to fantasizing and wishful thinking, an overturning of civilization itself, in their search for a life of pure emotion. That is why the fascist temptation has always been much stronger in Europe than in America. Also, they are just more comfortable with rule by governmental elites, even when the rule has become hereditary in certain social classes or even families, while America is more comfortable with limited government and strong control from business elites. As a result America has order in certain areas, the business world especially, and what Europeans might see as moral anarchy in other areas, the disorderliness of certain areas of communal culture for example. That is why Europeans are more likely to accept what Americans might consider to be the bullying of social elites (probably more true of Central and Eastern Europe), while Europeans might consider the bullying so often found among American youth and in American slums as the obvious result of the lack of cultural order in those pockets of American society, the result of what they see as social anarchy (no clear-cut elites) resulting in moral anarchy. Though Europeans may look with some nostalgia at their cultural traditions, perhaps more so than Americans do at our "traditions" which are just not as Medieval as theirs, though in some ways our ideals are more like the archaic traditions of tribal societies than the bureaucratic or even feudal traditions that once underlay the European cultures. However, all modern societies, America and Europe both, tend to suffer from alienation from one's feelings (be it from repression of feelings or from hysterical, overly-romanticized expression of them as a defense against that, or increasingly in the modern world as an expression of narcissism). A social environment that provides support for interpersonal closeness and for the healthy expression of emotions, that ultimate purpose for the family and for communities that think of themselves as being like extended families, do not survive well in anonymous, bureaucratized societies.

In fact for a truly traditional society (not us) like that found in Pakistan, their traditional, sociable, honor-bound cultures find that not creating emotionality, but controlling it, in fact controlling

outbreaks of fear, of anxiety (perhaps leading to mass hysteria though this seems to be more of a problem in modernizing traditional societies) is their major problem, though it is not ours. Such anxiety and perhaps hysteria is a common result of the pressures of life, of poverty, disease, even warfare when it occurs, and even inappropriate social closeness (jealousy, etc.) which occurs when social closeness is not handled well. Yet for them the major problem is not the feeling of nothingness, the attempt to artificially create emotions through purchased commodities or through the purchased fantasies of the recreation industries which is increasingly at the center of modern societies, and no place more so than in America. Of course when their educated classes do become influenced by modern, particularly American, culture, and so no longer feel at home in what can be a close-knit, somewhat suffocating or at least stifling traditional culture, yet fear the anonymity and just emptiness of a modern, American-style society, then their anxiety is only beginning.

That is why so many writers about the terrorists of Third World "liberation" movements point out that many of them are from relatively well-off backgrounds, and it is obvious their identity confusions, and feelings of hopelessness in this area, that cause them to strike out at us, not their poverty. They tend to blame America for their problems, some of which we bring upon ourselves by so often backing Third World dictators, but they also exaggerate, acting as if we are the attractive nuisance, let's say the Las Vegas of the world. Of course our exaggeration is that we tend to see ourselves as just being businesspeople pure and simple.

Now it is true that the American ideal like all social ideals tends toward what we view to be the golden mean, between the extremes that we are aware of. In effect we try to avoid the very sociable but feudalistic and status-conscious European culture of a 1000 years ago which somewhat survived and has continued to have a strong influence in the Mediterranean area, and also to a certain extent in the Islamic world in general. The opposite extreme of course is a very cold, socially distant culture of people tied together by fanciful ideals and bureaucratic loyalties, at least outside the family and a few intimates which remains their hotbed of true social warmth to the extent they have any. This culture, so often found in Central and Eastern Europe, evolved out of the more personal based loyalties of a 1000 years ago, but not in our individualistic way. With them authoritarian loyalties evolved to what we in America consider to be an absurd degree.

This happened in Germany and in Eastern Europe in general, from which just now they are removing themselves from the brink of what we consider to be authoritarian absurdity. You might say their open-ended loyalties were like that of a monarchy gone haywire, if you have a good monarch you take orders blindly, and if you have a bad monarch you take orders blindly. This explains the absurdity of the rise of Adolf Hitler, who was allowed to rule under in effect martial law in order to put down a communist uprising, and then proceeded to use that power to do anything he wanted other than to put down this non-existent communist uprising. So much for a society that loves social order, but with until recently nothing approaching our reverence for American-style checks and balances. Our tradition in fact was the result of the American, originally evangelical Protestant, tradition that the sinfulness of leaders, and not that of followers, must be truly feared and watched for. Yet in other ways British and American individualism takes the bureaucratic coldness of Central and Eastern Europe one step further, by producing an anonymous, atomized society without even a bureaucratic structure to tie the parts together, just the individual couplings and uncouplings of the marketplace.

Not surprising, the ideal of character is pretty much the same in almost all culture areas, though the problems they face differ. In the Mediterranean area the self-absorption and foolishness they fear most among leaders is probably more of a socially arrogant “macho” sort, as if they can’t help bullying their pals, and not the kind of perverse self-disintegration arising out of utter aloneness that leads both to idiot nationalism and to a blindly striking out at subordinates which is more of a problem in that other, less sociable area of Central and Eastern Europe. As to where the US fits in if we lose our buffer of material wealth, who knows? We may go in either direction, or perhaps in some totally new direction, or perhaps we will simply wallow in our traditional temptations of ambition, of trying to buy happiness even to the point of addiction, or seeking religious salvation according to the precept you can trust God, because you certainly can’t trust people.

All traditional societies, with very few exceptions such as those Buddhist societies that make not losing one’s composure into a social ideal, put on a pedestal the emotions of virtuous authenticity, which makes America unusual for being different to the extent that we make the character traits necessary for economic success our ideal instead. Increasingly through our history, reaching in some ways a culmination in our time, we emphasize self-control in the pursuit of achievement,

after which we think we can go out and buy happiness. Compared to the emotions of virtuous authenticity, this is like the difference between an individual crying upon learning of the misfortune of a loved one, which is virtuous authenticity under most circumstances, and the emotions aroused by watching a TV show, which is not. The latter has become too often the outlet for the experience of everyday emotions in America, and thus America seems to be blazing new trails for emotional expression, in an odd, derivative way, not a way that encourages virtuous authenticity. The result is that the more traditional world looks askance at this, as if we don't know what we're doing when it comes to leading a healthy, communally-based emotional life, or we don't care.

It is not that America's ideal of control over things doesn't accomplish things, which requires control over the self so that the self can be held in check while it does its job, while its emotions decay and disappear, until what remains can be emptied and the self can be filled up again, usually with the substitute satisfactions of the entertainment industry. Much of the world considers this to be a rat-race version of happiness, and once long ago we would have thought so too. Now we consider it just being modern. Yet it does accomplish much. And at least it is not mere control over people, that bane of "macho" cultures where if one has enough power over people the temptation is to believe one doesn't need self-control because the willful person will always be obeyed. And it is not the fatalistic feeling of being trapped, especially bureaucratically, which was so common in 19th century Russia, and which was so clearly expressed in their great novels of that era, feelings that continued on into the Soviet era and even beyond. It was a spirit that empowered the tyranny of bosses of all sorts, as well as what might be called the sincerity of the weak, the kind of sincerity, again so well expressed in Russian novels, felt by people who literally have nothing to lose (at least when they're not talking to the boss). Whether this brooding leads to wisdom, rather than fantasizing about future utopias, however, remains a problem, especially for politicians, and perhaps for their neighbors.

In some ways America started out as an archaic society. It in those days retained certain aspects of communal life that were already starting to be lost in much of Europe. Through maintaining a political tradition of checks and balances, which was being lost in Europe through bureaucratization and centralization of their governments, it was hoped that a balance could be achieved between what could be achieved



from the bureaucrats of the central government, and what could be done at the local level where people hopefully would know each other in depth in the fullness of their characters, and so not treat each other as objects. Of course in the modern day this ideal is increasingly honored in the breach.

Traditional cultures are sensitive to the little details of manners, morals, and customs, but often refuse to admit when traditions have changed slowly but surely so that they have been replaced by customs and rules that are far removed from their original ideals, or may be inappropriate for changed circumstances. Modern cultures are often sensitive to the big details of moral idealism, but often refuse to admit when these big details, which allow for individual improvisation regarding the small details of one's life, are not enough to structure a society in a moral direction. This is especially so when among the individuals whose everyday lives make up the moral fabric of society there are those who are not holding up their end of the bargain, allowing free riders to take advantage of average citizens, that is to say the good-natured, moralistic slobs in their midst, whom they think of as being pigeons, suckers, and waiting to be taken advantage of.

It can be said that the Protestant culture of Northern Europe from which America's culture mostly derives can be described by such terms as bureaucratic, law-abiding (not custom-abiding to any major degree), and loyal (in an impersonal way), while the Catholic cultures of southern Europe can be described by using such terms as emotional, theatrical, honor-driven, and strongly influenced by custom and social image (not that the two can't come into conflict). In reality too much passion in life is a bad thing, like in the person who is always angry or lustful, and too little is also a bad thing, like the person who by being so emotionally repressed becomes constantly bored. Again, the avoidance of both extremes is the ideal for all cultures, even when they approach this golden mean from different directions. They also get to warn each other about each other's typical hypocrisies. Of course it is government that is often given the task to seek to provide a balance to compensate for what is missing in any particular communal culture.

Actually it is no surprise that in the Mediterranean area harmony is such a cultural ideal, since this is an area often wracked by emotionally-driven social conflict (often the result of interpersonal rivalries), and Northern Europe often sees cultural movements that offer to sell as their contribution to progress an idealization of explosive emotionality of some sort, probably because in this bureaucratized section

of the world, they ordinarily don't have much of it. As a matter of fact the Anglo-American cultural area is rather unusual for advocating a rather rare combination of cultural traits, morally-driven individualism is what it originally was, derived largely from their versions of Protestantism refined over time by conflict with their elites, individualism that is not mere individual removal from social conformity (that common worldwide religious ideal), and not individualism as mere ambition which in much of the world results in bureaucratic social-climbing and opportunism.

In a nutshell American government's actions tend to be a reaction to non-governmental initiatives, so that our governmental culture exists on a moral and cultural basis originally derived from Protestant traditions and from other traditions that seek to work in tandem with these traditions. But if these sources of social order, and social morality, are lost, American government really doesn't know how to replace them. Thus American government is much better at building upon and taking advantage of social order than at creating it; creating it being the job of civil society located in community life.

Many other societies tend to be more authoritarian than us because they just feel it is the job of government to maintain social order, and if necessary create social order (either because it is now missing or because local communities have become so self-sufficient they just won't cooperate unless forced to), even at the expense of personal freedom. Many of their national liberation struggles were to remove foreign rulers, just like our Revolution, but also to appeal to national egotism, to put a government in place that would create a social order that would appeal to their egos, that is to say by appealing to national vanity, by claiming their religion, language, literature, and customs in general are better than those of other people, or at least better than those of their rivals who are usually their neighbors. This type of nationalistic exuberance, which easily turns into arrogance, occurs much less in America simply because here government is not particularly expected or supposed to give people an identity, our private or at least communal cultures are supposed to do so.

The result is that more authoritarian societies than ours use government to create culture, which can create good religion and public morality, or secular substitutes. It can also produce impositions on people who prefer their own local cultures to those imposed on them from above. In a sense those imposed upon would probably prefer the American way of resisting governmental impositions, though

commonly their first choice as a solution is to try to gain power, either through force or by alliances, and so achieve the power to rule for their own benefit. Obviously there is also the great danger that cabals of "intellectuals" will use any temporary control of government to try to force their viewpoints upon the population at large, and so create social order in their own image. There is also another great danger, though one more likely to arise in America, government which is so limited that it doesn't get to produce the order which the mass of population want it to produce but economic elites don't. This is because such elites tend to make much money by filling in the gaps.

In fact in the modern age social power increasingly does not come from social solidarities that are interwoven with both religion and politics, but by the separation of these institutions so that they influence each other only indirectly (through general cultural values) or only at certain bureaucratic focal points (the way any social institution lobbies with power groups for its own benefit). At least that is the American tradition of checks and balances in society that has increasingly spread to the rest of the world. However, typically the rest of the world still demands more social order than we do, and allows more than we do social institutions other than the economic marketplace to determine how society is ordered. In that sense they tend to be more reliant on authoritarian social institutions, either directly based in government or based in the community, than we do, though admittedly our communal social institutions were once more authoritarian and influential than they are now.

So what is the major source of social order in modern America, and increasingly in the rest of the world, though there is backlash in the rest of the world and they resist it? It is the individual independently spending money on whatever sources of happiness can be achieved by this method. This also means modern individuals need to be able to coordinate their actions with others for economic advantage, which Americans are good at, much more than in primitive or even rather traditional societies where people often defer to non-economic values such as involving religious or even political loyalties, thus producing economic advance as a kind of side-effect.

The end result is that modern happiness is conceived of primarily as what money can buy, either earned directly or as the result of government subsidies, and not as in many traditional societies as the direct result of non-economic institutions (often religious or political in orientation, often combinations of both) trying to produce a "meaningful"

order directly. Such traditional societies tend not to greatly foster economic growth, since that is not their primary function, and so have problems dealing with population growth that requires an expanding economy.

Modern economically-oriented societies, such as modern America, rely on the rationality and morality of its population to foster economic growth. Obviously it is economic rationality that is given pride of place, not family feeling, not kindness to neighbors, not even a particularly strong ecological sense, all of which are often more important values in many traditional societies than the economic rationality that takes pride of place in ours. This economic rationality, and competitiveness, arose out of broader moral values, the famous "Protestant Ethic" which encouraged personal initiative, a basic trust between people which facilitated economic contracts, and an ambition that arose out of a strong feeling that social progress, rather than social stagnation, was the true measure of character. Yet even in America these underpinnings for economic advance in the basic cultural and moral fabric of society seem to be weakening as economic rationality has taken on a life of its own, so that people are now economically productive, and economically competitive, for its own sake, the sake of material advance, and much less so for the sake of underlying social values that once were the underpinnings of economic society even in America.

This change is what traditional societies really fear about America. The traditional America of a few generations ago they could live with, because we were still in many ways just like them, an improvement in fact on the same basic concept of social order through personal morality. It is the new America, devoted to materialism for its own sake, and those countries around the world who share these same materialistic values, sometimes even more than we do, that more traditional societies fear, or are jealous of because they would like to be like us and can't be, or perhaps feel a combination of both. These societies, often with more passionate, emotionally-driven populations than is the norm in the American, sometimes just passionate in their depressiveness and in their hunger for social contact through social order, which we can empathize with but we would never use their authoritarian solutions to seek to deal with this, are the ones who increasingly consider America to be the attractive nuisance, the town bully or the town whore or a combination of both on the world stage.

Of course they exaggerate our faults, in order to excuse their own. Yet American-style optimism, which is for most people a better

alternative than the paranoia, jealousy, and just personal depression which so often drives the personal politics of other societies, is itself dependent on conditions that existed in the early days of American history but perhaps less so now. Even before the American Revolution we became the heirs of the Protestant Reformation so that the mass of people, who ever since the days of the Roman Empire had been considered prone to immorality and so requiring an elite to rule over them, now had taken their moral lessons to heart so that they felt if anything they were the moral superiors to many of their elites, who needed monitoring, not them. This became the moral underpinnings a few generations later for full-fledged political democracy in America. Of course the economics of starting fresh in a frontier society with great economic opportunities for all, compared to more settled societies, was also a great boon to economic equality and thus social democracy.

The combination of all these factors, the moral seriousness of the American population, so that conformity to the state was not the sum total of their moral identity, the economic opportunities that were greater than anywhere else in the world, even the remnants of traditional communal feelings that allowed the checks and balances of the American governmental system to flourish just because local communities could take up much of the slack, and produce real communication between the leaders and the led which had long ago disappeared in societies that were both much more authoritarian and much more bureaucratic, all of this made America special, and admired. It led to an optimism in American life that was based on a realistic assessment of conditions compared to those in the rest of the world. At least for a while this optimism was not based on mere chauvinism or parochialism or wishful thinking, and also not merely wanting to appear not to be a team player, that business euphemism for being optimistic just as a way to hide one's feelings and so better to fit in, which has become such a common source for social solidarity in the modern American world of business.

Historically, America has relied more on the good sense of the average citizen in approving public policy than on the good sense of elites, even when paradoxically this depends on the average citizen exercising self-restraint so as not to interfere with the bureaucratic expertise of elites upon which the modern economy, and modern government, rests. In a sense the leaders and the led serve as checks on each other so that neither elite conspiracies nor mob rule tend to be the norm in

American history. For this we can be grateful, and this can be a true reason for optimism. But whether this will last, or like a gyroscope whose spins are becoming more and more wobbly, will the relations between leaders and the led, between public morality and individual assertiveness, between feelings of community and feelings of individual independence, between the meaningfulness of the individual experience and the meaninglessness of the machine-like production of social order for the purpose of economic advance, become out of alignment? This is something only the future will tell. Then we will know if our optimism is warranted, or if we will join so much of the rest of the world in their pessimism. If it becomes so, it will be a return to the sense of sin with which we started.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE RATIONALITY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FULFILLMENT IN ADOLESCENTS' LIVES: THE PRODUCTION OF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND SELF-IDENTITY

Essentially all societies place emphasis on how to teach their children to be rational, a process which involves not only an inculcation of knowledge but of what knowledge should be used for, the ability to differentiate between worthwhile and non-worthwhile goals. This of course implicitly makes the assumption that human nature, and particularly emotional needs, are better fulfilled in some ways than others. That societies make the distinction between behavior motivated by "rational" attitudes that serve emotional needs and/or instinctual drives as well as attitudes that can be described as being short-sighted, ignorant, naïve, lazy, foolish, bitterly escapist or even prurient just goes to show that human emotions are recognized as a biological system that orients one to the world, yet requires monitoring by other biological systems, just as there are fail-safe systems in many of the products we buy since error and breakdown are a fact of life.

To discuss what is meant by character in the human context, and how societies develop social fail-safe systems to correct errors in personal psychological functioning, and vice-versa in producing reasons for personal rebellion (since societies themselves can have their own errors so that social and other environmental constraints can mold personalities in unhealthy directions) is what this paper is all about. I also hope in the course of examining these processes to serve as a reminder for works in the social and behavioral sciences and the humanities, that in their time proved highly enlightening, and still do, but just as ignorance or just plain forgetfulness is a factor in individual life, so is it also a factor in social life and in the history of social institutions including fields of knowledge.

To start with, it is perhaps useful to be reminded how personality is molded by environmental constraints, particularly in the younger years. While adults are somewhat more "rational" than children in dealing with environmental constraints, this rationality is more a matter of better ability at developing and sticking with plans to fill their

emotionally-driven purposes. Whether these purposes are themselves rational is a matter of ethics which in everyday life is a matter of concern, as is concern with the mechanisms of personality functioning. As to who will guard the guardians, there is no pat answer but throughout history societies have muddled through, just like we do now.

Ultimately, I hope to shed some light on the reciprocal influences in various kinds of societies with various kinds of structures of social power, and how they inculcate various kinds of cultural values which impinge on young people's personalities. In return these personalities pressure these societies that they eventually take over to have the kinds of systems of power and of cultural values that they in turn wish to support, or perhaps feel compelled to support, and that they also are comfortable with inculcating in future generations.

To start with, regarding broad questions of social structure and culture, there is an interesting book *The Broken Rebel: A Study in Culture, Politics, and Authoritarian Character* (Wilkinson 1972) that actually summarizes a whole field of study, the attempt to explain why whole societies can collapse into immoral decadence. I am referring of course to the rise of Fascism and Nazism that led to World War II. Wilkinson's book in fact builds upon probably the most famous book of this genre, a book that tried to explain the prevalence of such attitudes in all societies, *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno and others 1950). The major failure of this book as recognized by critics soon after it was published was that the authors stigmatized people they didn't like for reasons of their own bias, they didn't like right-wing authoritarians, and didn't really investigate people who were left-wing authoritarians.

Given that their sampling procedures were all off, it is still interesting to notice what the authors claimed to be weaknesses of character that interfered with proper rationality. This is the what I would call the extreme version of the "authoritarian personality" which is one that combines submissiveness, obvious problems of self-esteem that is probably a direct result of this submissiveness and not just mere coincidence, certain obvious tendencies toward cognitive mistakes that can be described as stereotyping certain classes of socially disfavored people, and two other factors both of which contain attitudinal and motivational elements (which is to say morbid and prurient interests), paranoid judgments of those they consider political and cultural rivals, and absorption in sexual fantasies, often tied in to stereotyping of others, of a definite sado-masochistic sort. As Wilkinson describes such people: "Our detailed description of authoritarianism has so far



stressed two main links between the fear of weakness and the desire to be aligned with punitive power" (Wilkinson 1972: 41).

Wilkinson then describes the first link as a process of compensation and denial. "The authoritarian feels weak, so he denies and hides his feeling of weakness by identifying with power... He [the examples he has in mind are obviously male] may likewise dissociate himself from symbols of feminine tenderness and of social inferiority, in part because both to him mean weakness" (Wilkinson 1972: 41). The second link he describes is a process by which rebelliousness is repressed, and then the authoritarian person in terms of attitudes attacks symbols of weakness and inferiority, facilitating extreme identification with power. "In a phrase, a process of diversion whether by displacement, projection, or both" (Wilkinson 1972: 41).

The second link which leads to action rather than mere attitudes of ideological smugness, shows the importance of scapegoating those that are considered "social outsiders" or especially "ideological threats" because by having conflicting opinions they interfere with the ready taken for granted aspects of one's own opinions, or even one's own identity to the extent this identity is based on loyalties. These outsiders may not even have diverging loyalties, and such beliefs may be entirely irrational and in the service of relieving anxieties by finding scapegoats, or perhaps reacting to political appeals by demagogues who are seeking to foster such irrational attitudes for their own purposes, such as loyalty to them.

In psychodynamic terms the development of such irrational attitudes reflects weakness in all or part of what metaphorically we can call the system of superego, ego, and id integration of the personality: harshness and rigidity of the conscience (superego); weakness of integration of the sense of self (ego); and brittleness of impulse control (id). This kind of person has a repressive morality that is expressed through craving for power and position, and such a repressive sense of morality may come first and the craving for power and position may follow, or vice-versa, or both may arise in bits and pieces of social, cultural, and personal experience with no real sense of what comes first. For some people they have such attitudes because of the social and cultural pressures that induce them, and then the attitudes in return reinforce social and cultural loyalties and thus produce further pressures during social interaction, or both attitudes and social pressures for conformity may in a practical sense be considered to have arisen almost simultaneously. It is because the actual strengths of various pressures on the personality, and the actual timings of various

interactions within a causal framework, differ from person to person that individual reactions and thus personalities differ.

The results are differences in motivational strengths and motivated habits of expression. There are also differences in what results from individual attitudes governing self-assertion as well as governing philosophies of life. It is because of this that people are different and not like peas in a pod. Though they may be alike in a general sense, which is what it means for many individually different types of people to nevertheless be alike in having "authoritarian personalities" which reflect extreme social subservience and resulting side-effects of anxiety. Other people however may have "narcissistic personalities" which can reflect conformity but only in the sense that there are immediate rewards, and much less need to defer gratification and to seek scapegoats to relieve anxiety. As to engaging in direct conflict with rivals, as opposed to attacking scapegoats because true rivals are too powerful to attack, or even to acknowledge in any rational sense, I will discuss that later.

To refer again to defense mechanisms which are characteristic of authoritarian personalities as well as other kinds of personalities, it should be made clear that affects can be dealt with by direct behavior (e.g., confession), coping strategy (e.g., selective inattention such as by focusing on something else), or as discussed above by relying on a defense (e.g., denying an act occurred). This description of the place of defense mechanisms within the broad range of affect (and in general personality) processes is described in more detail in Drew Westen, *Self and Society: Narcissism, Collectivism, and the Development of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) in the chapter "Emotion: A Missing Link between Psychodynamics and Cognitive-Behavioral Psychology" (Westen 1985: 22–96).

In general Freud discussed the motivational properties of instincts as made up of their source (in internal bodily stimulation), their impetus (the degree of effort exerted which represents the intensity of the need), their aim (essentially to abolish the experienced tension be it sexual drive or feelings of fear or of generalized anxiety), and their object (the person or thing in the environment that serves to satisfy the aim of the instinct, be it through sexual release or through the emotional satisfactions that come from personal appreciation by valued others, or by achieved intellectual understanding, or just by social interaction). (Cofer and Appley 1964: 598–599, Freud 1949: 6–83).

A way of looking at culture as being composed of substitute affects can also be found in Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*:

Life, as we find it, is too hard for us; it brings too many pains, disappointments and impossible tasks. In order to bear it we cannot dispense with palliative measures... There are perhaps three such measures: powerful deflections which cause us to make light of our misery, substitutive satisfactions, which diminish it, and intoxicating substances which makes us insensitive to it (Freud 1961: 22).

Notice Westen's mechanisms of defense are cognitive strategies, direct behavior (which requires knowledge of the outside world at least in terms of orienting oneself to that world), coping strategies, and psychological defenses, all of which are predominantly cognitively based, while Freud's list of substitute satisfactions are based on finding alternative sources of emotional relief, not finding different ways of organizing the personality, but differing sources of immediate emotional relief. No wonder counselors emphasize more cognitive reorganizations of the personality in order to improve "rationality" while psychiatrists often emphasize an immediate change in one's emotional state, e.g., through relief of anxiety by administration of drugs. Both are means of access to the personality and both can lead to reorganization of the personality system by coming in at different entry points. Freud's work reflects a period in intellectual history when it was common to emphasize the artificiality of the constraints of civilization, for good and for ill, while later writers, both in psychiatry and in other fields, tended to emphasize cognitive issues related to in general the self orienting itself toward a meaningful life, a rather existential point of view. Of course over time there are fluctuations in emphases between these two extremes, part of the cycles of history, in this case intellectual history. A fairly recent writer who has written on neurosis and even more severe states as a kind of failed ability to be heroic (and I assume rational) in the face of the challenges of existential reality and the anxiety it brings about is Ernest Becker; see especially *The Denial of Death* (Becker 1973).

To expand upon Freud's notion of culture as producing an arena for substitute affects, Rupert Wilkinson describes aspects of extreme authoritarian personalities, in fact the personalities of certain high Nazi officials. Let me expand upon his discussion to show in comparison, a variety of authoritarian cultures and resulting authoritarian personalities. The culture of Hitler's ally, Mussolini, in Italy was also authoritarian, but though the Fascists engaged in criminal behavior, they essentially wanted an empire for egotistical reasons but mostly for economic purposes, and their ideology and their personal desires

it seems was less tinged by sado-masochistic fantasies, though outbreaks of such motives could occur such as during their Ethiopian war.

Mussolini essentially wanted to revive the glory of the Roman Empire, to a large extent because of the history of social stagnation which was Italy's fate until then. In fact, especially in the south of Italy, the tradition of poor opportunities for entrepreneurs and for economic initiative in general meant that the tone of society was set by a hereditary elite, or at least once individuals gained social power they had little fear of losing it in structured competition of the sort which characterized already Anglo-American culture areas regarding many opportunities in life, including the world of business. This is why sports competition is considered practice for real life in these areas, but often not in the rest of the world.

Instead many of the elite of Italy in that era were known for their vanity, not their achievement motivation expressed in structured (and hopefully fair) competition. For them a solution to boredom was often an extreme emphasis on sensuality (and emotional fulfillment in general), and particularly an appreciation of the opposite sex. The good version of this was a desire of influential men to get respect from women through acts of chivalry, in effect respecting all women the way they respected their mothers. However this was the land of the "whore-madonna complex" and the bad version of this was manipulating women in general, usually other than their mothers and sometimes other than their wives, in attitudes treating them like whores. The fear of adultery was common, not necessarily the practice, but the fear of it was common because attitudes conducive to it, especially a bored elite (both the societal and local and even workplace elites) saw little opportunity to use their power except for sensual pleasure and the achievements of vanity. What they got was the admiration, sometimes mixed with fear, of women, and the admiration, sometimes mixed with fear, of men, because of these accomplishments as if these were the accomplishments most available to all ambitious people. Elites could also gain status from cultural attainments, such as scholarly accomplishments or attainments in the arts, or even from political power, but such attainments in a sense were limited to the higher elites, while sensual pleasure could be competed for by everyone with some power.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I recognize I am somewhat simplifying, but for a book that contains similar comments see Luigi Barzini, *The Italians* (Barzini 1964).

A similar phenomenon existed in the American South before the Civil War where the slavery system produced economic stagnation and lack of social mobility, and a privilege for rich slave owners that was often abused (poor whites often did not have slaves), sexual access to slaves. This produced a kind of "whore-madonna complex" where white women, particularly wives and mothers, were put on a pedestal and adored but often without emotional closeness, while slaves remained a source for sexual feelings. The American South before the Civil War was also that section of the country, like Mussolini's Italy, which emphasized empire-building, the expansion of territory and achievement of economic subservience from natives, if necessary through warfare, as a prominent goal for jump-starting economic growth.

Rupert Wilkinson's description of Nazi leaders on the other hand shows a pattern quite different from my description above of what was so common among Italian Fascist leaders. In the Nazi case their interests went far beyond mere empire-building for the purposes of economic exploitation. Though certainly there were sexual irregularities among a good number of top Nazi leaders, taking mistresses and so on, there was less a "whore-madonna complex" but to a great extent all women weren't respected, with some exceptions such as for mothers. In Hitler's case biographers constantly emphasize that he loved his mother and hated and distrusted what sometimes seemed like everyone else.

In fact Hitler's chief subordinates to a large extent seemed to have "loved" him more than their own wives. What I mean by this, which Rupert Wilkinson discusses as clear homoerotic tendencies among his chief officials, is not that they wanted sex with him any more than a female secretary who admires her boss automatically wants to divorce her husband and marry her boss.

What I mean is that their feelings were less based on admiration, enjoyment of working together, common interests, but literally they enjoyed being in his presence, despite the vituperative abuse he dished out to most everyone around him, more than they enjoyed being with their wives (Wilkinson 1972: 151–222). The feelings of libido which ensued, using the Freudian term, were not literally a desire for sexual congress, but feelings he aroused in terms of excitement, interest, fulfillment of fantasy all of which went beyond the sensual element to feelings of adoration (such as one feels for a parent), feelings of safety (again what one feels for a parent), and finding a source for a philosophy

of life (such as one gets from a priest or other religious leader). These are feelings that can be described more as actualization of life-force, making life interesting, meaningful, hopeful, “fun” etc. These feelings, of which there is a strong cognitive element as well, when they are present make life seem interesting and meaningful, and when they are lacking life lacks interest and “sparkle” and produces not only depression but more severe conditions including often sado-masochistic tendencies.

That Wilkinson describes these feelings as homoerotic reflects certain characteristics of German authoritarianism at that time that differentiated itself from Italian authoritarianism.<sup>2</sup> Whatever weaknesses in social integration produced by the “whore-madonna complex” there was the potential of the madonna part predominating and encouraging a spirit of chivalry. In Germany the common disrespect for women at least around the time of the Nazi period, even for one’s own wife except as a drudge, weakened the possibilities for developing attitudes of compassion, sympathy, and empathy in the family, usually emphasized by the wife who is also a mother and which leads to appreciation of these qualities from then on by husbands and sons. If anything, wives and daughters in that Nazi environment often learned to denigrate such “feminine” virtues and to emphasize masculine virtues of courage, aggressiveness, and assertiveness to the point of treating much of the world as rivals rather than as companions.

This attitude of course became structured by particular historical circumstances. Anglo-American culture also has certain tendencies toward encouraging androgeny, though it historically fluctuates more between appreciation of masculine and feminine virtues than German culture which until recently more strictly emphasized masculine virtues.

For that matter, France ever since the 18th century has emphasized certain feminine virtues in social interaction (less in “mothering” society than as encouraging women in being entertaining toward men), which probably has encouraged a certain boldness and aggressiveness in men in order to gain the admiration of these flirtatious women. It is less the “whore-madonna complex” so common in Italy, and also in Hispanic culture areas, and more a culture of “sociability and flirtation”

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<sup>2</sup> In general to learn about the different varieties of fascism (which here includes Nazism) see Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (Paxton 2004).

which if anything leads to heightened feelings of chivalry and seeking to be admired, not literally trying to seduce women and gain self-esteem that way (though that occurs), as much as indirectly trying to make an impression on them by engaging in prestigious behavior, and showing comparable attitudes. In this way they seek to gain the admiration of prestigious women, who become the social arbiters of society rather than being merely mothers and wives, or being merely objects of lust, unlike the more traditional feminine roles of the more traditional Latin cultures.<sup>3</sup>

But to get back to Germany, this society emphasized the two extremes of stoicism and aggressiveness, depending upon one's place in a bureaucratized society's power structures. One important reason why Germany did not have a strong tradition of individual initiative except among the social elite or among social outcasts (sometimes intellectuals, and sometimes criminals), is because their history was so different from Britain and especially America, particularly regarding industrialization and modernization in general.

In Britain and in America the Reformation and resulting cultural and moral revival movements occurred before industrialization. The middle class especially learned to often think of the elites of society as hypocrites and morally inferior to themselves. Economic dynamism including the Industrial Revolution followed upon the development of attitudes fostering both individual initiative to a large extent and also individual self-righteousness to a large extent (Weber 2001).

In Germany and in most other nations around the world industrialization was forced upon them by economic competition from abroad, initially mostly from Britain, with resulting destruction of native handicraft industries. The result was that markets became considered not the result of a wise accumulation of individual initiatives, which by the way is the justification for political democracy as well, but became considered to be both the prerogative of elites because elites so often tried to control markets, and to the extent that it did reflect an accumulation of individual decisions it was considered to produce not wise decisions but thoughtless decisions, like a mob fighting for individual advantage instead of cooperating for the common good.

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<sup>3</sup> A very good analysis of many European cultures, written by a former Spanish delegate to the League of Nations is Salvador de Madariaga, *Englishmen, Frenchmen, Spaniards* (Madariaga 1969).

Of course soon enough the model for such cooperation was not individual consultation at the communal level, a somewhat more complicated version of social life predating market decision-making, but instead the creation of bureaucracies where everyone knew their place, not through mutual consultation and mutual agreement, but decided from on high by elites. Thus the alternative to free reign of market forces became setting up and regulating bureaucracies by elites. In much of Europe the expansion of markets as the ruling determinative in society was thought of often as being closer to anarchy than the way people in Britain and America thought of it, where they thought with all its faults it was better than elite control. Of course the culture of elites in Britain and America was such that they were willing to give relatively free reign to market forces rather than merely control and rule over the people, since they knew historically they must accommodate the wishes of the mass of people and this was an easy way to do so. Nations with more authoritarian traditions like in most of Continental Europe (less true of the small states of Northern Europe as well as Switzerland in Central Europe), had elites who truly expected to rule, and the masses accepted this rule, partly because they hated social disorder even more.

Thus in the German example, during and after the creation of the German state economic and even political change was considered to be naturally the result of an imposition by bureaucrats. They were usually from the elite classes, and not only not freely chosen in a market fashion, and often not in a political fashion, but the social change they sponsored was not something which actualized attitudes of individual morality and individual initiative. In a sense German culture became predominantly the creation of elites, and the only duty the masses had was to follow it (in practice, if not in theory, often unthinkingly). They became like parts in a machine, a machine created by social engineers to run with clockwork accuracy, but with little interest in consulting the parts of the machine for their ideas. Oddly enough, the more traditional areas of Europe, like Italy, were also run bureaucratically but were considered in some ways more humane just because they allowed more inefficiency in society, and in the process made it somewhat more enjoyable and thus humane (even though this guaranteed poverty because the cost was great economic inefficiency). A combination of economic efficiency with concern for humane working conditions and equitable distribution of wealth did not become common in the authoritarian areas of Europe until after World War II.



Before then, in Germany and also in similar elite-driven areas of Europe, social progress became the prerogative of elites with bureaucratic privileges behind them, and social reform movements became the province of intellectuals and their intellectual creations which often had a definite all-or-nothing quality to them. Thus because social change was considered to be the province of bureaucratic imposition, their fantasizing or that of their intellectual advisors about grandiose pasts or grandiose futures became the preferred blueprints for political programs more than relying on the national public's own decisions which would have produced slow but sure changes through market and political forces (either that or anarchy which was everyone's great fear).

This of course returns us to the issue of sado-masochistic tendencies. Feeling entrapped in bureaucracies riven by extreme status consciousness but little sense of tolerating let alone listening to social inferiors so different from them which is the American democratic ideal, with a weak moral tradition of rebelling against morally unworthy elites (becoming apathetic and emotionally distant as opposed to confronting injustice), with little respect for women and little opportunity to develop feelings of chivalry for people who were weaker or just different from them, instead these bureaucrats and those that emulated them developed extreme status-consciousness and extreme weakness of self-esteem. This tended to be dealt with by sado-masochistic defense mechanisms and identification with social superiors often to the point of homoerotic feelings (living through them to fill the emptiness of their existence rather than mutual accommodation and communication as people with firmly differentiated personalities whose own heterosexual relationships were based on mutual appreciation and honoring yet learning from their differences).

Let us build upon this analysis of how both social constraints (especially regarding differences of social power and influence) and cultural constraints function to show how they can impact upon prospects for self-fulfillment and developing attitudes conducive to rationality among American teenagers. As a source of information let me refer to a classic discussion of the problems teenagers face in developing a proper sense of self-identity in modern America. I am referring to Edgar Z. Friedenberg's *The Vanishing Adolescent*<sup>4</sup> (Friedenberg 1967).

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<sup>4</sup> A classic of an earlier era is *The Sociology of Teaching* (Waller 1967); originally published in 1932. It reveals the remnants of rather Victorian attitudes where

I should mention first, however, some things about the adolescent personality. The personalities of adolescents reflect the border areas of the adult personality. Primitive psychological motivations are still quite strong and relatively unrestrained, but the factors that govern the adult personality are starting to come into play and the more “typical” types of cultural conformity can be seen in somewhat pristine form among adolescents, partly because they rarely have the personal experiences that would enable them to judge wisely what they have been taught. Instead simple, emotionally-driven rebelliousness colors whatever reactions against their culture that they may have. This reflects receiving conflicting messages, such as one message coming from a subculture and another message coming from the dominant culture, personal experiences that inculcate difference messages of how to live than they get from adults, and emotional needs that are not met by various cultural demands - all of which tend to produce ambivalence if not outright rebelliousness.

Of course there is also the issue what constitutes incentives for social conformity. Leaders have coercive power at their disposal usually as a last resort, and can control reward structures, but also followers have their own needs for social identities (resulting usually in firm boundaries between social groups) that keep followers loyal to groups, and thus to the leaders of these groups. Secondly, there are charismatic leaders who earn admiration and submission to them personally.

A rather interesting book which emphasizes more the relationships between equals, from which can be inferred how relations between leaders and followers are different, is C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (Lewis 1960). A well-known writer of Christian apologetics, he goes into great detail on affection as among family members, friendship, eros, and then charity which he considers mercy shown to the weak (and in that sense social inferiors) which is for him also the model for the relation between God and man. For all his insight on human relationships on the earthly plane, for him all this leads up to what is even better, adoration of the sublime, a rather Platonic point of view which some

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teachers, I should add like priests, were put on a pedestal without necessarily being paid well, respected but not confided in typically by townspeople, forced to adhere to a stricter moral code than the average citizen, retaining often certain childlike traits such as a certain idealism that enabled them to like children, yet also alienated from these children whom they controlled essentially for their own purposes rather than the children's.

will say makes such people more likely to admire earthly virtues than practice them. Be that as it may, he certainly knows how to admire social practices, and the social relationships that become embodied in them. Whether one can practice, or should practice, what one preaches, and whether intellectual creations of the sort C.S. Lewis specializes in are better at illuminating the world, or hiding it behind a curtain of good intentions, or sometimes bad intentions, I leave for the reader to decide, for any particular case that comes up.

One way to look at the relationship between leaders and led, in an emotional sense, is to distinguish degrees of emotional distance between the leaders and the led. Thus one can distinguish between:

- "Consultant" leader - purely intellectual or "service" connection
- "Loving" leader - bonds based upon identification, trust, sympathy
- "Scapegoat" leader - projections upon the leader, extremes of psychological merging with the leader, then rejecting the leader, then perhaps merging once again which reflects ambivalence (too much is expected of both leaders and/or followers than can reasonably be fulfilled as well as environmental constraints that prevent full stability of the relationship)

There is also the issue that when there is so much of a "fantasy" element in the investment in the relationship that full success in the real world is not to be expected; thus the eventual breaking in of constraints coming from the world of reality. The "fantasy" element can exist in relationships with "consultant" and "loving" leaders as well, but it is more prominent among leaders who claim a charismatic status that cannot be sustained.

Now given all these constraints, how can the older generation encourage "rationality" among adolescents who are about either to join the adult world, to reject the adult world, or to change the adult world? To return to the work of Edgar Z. Friedenberg on the lives of adolescents, he also had something to say about authoritarian personalities: "The basic characteristics of the authoritarian personality include a high degree of generalized hostility, suspiciousness, and prudence; great constriction of spontaneous emotional expression of any kind, and its replacement with conventional sentimentality; the cloaking of a readiness to resort to violence in rationalized respectability; punitiveness justified as a defense of an orderly society; and an utter inability to empathize with weaker individuals, responding instead to their needs with fear and rage" (Friedenberg 1967: 197-198).

He of course feels this characterizes not only some teenagers, but even more so many adults who seek to manipulate them, often out of fear or misunderstanding, rather than to help teenagers become mature. Actually this book is quite good at describing in accessible form some of the stages of psychological development described in more abstract form by Freud himself (and now under criticism for being too abstract, theoretical and not quite accurate) and the work of Erik Erikson<sup>5</sup> (Erikson 1993) which though more culturally sensitive than Freud's work still is no substitute for understanding the peculiarities of particular individual, and cultural, circumstances.

Prof. Friedenberg writes in a very clear and understandable manner, and the first of the two major points he makes is that teenagers, as opposed to pre-teenagers who are true narcissists, are at that time in their lives when they are beginning to view themselves as having effects on others, as opposed to conforming through fear or a desire to achieve selfish pleasure. Yet they are usually rather naïve at their soon-to-be-faced adult responsibilities. The second point is that adults tend to be manipulative of teenagers out of their own anxieties or for more base purposes. Thus: "As cooperation and group adjustment become pervasive social norms; as personalization becomes false-personalization, adolescence becomes more and more difficult" (Friedenberg 1967: 29).

Basically he states that adolescents tend to flaunt their authenticity (another way of saying they often don't repress their emotions) and an adult society which doesn't encourage this, or which I should add encourages this only as a way to define markets where money can be made (which raises the whole question to what extent "youth culture" is the creation of youth or the creation of adults for youth) makes this period of life when youth seek self-definition even more problematic. In all societies this period of life will be somewhat of a problem for youth, but the lack of clear-cut guidance, the expansion of manipulative commercial alternatives as the source of lifestyles, and in general the lack of ongoing interpersonal communication in an anonymous but bureaucratized society make things worse.

He emphasizes the narcissism that predominates in pre-adolescence, but then mentions that adolescents develop an appreciation for

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<sup>5</sup> For an attempt to validate his work, particularly regarding adolescence see "Development and Validation of Ego Identity Status" (Marcia 1966). A popularly written book written in Erik Erikson's tradition is *The Growth of Personality: from Infancy to Old Age* (Lowe 1972).

tenderness that allows them to relate to others in ways not wholly cynical or expedient. Also the adolescent develops a respect for competence. Later childhood, right before adolescence, is the time "...when social institutions oblige the child to deal *as an individual* with the problems of his relationships with strangers, with the cumulative difficulties that arise from the difference between what he sees in himself and what they see in him, what he needs and what they have to give, what he gives and what they can accept" (Friedenberg 1967: 42). The pre-adolescent is to a certain extent forced to be civilized, the adolescent does so more willingly, but worries about it. Prof. Friedenberg maintains that it is sexual maturation that contributes to this increased sensitivity and tenderness for other persons. Before then the juvenile experience is quite frank, which is one reason no doubt that potty humor and slapstick comedy is so enjoyed, mostly by young boys.

Of course becoming responsible adolescents does not come easy. Interpersonal denigration is not exclusively a pre-adolescent trait, some adolescents retain these traits, as do some adults. Adolescents are supposed to learn empathy, partly because their own anxieties over competence cause them to sympathize with those who can provide emotional support in return and who have the same kinds of problems. To this is added the overall glow that comes with an awakening of interests in bonding (sexual as well as non-sexual but emotionally intimate), in other words the ability to appreciate the comfort of being loved, or more likely just liked, in a deeper way than a young child does, and eventually the ability to give love.

The feeling of chums in early adolescence for each other is usually their first experience of unconditional acceptance by a person. Once this is established, the two can learn about themselves without the tension of the juvenile proving ground. The learning goes deeper, providing a warm and healing light by which old wounds are examined and old and crumbling defenses abandoned (Friedenberg 1967: 50).

Chums also teach each other about how to learn competence and how to evaluate it in themselves and others; the beginnings of personal autonomy.

Of course peer groups paradoxically can judge competence in a naïve and conformist manner. This is also true of adults who insist on generalized responses, that is to say bureaucratic demands for conformity, rather than the specific interpersonal sensitivities that adolescents like their once younger selves still crave since it allows them to express their wants and needs, the most important reason for

developing a sense of individuality. Part of the maturing process is to learn how to repress one's individual feelings in a bureaucratic environment so that one can then express them better at a more opportune time. If that more opportune time never comes, that's a problem.

Part of the implied social contract between teenagers and adults is that teenagers should develop self-control for a higher moral goal, which is eventually fulfilled and which includes their own personal happiness now merged with the happiness of others, the achievement of the common good. Unfortunately, teenagers sometimes gain the lesson, or teach themselves, that life is a zero-sum game, that it produces winners and losers and so their acquiescence to adult demands is just a sham, as is sometimes adult claims of concern for them. How to deal with such failures, is a goal of maturity, somewhat more complicated to achieve, however, for it requires virtues that are not easily taught, nor rewarded.

Peer groups may interfere with all of this, for good and for ill in the moral sense, helped along by an artificially created (by commercial interests) "youth culture." Actively manipulative adults may interfere with this process of maturing also, encouraging status rivalries and competition as the best way to prepare for an adulthood that admittedly thrives on this, but not necessarily as much as some youth, who see this process from a distance, think it does. By becoming hypercompetitive themselves, youth when they grow older then create the next generation of adulthood. Prof. Friedenberg distinguishes between self-definition as the clarification of experience, and the establishment of self-esteem, and the latter is often created by social institutions that produce winners and losers, at the expense of the former.

He makes clear that "Adolescents lack *reserves* of self-esteem to sustain them under humiliating conditions. They cannot easily assimilate an attack on their dignity or worth, for it produces not merely resentment but intense anxiety" (Friedenberg 1967: 107–108). In the modern world of adolescence many learn to sell themselves, to develop self-esteem by fitting-in, be it to shallow peers or to oblivious or conniving adults. The identity that results is not the best that one can be, for the young person will be discouraged from appraising himself (or herself) other than according to the going market rate. Under such conditions many students (which is what most young people are) will not learn to turn to others in times of adversity or to rely on inner discipline to resist superficial pleasures.

Of course the kinds of superficiality that arise among the rich and powerful and that arise among the poor and powerless will be quite different. Middle-class students are more likely to react to the world with salesmanship, upper-class students often will do this too but with a tinge of arrogance as if how dare anybody try to judge them (or perhaps they feel they can get away with trying to intimidate or impress their judges), while working-class students are more likely to react with emotional withdrawal, or sometimes the reverse, extreme aggression.

To a large extent adolescents build upon the narcissism of pre-adolescent life, and it shows when the adult world which should prepare them for adulthood doesn't do a good job of doing so. In that case it is not a healthy narcissism that results, that which is ordinarily a combination of self-esteem based on realistic values, a proper understanding of the world, and a healthy motivational structure which does not interfere with self-control (the proper functioning of superego, ego, and id). In fact America is thought of in much of the world as a narcissistic society because self-esteem is so often not based on self-control other than what is necessary to do one's job (such self-control was more true earlier in our history when we had more of a puritanical culture), nor is it particularly based on wisdom which was such a value in much of classical European culture (the heritage of the examined-life which was so important in ancient Greek philosophy and traditions that built upon it, whether or not such knowledge leads to accomplishment or just simple fatalism and resignation). Instead self-esteem in America is increasingly the product of telling people what they want to hear through entertainment.<sup>6</sup>

Most societies of any bureaucratic complexity produce leaders who are relatively narcissistic, (unlike tribal democracies where most everyone are equal in status in the sense of sharing their poverty) and

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<sup>6</sup> My own writing on the subject emphasizes the mildly authoritarian nature of the European values of wisdom and self-control that permeated Psychoanalysis in its original form, and which gave psychoanalysts power to motivate their patients to change because they were authority figures in cultures that honored authority figures. This did not work so well in modern America which emphasizes so much self-esteem because it feels good and it allows one to compete in the marketplace, less because it is tied to higher values, and which causes American authority figures to be increasingly mere producers of self-esteem in others, the way entertainers do. Such mildly narcissistic attitudes are of course spreading to much of the modern world nowadays, not found only in America. See "Why Psychoanalysis Could Never Really Fit into American Culture" (Braun 2006: 315–320).

followers who are relatively authoritarian. In the US this is also true but because of a favorable political and economic environment the working class who are still usually more authoritarian than their leaders (they are realistic about the fact there are limits to what they can achieve and they recognize there are costs to failure), but regarding most areas of life (not in all areas) are more narcissistic than the working class of almost all other societies. Obviously just as the question arises regarding emotions, fearful or joyful regarding what goal, so Americans are narcissistic about the typical goals they expect to achieve, and other societies may have faith in the attainability of other goals, and thus have a self-centered narcissistic expectation of perhaps achieving these other goals. Such other goals can conceivably be religious martyrdom, social closeness with neighbors, trust in an extended family, social and economic stability (though without prospects for a higher standard of living), etc.

It is this relatively narcissistic culture which permeates all social classes in America, though the middle class are still relatively less narcissistic than the rich who so often feel they have almost nothing to lose, and the poor likewise but for opposite reasons, which distinguishes America from so many other societies, but also from the culture of its own more puritanical past.<sup>7</sup> Again, the leaders are often more narcissistic, particularly in an arrogant kind of way, than much of the rest of society, though perhaps matched in the degree of narcissism by the very poor though not for the same goals, the very poor being often very bitterly escapist in their simple pleasures.

On average however this narcissistic tinge to American society to an important extent arises out of the narcissistic tinge to the culture of American adolescents which nowadays they are typically very slow to outgrow. Of course the lifestyles of adolescents, and less so the motivations to adhere to these lifestyles much of which comes from mere conformity and peer pressure, are to a large extent the products of "youth culture" (much of which of course is marketed to youth by adults). In many ways nowadays youth cannot perceive of adult responsibilities and achievements except through the deforming lens of youth culture, partly because it seems preferable to the older versions

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<sup>7</sup> The whole issue of America as a narcissistic society has been well-described in the writings of the late American cultural historian, Christopher Lasch. See especially his *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations* (Lasch 1981).



of adult culture, which they are less and less taught nowadays or experience compared to the generations before the 1960's. Many of them live by adolescent attitudes far into adulthood which is one reason the natural narcissism which is to be expected in a rich country like America is biased by adolescent goals and adolescent interpretations (the cognitive side) and adolescent ways of feeling (the emotional side).

In general teenagers take to heart what is expected of them, officially and unofficially. That is why social prestige is so often seen as black and white with no shades of gray. Of course what is seen in America by naïve teenagers as being mature, "being cool," is a matter of managing their emotions by holding their feelings in (they are not proud of losing self-control even when they expect themselves to do so) and then when the time is right letting out their emotions by consuming things. This is not the case in "hot cultures" where at least elites can be expected to indulge in emotional display to their heart's content. In such societies the powerful are often more narcissistic and on more subjects than our own, for even the powerful of our own society often find that career achievement and then consumption of commodities are the only ongoing sources of narcissistic satisfaction open to them. In some ways this is democratic, because it means the opportunities to humiliate others personally are limited, the downside of more intimate societies than our own, though it is true it often takes awhile for American teenagers to learn the American value that everyone has sufficient dignity that no one should be humiliated to their face. In those authoritarian societies which nevertheless value closeness between people, opportunities for such humiliations are more common. It is even possible to have the worst of all worlds, where a society that values social distance nevertheless offers elites the power to bridge that distance to humiliate those they consider to be rivals or even social inferiors when it suits their own purposes either strategically or because it makes them feel good. Nazis used to do such things.<sup>8</sup>

Our own society, in reaction to our native culture and our traditional way of doing things, now offers many countercultures, as it always has done, but rarely in such exuberant variety. Though some of them serve as honest expressions of desire and feelings and

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<sup>8</sup> A book that describes how cultures produce ways of life, based on the work of the anthropologist Mary Douglas is *Cultural Theory* (Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky 1990). They have created a typology of five ways of life - egalitarianism, fatalism, individualism, hierarchy, and autonomy.

philosophies of life, others are best described as just another version of consumer products, lifestyle choices they are now called.

In some ways in our society which provides limited avenues for emotional expression, teenage emotional expression becomes a model for adult emotional expression, which is not necessarily a good thing if maturity is a goal. True, unlike adults, teenagers are not reconciled to being trapped. For them their emotions are not yet jaded, and their fears replaced by boredom and/or acceptance of their fate. Yet they are very rarely wise, or even emotionally mature. The extremes of adults patterning their attitudes after those of teenagers, or perhaps just they themselves never grow up, or teenagers being manipulated by adults to fit in to society in an unhealthy way are both too often common but not particularly healthy ways of life.

One reason of course that a certain childishness permeates modern America, the fabled dumbing down of society<sup>9</sup> that is so discussed in the mass media when they are not themselves adding to it, is that the tradition of respect by youth for adult authority has been diminishing ever since the 1960's. Once such authority came because adults were considered older and supposedly wiser, but also because of trust in the values they taught as well as practiced. Such trust in society is diminishing, not only by teenagers of the older generation, but trust between many people as individuals and between many groups in society of other groups.<sup>10</sup> Admittedly distrust between groups is more of a problem in some other societies. Distrust among individuals, which weakens the ability to form groups that foster strong interpersonal connections and loyalties, other than for rather superficial purposes such as business or entertainment, seems to be more of a problem of individualistic cultures such as America's.

There is also the psychological stress caused by change, so that societies where ties between individuals are weakening may face a reaction and a backlash and develop then overly tight and authoritarian loyalties, just as societies which were too tightly knit together in an authoritarian way, such as by a political dictatorship, may experience in reaction the development of overly loose social ties (perhaps even excessive individualism) later on. So the cycles of history often repeat themselves.

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of this see *The Twilight of American Culture* (Berman 2000).

<sup>10</sup> See *The Problem of Trust* (Seligman 2000).

Such endless and rather haphazard cycles of change may be avoided when the culture has philosophies of life that are well thought out and serve a purpose to orient people to their environment. Usually cultures have as their ideal for ethics the golden mean, for example to avoid extremes of either individualism or collectivism. To have the wisdom to put this into effect, that's the hard part.

Adolescents, without much life experience, rarely have such wisdom. The anonymity of society and the replacement of social closeness by bureaucracy are such that adults teach conformity better than they teach moral earnestness. Admittedly bureaucracy can have its efficiencies even in such emotionally-tinged environments as governments, courts, and religious institutions, where the alternatives for solving the problems of masses of people by non-bureaucratic means are usually even worse. There is also the problem that adults are so used to selling themselves rather than expecting mutual concern and understanding, that adults have gotten used to thinking of children as markets, and thus appealing to their cupidity just as they do with other adults.

It is not necessary to go into detail on the deficiencies of pop culture, that which is the source of youth culture in many respects, as a view of life, these attitudes being based on a combination of the sentimentality as well as the greed of the entertainment industry. This is an industry which so often sells the message that you can have your cake and eat it too, that there are no hard decisions except whether or not to buy, if nothing else this entertainment product. It is no surprise that entertainment products often sell contradictions that would not really work well in real life, like the way villains are often allowed to enjoy the fruits of their labor, that is to say sex and violence, just so long as they are punished at the end. If nothing else such entertainment vehicles teach the lesson that a mixture of sex and violence is a good source of happiness, at least in the short run.

Since I have placed so much emphasis on social structure (which tends to produce in a bureaucratic society structures of power), and culture as molding the individual as well as limiting one's options, now is the time to discuss more internal factors of character, in the needs of the personality. It should be remembered, however, that the motives of compliance, duty, fear, conformity to custom, and/or self-interest, reflect cultural conformity (moral duty, custom), emotional feelings internally generated but perhaps at an earlier age partially socially learned (such as fear, anger, and joy), and the combinations of cognitions and emotions that result in acts of will or the lack of will, such as

boredom, anxiety relief, force of habit, and willful acts of self-interest. It should also be remembered that warped personalities reflect traumas in the past, or persistent unhealthy pressures on the personality in the present, or lack of resistance (a kind of habituation derived from the past or the present or both) which is often greatly amplified, the catalyst being a lack of moral ideals together with a lack of a holistic view of life (which otherwise would have put bad experiences in context to help one monitor one's own understanding and motivation).

Explaining the workings of the personality is much like the story of the blind men and the elephant, one who thought an elephant was like a rope (the tail), the other who thought it was like a tree trunk (the foot), the other who thought it was like a snake (the trunk). Freud emphasized the distortions to the personality that come from the lack of a proper outlet for the instincts, too much repression resulting in neurosis, too little repression (resulting from the ends being inappropriate) resulting in perversion. Other scholars of personality like Harry Stack Sullivan and Karen Horney emphasized the effects on personality not of instincts that are or are not repressed, but of personal identity that is molded in social situations, a bad version of this being approach/avoidance ambivalence in interpersonal relationships. Other scholars such as Rollo May and Ernest Becker emphasized a rather existential approach, emotions being pulled by the outside world that ordinarily pose existential questions on the meaning of life, something which Erik Erikson postulated as a typical problem of adulthood as apposed to appropriate expression of instincts being a typical problem of very early childhood and appropriate handling of interpersonal relations being a typical problem of late childhood and especially adolescence. In fact the theorists of personality who specialize in issues of developmental stages of personality, like Erik Erikson who was probably the most famous of them, tend to assume all the stages of possible personality development mean that there are many ways of going right or going wrong, but that ultimately the healthy personality will have to traverse all these stages or face all kinds of potential problems, from issues of instinctual release to proper interpersonal relationships to meeting the existential demands for finding a meaningful purpose for one's existence or otherwise be not truly (or at least in the best kind of way) mature.

I don't propose to find solutions for all these problems. To begin with by just describing personality at all, a common distinction is between extraversion - emphasis on social accomplishment

(particularly the self-confidence that comes from being liked by people, and therefore trusting to get some advantage from that), and introversion - emphasis on individual capabilities even if it is only the capability arising from the individual imagination. Obviously with extraversion the social result is important for self-fulfillment for the ends of hedonism (an agreeable in the sense of pleasurable existence based on acting on good-hearted impulse and hoping for or taking for granted the support of others) or asceticism (achieving emotional stability, not so much through achievement, and gaining the support of others by being already a winner, but through self-control and gaining the support of others through propriety and developing a good reputation). With introversion, which is an individualistic attitude, individual initiative is important for self-fulfillment, producing often a rather melancholic, and also libertarian philosophy (emphasis on freedom for imagination and to be able to develop and perhaps even act on principles whether or not real accomplishment is around the corner), versus a rather phlegmatic, and also conservative philosophy (with emphasis on acting on self-interest whether or not this is done with forethought which requires a depth of intellectuality which may be missing). Obvious these personality types are extremes on a continuum. While above I emphasize Sanguine (liberal; emphasis on good-hearted impulse) - Choleric (authoritarian; emphasis on propriety) as the two sides of being extraverted and Melancholic (libertarian; emphasis on intellectual speculation) - Phlegmatic (conservative; emphasis on acting on self-interest) as the two sides of being introverted the emphasis is on intellectual philosophies, with the emphasis on being optimistic vs. pessimistic as a kind of intellectual assumption. If the emphasis is on acting and feeling, including feeling energetic, essentially starting with being joyful rather than sad, self-confident (and perhaps narcissistic) rather than anxious and fearful the two sides of two continua are Sanguine (ready to act because of optimism) - Phlegmatic (not ready to act because of pessimism) and Melancholic (somewhat depressed but not acting on it) - Choleric (somewhat depressed and becoming irritable).

Though these distinctions may not seem very useful as they stand, there is work on the development of personality that emphasizes, going beyond the work of Erik Erikson, that personality development requires both enduring and mutually satisfactory interpersonal relationships, and a differentiated, cohesive, realistic, self-identity. An important work in this area is Sydney J. Blatt in his essay with Rachel

B. Blass, "Relatedness and Self-Definition: A Dialectic Model of Personality Development" (Noam and Fischer 1996: 309–338).

Blatt and Blass make clear, building upon the work of Erik Erikson, that the development of personality reflects a series of hurdles, that start with processes of identification with valued others (starting with parents, the precursor to all future personal relationships), but then through inevitable failure of total symbiosis with valued others, there is the production of self-identity. This is what they call the relation between relatedness and self-definition. "An ongoing balance between the processes of internalization and integration is essential to normal development" (Noam and Fischer 1996: 328).

They also make the point with the shift to integration of the personality with the attaining of a fully developed self-identity rather than a symbiotic relationships with valued others, motivational forces become more psychological than biological. Admittedly an adult's love relationships are also symbiotic but unlike the love of a child, tend to reflect much more fully differentiated personalities, and the rationality governing one's motivational processes that comes with it.

Blatt and Bass emphasize that Erik Erikson's stage of trust-mistrust (an interpersonal relation) is followed by autonomy-shame and initiative-guilt (both involve self-definition) followed by a stage Blatt and Bass add to Erikson's schema that they call cooperation-alienation (an interpersonal relation) followed by industry-inferiority and identity-role diffusion (both involve self-definition) followed by intimacy-isolation (an interpersonal relation) followed by generativity-stagnation and integrity-despair (both involve self-definition) (Noam and Fischer 1996: 318). Blatt and Blass relate these stages of personality development to potential failures and prospects for psychopathology. I suppose that means such stages were never really handled well in the first place, or present stress can cause regression to an earlier stage of development if its attainment is not firmly in place.

In general they distinguish between psychological characteristics tied to concern with maintaining personal relationships, and those tied to concern with maintaining self-definition, also commonly called self-identity. These personality characteristics essentially are the same as the distinction between extraversion and introversion mentioned earlier. For example, Blatt and Bass distinguish between anaclitic or dependent depression characterized by feelings of loneliness and fears of abandonment with introjective or self-critical depression characterized by feelings of low self-esteem, worthlessness, feelings of failure, and guilt.

The consequences for issues of character development are more fully developed in Blatt's paper "Representational Structures in Psychopathology" (Blatt 1995: 1–33). In particular he emphasizes that some personality disorders seem to be related to problems, more likely fears, related to relations or potential relations or lack of relations, or troubled relations with significant others, while other disorders seem to be related to problems, more likely fears, related to the presence or the lack of a presence or just problems with self-definition. I should add these problems can be based on traumas of the past, or problems and even traumas of the present, though traumas of the past, though they can diminish in intensity, carry a heavy footprint because the immature personality then doesn't understand how to deal with such problems well. At the same time, forgetfulness and the healing of time does occur, and the problems of the present can be so great, producing among other things the fear of death, that they can produce an existential anxiety that is very hard to alleviate through processes of consolation that seem to work much better with children, though of course taking a philosophical and stoic attitude, which works well with adults, works very poorly with children who often just need and feel better after a good cry.

To summarize his argument, Blatt distinguishes between secure, anxious, and avoidant personal relationships. He distinguishes between certain stages of cognitive development, much influenced here by the work of Jean Piaget. Here he distinguishes between the development of boundary constancy (at 2–3 months) which initiates engagement with others, recognition (libidinal) constancy (at 6–8 months) which allows attachment to a particular person, evocative constancy (at 16–18 months) where there is retained the sense of an object no longer in the perceptual field, self and object constancy (at 30–36 months) where there are stable concepts of self and other, and then other stages ending up with self-identity (at late adolescence to young adulthood) where there are mature expressions of both individuality and relatedness to valued others. Based on this schema, he describes many types of psychopathology as being like a regression to an early developmental stage. What would cause such regression is a whole study in itself, which he doesn't go into in this paper. He describes much of the symptomatology of schizophrenia as disturbances in boundary articulation, producing an inability to differentiate between independent events and objects, and problems with libidinal (recognition) constancy. Difficulty articulating boundaries interferes with the capacity to maintain focused attention which results in severe distractability,



loose associations, and an inability to perceive accurately and think logically. He mentions the paranoid schizophrenic seems to react to these circumstances by hyper-alert attention as if attempting to maintain boundaries that are weak, producing an exaggerated defensive struggle to preserve and solidify boundaries. The result is a preoccupation with power and control, with trying to maintain autonomy, excessive suspiciousness, isolation of affect, keeping people at a distance because they are distrusted, and trying to defend against both boundary dissolution and experiences of merger and fusion. Here problems with personal relationships and self-identity combine, with thought working at a very primitive level, in some ways like that of a very young child.

For him problems with borderline personality disorder shows impairment in evocative constancy, as they easily feel rejected and abandoned by significant others during stressful moments in the relationships. Such feelings of abandonment disrupt the capacity for reality testing. In general disapproval and criticism result in feelings of fragmentation or depletion of the self so that cognitive processes become fragmented and illogical. Intense idealization and extreme denigration of others are their ways of maintaining social contact, especially when they feel vulnerable. Flamboyant cogitations and behaviors and extreme affects are their attempts to sustain interpersonal contact. Exaggerated overstatements and behaviors are an attempt to maintain or revive experiences and mental representations to compensate feelings for their decay and to overcome feelings of emptiness, aloneness, abandonment, as well as fragmentation or rage. Thus in general unstructured situations are trying for people with borderline personalities.

Regarding the neuroses, problems with attachment to significant others often puts attainments of self-identity (especially cognitive abilities) at risk. Thus Blatt distinguishes between anxious (which is also ambivalent) insecure attachment which leads to a dependent type depression that is associated with fears of abandonment and loneliness from avoidant insecure attachment which leads to depression characterized by loss of self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness and guilt. Anxious-ambivalent attachment can be resolved by compulsive caregiving which is often a more mature and integrated expression of this attachment style since it can lead to mutuality and reciprocity, while compulsive care-seeking tends to be less mature since it leads more to unilateral actions that do not resolve dependency, self-criticism and



anxiety. Avoidant insecure attachment tends to take the form of fearful avoidance, where there is a conscious desire for relatedness that is inhibited by fear of the consequences, and dismissive avoidance where there is an intense denial of the need for relatedness. Reality-testing seems to be poorer among those prone to dismissive avoidance than those prone to fearful avoidance since those with dismissive avoidance are in a sense much more narcissistic and avoid communicating with and understanding others. I should add such dismissive avoidant people are often very ambitious, and their combination of achievement-orientation and unconcern for the opinions of others makes them fit in well in certain sections of the business world, and in certain social-climbing sections of the teenage world. They are the leading edge of the culture of narcissism.

In general Blatt makes the point that disorders where there is an exaggerated and distorted emphasis on interpersonal relations and defensive avoidance of issues of self-identity (anaclitic disorders) include grossly immature personalities, and hysterical personalities. Disorders which place an exaggerated emphasis on defining a sense of self and avoidance of issues relating to personal relationships include paranoia, obsessive-compulsive disorders, introjective (guilt-ridden) depression, and what he calls phallic narcissism (which I should add seems to arise greatly during the teenage years and is commonly a form of being a hedonist with little concern for the future or how it affects others).

These character types are dynamic processes and there can easily be movement along a continuum. The infantile (grossly immature) character is concerned in a more primitive way with bonding and relatedness than the hysterical personality, but people can move, or more likely evolve, from one extreme to the other, or may end up with a blending of both features. Paranoia, obsessive-compulsive disorders, introjective depression, and phallic narcissism are all attempts to protect and preserve the sense of self, but it is possible to have combinations of these traits depending upon the circumstances of one's life, and the particular combinations may change or evolve in a particular manner which is where issues of social power and cultural values have their influence.

Blatt emphasizes that people with introjective (introverted) tendencies tend to develop pathologies that fall on this continuum, and the implication is that paranoia, obsessive-compulsive disorders, introjective depression and phallic narcissism are traits of decreasing severity,

though there may be exceptions to that such as mild paranoia, excessive obsessive-compulsion, etc. Likewise people with anaclitic (extraverted) tendencies tend to develop pathologies that decrease in severity from infantile to hysterical, though undoubtedly there are childlike people (certain entertainers for example) who are less maladjusted than extreme hysterics. Blatt also makes that point that anaclitic personalities are instinctually bonded through their libido, and rely on avoidant defenses such as denial and repression, while introjective personalities are instinctually bonded through their aggressiveness and rely on counteractive defenses such as projection, intellectualization, reaction formation and overcompensation.

Though Blatt does not mention this, there conceivably could be combinations of extraverted and introverted personalities. Even extraverted people have individual reactions, and wonder what people will think, while introverted personalities must take social circumstances into account when planning their futures. That is why there are extraverted and introverted causes of depression, and phobias and simple anxiety are very primitive psychological reactions that affect both extraverts and introverts.

In a sense the obsessive-compulsive personality seeks through ritual to maintain what existed in the past (and to assuage guilt for allowing change to take place) and tends to be in a sense intellectual and introverted but must react to a social environment. Also the hysterical personality who as an extravert uses people as objects of desire seeks to avoid changes from childhood reality, particularly childhood relationships which were such a source of both personal identity and personal satisfaction during the play stage of one's life, and so seeks to recreate (falsely) the social relationships of the past. Nevertheless there is a kind of intellectual element to all of these hysterical actions, a conniving to make reality more agreeable though not in a particularly rational manner, though there are cultures where hysterical fits do draw attention and even social acquiescence to personal desires, particularly when the people throwing the fits are quite socially influential to begin with.

Just as schizophrenia represents a kind of final common pathway for many types of psychopathology taken to an extreme point of personality disintegration, narcissistic disorders also often reflect an underlying factor that can partake in many types of psychological disorders, since narcissism as self-centeredness can take both libidinal (requiring social bonding) and aggressive (seeking removal from social bonding) forms. Narcissistic disorders reflect a "neurosis of most complicated form,

which contains the compulsive qualities of the obsessive and the envious disposition of the hysteric, rooted in flagrantly paranoid fantasies" (Thompson 1985: 56).

The narcissist is the person of resentment, who if disappointed will not feel genuine sadness or guilt (which is greatly exaggerated in the obsessive). Instead what erupts is a seething anger occasioned by vengeful fantasies which alternate with melancholic depression (which is the obverse of this grandiosity). Not realistic loss but blows to self-esteem, so dependent on fantasy as a way of retaining the feeling of being loved from childhood, is what hurts the narcissist so badly.

In the modern world ambition as the core of self-esteem, and fantasy as the core to ambition, is the spur to striving in modern societies, and what makes the ambitious person often so unrealistic when it comes to personal relationships. Ambition becomes the way to earn love from the world at large, the means to keep alive the love of one's parents, and the way to attract a mate. In a world of image-management, its power over the self, as what constitutes the self, grows in importance as one-upmanship and avoiding being manipulated ("being cool") substitutes for relationships based on concern and trust (both of which narcissists cannot supply very easily). Sociopaths, now often called anti-social personalities, I suppose are an extreme version of this, where the coolness in manipulation is increased, and the realistic acceptance of the possibility of failure which results in melancholic depression is decreased (Cleckley 1976).

More traditional societies have their own problems, and a modernizing traditional society often is driven by narcissistic elites who rule over a rather authoritarian mass of people, though their loyalty, in addition to not being repaid well by their rulers, often has a confused quality to it. It is as if they have forgotten what they are being loyal to, the sense of the difference between the sacred and the profane, so that their authoritarian loyalties increase beyond all reasonable bounds, the obverse to narcissistic selfishness that plagues modern individualistic societies.

The practical result of the growth of nihilism in modernizing societies in general, both individualistic (with tendencies toward narcissism) and collectivistic (with tendencies toward authoritarianism) is what Stjepan Mestrovic calls "postemotional society" (Mestrovic 1997). Traditional societies take for granted scarcity, but at the same time the pleasures of life are emotional. Providing the proper context to enable the healthy expression of emotion is probably the major goal of life,

and certainly in traditional societies where “ambition” of the modern sort based on a complex economy has little meaning. The acting-out of emotions is seen in the multitude of social, and especially religious, rituals, as well as in the expression of everyday repetitive behaviors with valued others in personal relationships. We all recognize this when this produces the expression of intimacy, sexual intimacy being only the most obvious.

Such rituals work because there is an innate emotionality that needs expression. This expression does not work well when expressed arbitrarily, which is why sociability occasions will not work arbitrarily between strangers. Though rituals will help produce an emotional bond, the rituals will not be enough if the basis for commonality is not there. The same holds true for even more intimate relations of the romantic sort. Rituals in fact set up and enforce boundaries of an ontological sort (existential feelings of personal existence that are psychologically felt, and thus are of prime importance for the stability of the personality), and essentially distinguish between the sacred (that which is most powerful and can be used with care as a building block of the human experience) and the profane (that which interferes with the human experience, often a kind of waste product as it were, which is why excrement is almost always profane, while sex as a building block of self-esteem if handled well is part of the sacred).

In particular, while we in the modern world now live in a cornucopia of material goods, our personal relationships have been weakening. In fact increasingly people relate “rationally” to the vast majority of people they meet as if they are mere instrumentalities for achieving more and more material goods. The effect is usually one of great confusion, and many of the social philosophies of our time reflect this confusion between means and ends, and between the sacred and the profane.

It is not a big surprise that the weakening of social boundaries produces among very traditional societies (including many tribal societies) a common pathology in the form of transient hysterical episodes, that more bureaucratic societies also develop outbreaks of paranoia, often fostered by elites who encourage mass hysteria in order to maintain their power then offer solutions to this problem of their own making by offering social scapegoats (also known as the Nazi way of promoting public morale). Modern societies include all these tendencies, but with anonymity, bureaucratization, economic instability, and an increasing weakness in social support systems from significant

others, particularly with the weakening of the family, it is no surprise that not transient hysterical outbreaks but schizophrenia (a kind of bureaucratization of what in a more flexible society would have been a transient hysterical episode) is a common result to social degradation. It is a common problem in the slums of the modern world.<sup>11</sup>

Of course what does all these possibilities for the adolescent personality, these concerns with the power base behind social structure (so obvious an issue among status conscious teenagers), the values of culture (which teenagers increasingly do not learn or learn through the distortions of the dumbed down version found in "youth culture"), and all the varieties of personality traits that may date back to early childhood, or may reflect the extreme stresses of present-day teenagehood, what can be done about them? If nothing else, does counseling help? The short answer is maybe, though it is better received from trusted and admired figures, for which parents still fit the bill the best.

Trusted and admired figures are in some ways rare in adolescents' lives given modern conditions. Modern societies much more than traditional, less bureaucratic and anonymous societies are filled with affectively neutral social relationships as well as actively sought out (and therefore idealized which may or may not result in disillusionment) new relationships. Traditional authoritarian societies (not modernizing authoritarian societies) have much less room for affective neutrality. People are much more likely to be emotionally bonded (relatives, community members, friends) or they are distrusted.<sup>12</sup>

Since it is less likely nowadays for adolescents to find community members available to teach them the ways of the world, and with whom they can unburden their feelings, the question arises, can the schools provide substitutes for this? I wouldn't exaggerate the possibility for success, but if the attempt is to be made, here are some of the issues such counselors will have to deal with. They will ultimately be counseling students for both emotional and cognitive rationality, but they are not involved with them as their parents are, neither are they as

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<sup>11</sup> See *Psychiatry Around the World* (Leff 1988). I also recommend for a meditation on social revitalization processes and on the relation between traditional notions of magic and religion, *Stolen Lightning: The Social Theory of Magic* (O'Keefe 1982).

<sup>12</sup> See Alan Silver, "Two Different Sorts of Commerce: Friendship and Strangership in Civil Society" (Silver 1997: 43-74). For a discussion of how popular culture has evolved somewhat in tandem with these changes in social structure and social interaction see *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernity Avant-garde Decadence Kitsch Postmodernism* (Calinescu 1987).

influential, in both a positive and a negative sense, as parents. They will enter into their clients' lives pretty much to the extent that their clients will let them in. As counselors they may give advice in the sense of factual information, they may subtly prod students to be more mature, they may serve as a counterweight to peer group pressures and the obsessions with social status among teenagers for whom an adult is merely an outsider.

In merely the sense of encouraging rationality the counselor must help the client deal with: 1. Fear of failure; 2. Giving up too early; 3. Giving up too late; 4. Relying too much on a general short-term time perspective (common among the poor; and among the leisure-class rich); and 5. Relying too much on a general long-term time perspective, so that the present cannot be enjoyed (common among the ambitious rich and the ambitious middle-class). Sometimes the counselor will be a sounding-board for the client who feels trapped into pleasing their peers, or their parents, or feels trapped because both groups send conflicting messages (usually the former supports hedonism and the latter the opposite though this is not a hard and fast rule). The counselor may be asked to give advice on values and morals, but modern society does not encourage overt moralizing the way many traditional societies do (admittedly those societies sometimes confuse chauvinism and parochialism for moralism). Counselors soon come across the common patterns of their community, the "spoiled" rich children and the "rebellious" rich children who may be rebelling against their parents, or may be simply taking the intellectual ideals of their parents and acting on them to an extreme degree, but in either case usually manage to present a good public image without too much real self-sacrifice. Likewise, they soon come across the children of the poor who often become obsessed with mere survival and commonly "act tough" or "feel sorry for themselves" but in either case show emotions that the ambitious youths are constantly deferring for later use. However ambitious youth can be quite manipulative in a rather subtle sense, thinking that image is quite enough to be able to succeed when there are sponsors to open some important doors. And sometimes they are right, the mediocrity of the rich and powerful which they hope to join is sometimes the first thing they learn to hide in their climb to power.

The healthiest balance between authoritarianism and narcissism as cultural values is when there is a balance between realistic identifications with the outside world (healthy identifications combined with healthy desires producing for the most part healthy and relatively

realistic fantasies as the motivational basis for one's social conformity) and realistic self-identifications so that desires and expressions of will represent realistic goals as well as appreciations of the motivations (and thus the dignity) of others in one's environment, the result being a "rational" self-esteem rather than one that narcissistically compensates for all the other failures in one's life. For narcissists such failures are not faced so much as ignored or glossed over by unrealistic compensations, and for rich narcissists it is often very easy to ignore one's failures and concentrate on what is readily available. For that matter narcissists from poor communities do the same, but what is readily available just differs. Authoritarianism (social conformity) and narcissism (self-centeredness) as a psychological reality overlaps with extraversion and introversion, though the fit is not 100% since psychological traits and even fantasies often differ from cultural ideals that are enforced by authority (including the authority of parents as well as peer pressure).

Nevertheless all societies as far as I know give lip service to the golden mean between extremes as a good working model for a healthy life, since the major conflict between cultures and competing ways of life is: Between what extremes? "Tolerated" vices often depend not only on cultural values but on the economic and social environment which either increases or decreases the inherent dangers of these vices. Thus American-style narcissism, particularly those aspects that arise as commercial products which in many ways is what American "youth culture" is all about, is dependent on material prosperity and social mobility, and requires a certain inherent "rationality" as the basis for the personality that is in some ways a historical tradition of our more puritanical past, and not necessarily well-understood as the reasons for its existence are increasingly forgotten. Nevertheless, societies with less of a cultural tradition of law and/or morality based on rights, duties and moral obligations, and which rely on social conformity instead, more than we do to produce social order, often find that social change produces reactions to stress in the form of open-ended emotionality, including mass hysteria which if it doesn't arise on its own for which some politicians are quite willing to provide the catalyst. Then certain people from among them will then complain that American-style culture doesn't prepare them for such social and even psychological changes. Well, American culture doesn't handle such changes well here either, if they would occur, though the cultural precursors for such changes (rather weak sense of self-control, rather strong sense of social conformity, all in all a great dependency on leadership to provide rules

for social order) are weak here which is one reason up to now mass hysteria has been rather uncommon here. Whether it will continue to be uncommon, for not only are other societies becoming culturally like America in terms of their appreciation of mass recreation, but America may be becoming more bureaucratic and class-ridden like many other societies, and thus eventually may become more authoritarian (and not in the puritanical, self-control sense which was once America's tradition, but more in the Roman "bread and circuses" sense).

For the moment anyway, certainly in America, one can wonder whether psychology has been able to keep up with the changes in character structures as modernity as it now stands seems to encourage the character traits of narcissism. Psychology less often gets to use Freud's insights on neurosis as reflecting powerful repressions of instincts that still seek expression, since it reflects a Victorian world that is increasingly rare to find, though not nonexistent. Instead the polar opposite of neurosis for Freud, perversion, the free expression of instincts without regard for consequences, or even more commonly found, narcissism which is the expression not necessarily of raw instincts but certainly of their socialized forms, even when such expression results in dire social consequences because of their unnatural, impractical, and ultimately immoral consequences, is seen increasingly as the dilemma of modernity.

The modern world faces the dilemma of ensuring the rationality of the ego, that part of the personality which reflects the self as an independent, self-motivated entity, not only because of all the temptations placed in the modern world on the self, but because the basis for creating a stable self until the ego matures through experience is increasingly lacking. What Freud called the superego, the sense of self that arises from identification with hopefully mature parents and other significant authority figures, is increasingly weak just because such social solidarities which would otherwise naturally engage a child's loyalties are now rather weak. Whether counselors can substitute, that's a hard question, and only time will tell, or whether society can become more intimate and communal, and then perhaps it won't be necessary. Time will tell.

But for now counselors of adolescents, and of people of other ages as well, will have to face the reality some of their clients are just immature (which is what sometimes makes them seem sort of dumb, or shallow, or naive), some react to the outside world in a very defensive manner



which is usually more serious since getting them to act more mature may not be enough, and there are the combined states where their defensiveness takes the form of a regression of the ego, of acting in an immature manner during a time of stress because it is more comfortable and feels safer. Becoming more mature is sometimes just a matter of giving the client more time, and a little encouragement. Out and out defensiveness (a motivated immaturity), especially when there is all the encouragement which a narcissistic culture provides which is added on top of the individual motivations for narcissism, make the counselor's task, because many of the institutions of society are not on the counselor's side, so much harder.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### NIHILISM: EAST AND WEST

Here once again will come up the issue of values in modern society as the basis for social cohesiveness. The 20th century, and now into the 21st century, has seen the fulfillment of both our greatest desires and our greatest nightmares, for it was the century of ambition. This is certainly true of the West, and now we expect the rest of the world to catch up, in wealth and perhaps in Faustian bargains as well. Thus Nazi Germany was in many ways a nihilistic Nietzschean state (admittedly partly through distortions of Friedrich Nietzsche's ideas of the "superman"), while Imperial Japan of that era was merely an imperialistic one. Both represented the loss of traditional values in our time to a great degree. The philosophy of Nazi Germany was, if not a copy of Friedrich Nietzsche's personal philosophy, nevertheless seemed to travel on parallel tracks. Just as Nietzsche disliked modern mass society, and so longed for accomplishment in the aristocratic sense of fulfillment of all one's impulses, all taken together and subsumed under the will to power, so did he not believe in keeping these impulses in check according to religious scruples (he was an atheist) nor for social reasons, for he believed in accomplishment much more than he believed in self-control, and particularly, self-doubt. His philosophy thus was a combination of Social Darwinism with an anachronistic admiration for the social life of barbarian warriors with all their zest unconstrained by the guilt-inducing cultures of modern religions. For him, as for Alexander the Great, Homer, or a writer like him, would provide a suitable Bible.

Yet aristocratic snob that he was, he was probably not any more cruel than Achilles or any other Homeric hero. He was an anti-rationalist and not an irrationalist, using the distinction made by A.C. Graham in his book comparing Eastern and Western thought, *Reason and Spontaneity: A New Solution to the Problem of Fact and Value* (Graham 1985). Regardless of whatever outrageousness he espoused, he was not yet a narcissist whose alienation from social convention required rebelliousness against conventional morality of the sort which the Marquis de Sade espoused in his writings. Hitler, unfortunately, did

take his belief in will to power one step further, and in some ways was closer to the heroes of the writings of the Marquis de Sade with their sadistic cruelties than he was to Homeric heroes. The latter may have had their tantrums, but were still rather objective in their attitudes toward warfare, using it as a tool, but not getting an extraordinary amount of sadistic pleasure out of it. Hitler and his ilk, like the Marquis de Sade, were extreme narcissists in a world which for them had lost the traditional social boundaries and moralities. They sought to recreate such boundaries, and in the process acted out sadistic fantasies.

The leaders of Imperial Japan of that same era were also somewhat like Homeric warriors in their own ideals, yet whatever sadism they encouraged or overlooked under stress, the Rape of Nanking and the brutalities upon the evacuation of Manila come to mind, they seemed to produce more sins of omission than commission. They allowed horrible conditions to exist, for example in prison camps, but they just seemed to get less sadistic pleasure out of warfare than their counterparts in the German leadership. Even their plan for an East Asia trade zone under Japanese control had less sadistic overtones to it than German fantasies of that time of a master race ready and willing to enslave others. The difference in attitudes to that war, the greater savagery of German warfare and rule, and admittedly the difference is more a matter of degree than a clearly qualitative difference, may well reflect the difference between in effect between individualistic (at least for leaders) and collectivistic traditions. True, the mass of Germans probably marched into war more out of feelings of social conformity than anything else, as was true as well for Japanese soldiers. However, it was the leadership class in Germany (augmented by the social mobility of people with criminal tendencies) that seemed more alienated than the comparable leadership class in Japan, the practical difference being in the greater brutality they encouraged, and thus a greater nihilism.

Oddly enough, Western individualism tends to produce a rule-driven, impersonal, guilt-driven culture, while collectivistic cultures, in Asia and elsewhere, tend to be more shame-driven. In the latter case individuals outside of the "in-group" may be treated as non-persons and exploited, but usually not in the kinds of sadistic ways that individuals suffering from their own identity crises would visit upon those who are taken to be a threat by their very existence to the fragile identities of individualists seeking something to cling to. Of course individualists can act out their ambitions in heightened moralism as well, so the

moral effects of heightened individualism to the point of narcissism is no doubt a two-edged sword.

True, collectivists tend to ignore outsiders, or at worst economically exploit them, while individualists often project their own feelings upon outsiders, using them as a focus for building their own identities, either congruent with or in opposition to that of these outsiders, which is just more dangerous than the mere economic exploitation which collectivists tend to inflict. I suppose collectivists can also exterminate outsiders when it is in their economic interest, though enslavement is more likely.

Oddly enough, tribal peoples because of their weakly organized social structures are more likely to treat outsiders as individuals than the more bureaucratically organized societies organized around peasant farmers. Tribal warfare can result in wars of extermination, but usually it doesn't (nevertheless see Edgerton 1992 regarding any myth of tribal harmony). Bureaucratic empires are usually satisfied with enslaving conquered peoples either literally, or more likely economically. Modern states, with their ruling over people who use the state to solve their personal identity crises, often have less tolerance for ethnic minorities who are unwilling to let their social identities be defined by the state. The major exception is a state like America which defines itself more in economic than in ethnic terms, and even the US historically has been markedly unsympathetic to ethnic groups who wish to opt out of economic competition, which was the original rationale for treating aboriginal peoples as being so different that they could only be marginalized, and not treated as mainstream Americans.

In Prof. Mathew Kanjirathinkal's essay "Responses to Nihilism: Religious Revivals and Political Activism in the United States, Japan, India, and Germany" found in *Social Pathology in Comparative Perspective: The Nature and Psychology of Civil Society* (Braun 1995) he develops an interesting typology of cultural and political responses to the strains of modernization and loss of traditional values, reactions to nihilism if you will, in these four different societies. Prof. Kanjirathinkal both emphasizes the similarities between religious revivalism and secular nationalism (especially when it functions much like a "secular religion"). He emphasizes the trajectories of social change which distinguish between major world cultures, which shows not their similar reactions to social strain, but their different reactions.

He sees the US with its heritage of puritanism lending messianic overtones to its politics as being in culture individualist and

world-conquering in orientation, messianic but conflicted because of lack of social integration which prevents this messianism from being put into effect until some crisis or outside enemy unites the nation. Japanese culture is communalist and self-conquering, and though its culture orients its society for group endeavors, it is not particularly messianic in orientation, and its group endeavors may suffice for economic imperialism or even paternalistic hegemony over its neighbors, but not for messianic crusades. Indian culture is individualist and self-conquering and the emphasis on the path of personal enlightenment, though constrained within the norms of ethnic, religious, and caste diversity, barely allows the nation to be united at all, let alone go on messianic crusades. German culture because it has historically been communalist and world-conquering (messianic) at least since the Reformation has had a trajectory of political and cultural development that both encouraged the nation to be obsessed with producing social uniformity, partly because of its earlier lack of political cohesion, and to use the state to fulfill not individualistic but social ambitions for messianic expansion. The result at least during one era was not only despising other cultures, but acting on this belief that any competition with one's neighbors was not only an economic but a cultural and moral conflict. When traditional moral values that had at least bound all of Christendom were rejected in the era of the Nazis, there was nothing to hold back extreme hatred and contempt of their neighbors. The result was a no-holds-barred competitive attitude toward them that put even the fierceness of American competitive attitudes, our tendency to let the market decide our moral values and then occasionally react against this, to shame. They of course went beyond market competition between individuals and between groups, but became competitive as a mass which guaranteed their competitors would also react in the same way, and the result was war.

Messianic, they were, as the US still is, but they did not allow for generations of public debate which is the norm of American-style individualism, which institutionalizes tolerance. True, such debate can become an end in itself. A society such as ours may in effect not do anything other than defer to a coalition of elites, coalitions which change from time to time in market fashion. The mass of people tend to be left out of these coalitions, but muddle-headed messianism is not much of a substitute. That is why we adore markets.

But to get back to the main focus, one way to put into context the different trajectories of social change resulting from the stresses

produced by extreme value relativism ("nihilism") in Asian and Western thought, is to see how Friedrich Nietzsche, that German philosopher and exponent of the "death of God" reacted to these two poles of the philosophical dilemma, the Asian emphasis on the ultimate importance and unreality of the sense of self, and the Western opposite of this. This distinction overlaps with the distinction between communalism and individualism, except that there is a paradox. Both the Hindu and Buddhist traditions so influential in Asia, and their other major philosophies as well, oppose ambition as an ultimate value and support communal loyalties because individual self-fulfillment is defined as something other than fulfillment of individual ambition. Likewise, Western thought, especially in the modern era, tends to support individualism as the fulfillment of individual ambition, with the realization that this involves the gaining of social power and mastery over others. Thus both traditions deal with individual self-fulfillment as an end, and differ according to their emphasis on the importance of individualism or communalism as means.

America is like India to the extent we both emphasize the ultimate ends of life defined as individual self-fulfillment, while Japan and Germany both emphasize the social means, means which are determined by elites. Thus European history has seen much of late in individualism for the elites, and conformity for the masses, the end result being a deformation of communal cultures by elite control, serving the elite's ambitions. This is a problem which America faces as well, despite our ultimate ideological loyalty to individual self-fulfillment for everyone, that remnant of puritanism.

Now let's see if we can use the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche as a test case. Here I am relying on Graham Parkes, ed., *Nietzsche and Asian Thought* (Parkes 1991). A number of the essays in this book clearly produce the impression that Nietzsche approved of the problems raised in Hindu and Buddhist thought, that is their critiques of metaphysics, in other words the grounds for our existence, but not their solutions. He thought that Semitic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) with their emphasis on personal morality were religions of *ressentiment*, religions of people who merely attacked the best and brightest of society because they were not themselves creative. Of course, if anything, those that tried to put some of his ideas into practice, the Nazis, were the true practitioners of resentment, dethroning the German aristocracy, and putting into their place an elite characterized by all the hatreds and stupidities of the criminal classes suddenly given power.

Nietzsche admired Hinduism because he admired the social efficacy of the Brahmin class, an efficacy which he seemed to admire of Jews as well, and he especially admired Buddhism as a kind of purification of Hinduism, stripped of its dross of social ritual, and now functioning less as a system of morality than as a kind of medical hygiene for the attainment of philosophic and emotional calm. Of course though he shares the Brahmin and Buddhist critiques of our mundane existence, he doesn't think their solutions go far enough, for what he wants is not diminishment of desire but the utter fulfillment in a kind of Dionysian excess, the kind that an aristocracy, whose lives are fulfilled by their lording over their followers and their captives, can achieve. Nietzsche may ultimately have believed that the ambitions of egotistical individuals are vanities, but he wasn't prepared to give up these vanities just yet. In that sense he was much like the Christians he attacked, who may have believed that Heaven was a better place, but weren't prepared to go there just yet.

Thus Nietzsche denigrated the existence of a concrete self, much as Hinduism and Buddhism does, but denigrated the "realness" of our consensual notions of reality much less, for he advocated creating the self through ambition, of a sort which only an elite can achieve, rather than seeking the release from worldly bonds and the repudiation of desire. He, of course, totally misunderstood the place of personal morality in the Semitic religions.

All religions know that rules of morality have a number of effects and sometimes the effects are contradictory, so in that sense all morality is dependent on, is relative to, its effects and cost-benefit considerations are intrinsic to all morality. But some morality is relatively absolute, just as Nietzsche's advocacy seemed to be for a morality that was absolutely relative. The reason for the former is essentially a psychological one, based on social relations, and respect for all existence which when found in Buddhist form is the negative emphasis on diminution of desire and in positive form is the Semitic and monotheistic worship of the ground of all being, that is the worship of God. The social psychological and metaphysical reasons for morality can conceivably conflict, but philosophical and metaphysical reasons for morality are constructed to prevent such contradiction, to ensure that there is no conflict between moral duty and social loyalty, the secular dilemma *par excellence*. For that matter, an enthusiastic concern for one's social partners, for example familial love, will remove any contradiction between serving the welfare of the other and serving one's



own as the two become intimately intertwined. Nietzschean morality which makes it extremely hard, perhaps impossible, to love anyone other than oneself, and oneself is defined essentially by one's ambition, guarantees either conflict between oneself and others, or the resolving of that conflict only by making the others subservient.

Thus Nietzsche didn't believe in a covenantal community, in one where people voluntarily took on the responsibilities of personal morality, so that others benefited as well as oneself, not necessarily in the Buddhist and Hindu negative sense of avoiding this-worldly entanglements, but in a kind of purification of these very entanglements in the positive sense. Thus he would not have sympathy for the Jewish Torah, the Christian New Testament, the Muslim Koran, or even the American Constitution.

All communities have social morality, be it the Nietzschean ideal of an aristocratic order or the Communist ideal of very little social differentiation but a great deal of economic abundance. Yet such social morality must be based on personal morality or on the enforcement mechanisms of conformity and bureaucracy or it will face collapse, and if all else fails it will then only be sustained by brute force. Nietzsche ultimately sacrificed personal morality (though he was by no means a fanatic sadist) for elite glory.

Those that believe only in extreme value relativism, which in practical terms means they don't really believe in shared values, tend to believe that values are only a matter of personal taste and what they want cannot be shared or even coordinated with others because people are naturally in conflict and only the strongest and wildest will win out. Thus they believe that society can never be based on anything other than a temporary truce among competitors. Like so many half-truths, this Hobbesian world of little social sympathy, now congealed and made permanent through the controlling influence of bureaucratization, in reality has traditionally been counterbalanced by the existence of communities of true intimacy where morality not only made sense but was desired. The nihilists of this as well as other ages believe even this is not possible. Even the intellectual adepts of Asia who sought in effect a mystical union with ultimate reality, and thought it ultimately more important than the transience of personal relationships, never denigrated personal relationships in their proper place, for that would end all morality. They never had the desire or the ambition, that Faustian side of Western individualism, to take it that far, for even they never believed society could exist without personal morality. Even

Confucianism, which placed great weight on social morality imposed by the state, never overlooked the morality of personal relationships.

Obviously, neither individualism nor collectivism offer the golden mean of moral responsibility, but only a place to start. True, there can be an individualistic cultural tradition that emphasizes sensitivity to the common good, and a collectivistic cultural tradition that emphasizes preserving individual dignity and concern for adapting social conventions to particular circumstances and individual needs. However, obviously, these ideals are often not fulfilled, and the biases created by individualism in favor of individual narcissism, and by collectivism in favor of simple-minded conformity, are real enough social problems in most, maybe all, societies. Individualistic cultural traditions may assume the value of working toward the common good, but despite this cannot assure that the plans of leaders or even of previous generations will be respected and followed given the existence of so much personal freedom, while collectivistic cultural traditions, while inducing a desire to work for the greatest good for the greatest number, cannot take for granted a leadership class that can do so even if they want to. Their source for social complaints, the common people, are often passive and do not complain, or do not necessarily do so in a reasonable manner, and so even an orderly society can be rudderless. Nevertheless, almost all cultural traditions aim for the golden mean between pure individualism and pure collectivism, that balance between individual self-assertion and social cooperation. Though different cultures may start at different points on a continuum from individualism to collectivism, and though in a world of many cultures communication is sometimes difficult, it isn't impossible. We can still learn from each other.

Just to take an example, if you compare the individualistic political traditions of America and the collectivistic political traditions of Continental Europe, one obvious difference is the way "identity" politics is more prevalent in Continental Europe, but is becoming critical in the US too. We know that in the US cultural change is weakly inhibited so that cultural leaders have a great deal of freedom, certainly in the last few generations, and are relatively free from control by other power elites. Thus while economic change, for example the actions of real estate developers, requires access to bank loans and the approval of zoning commissions, the leaders of religious schisms and the purveyors of intellectual fads do not need the approval of the leaders of society.

Yet America has a two-party system rather than the multi-party coalition politics of the parliamentary systems of Continental Europe. Their parties tend to serve "identity-based" constituencies, Catholics, Protestants, rural voters, urban voters, etc. Yet though they have more parties, in terms of ethnic, cultural and racial diversity in many ways we are the more diverse society, as opposed to any single European state.

Our emphasis on political order reflects our emphasis on economic order as the glue that holds society together, while our tolerance for religious and cultural diversity reflects our relative unconcern for culture, as opposed to economics, as the ultimate power governing our lives. Their political pluralism reflects a concern for cultural identities to be reflected politically, while we want economic interests above all to be reflected politically. However, with the decline of the (social and economic) frontier in American life, particularly the decline in economic growth as compared to earlier eras, in many ways we are rebuilding an European-style polity, with the increasing relevance of an European-style class system, and with increasing relevance and political weight given to "identity" politics. Once again in America, as was always considered the case in Continental Europe, personal identity is not something that can be achieved alone, but requires a conducive social environment, often filled with others having the same or other "identity" in order for coordination of purposes to occur.

With the decline of frontier politics in America, just as it declined in Europe many, many generations before, comes the decline of a belief that people can get much done working alone, or alone surrounded by a few intimates, at a time when this reality of social atomization is if anything increasing. Even that stop-gap of economic cooperation being the defining principle of social cooperation is losing support as social mobility seems to be losing its role as the end-all definition of what it means to be an American. With this loss, the same kinds of nihilistic crises of identity that have plagued Europe for the last 100 years, among people who essentially cannot stand being alone, is starting to plague America as well. These crises of identity may have been more pronounced among elites and the intellectual classes, but if World Wars I and II are any sign, they reach down and produce effects among society at large as well, if for no other reason than the result of having a narcissistic leadership class, and passive followers.

Friedrich Nietzsche and his ideas have become the cheerleader for such a leadership class. In a sense, Nietzsche accused the followers of

traditional religions, particularly Buddhists and Christians, of being nihilists, while they accused him of being a nihilist, for since they contradicted each other's value system, they accused each other of having no values, or certainly of having unrealistic values. There is a strain in Christian thought that denigrates common desires, and Buddhism takes this one step further in denigrating the reality, the firmness, and the desirability of a strong sense of self, as a matter of intellectual realism and for moral reasons as well. Nietzsche takes both traditions to extremes for his sense of desire for individual perfectability goes much farther than Christianity, and his desire for denigrating the everyday world of the average person goes much farther than Buddhism. In a similar fashion, the Nazis went even farther.

The Nazi partisans of Nietzsche-type ideas (and some Nazis probably never even heard of him) took these kinds of ideas to an absurd degree (Nietzsche was no nationalist). In effect they separated the Western tradition of individualism (for leaders, not too often for followers) from values, as some Japanese imperialists separated the Buddhist tradition of selflessness and self-sacrifice (for Buddhism is not nationalistic) from values.

A.C. Graham takes particular note of the dangers of nihilism in the West. Referring to the writing of the Marquis de Sade: "The Sadean hero on the verge of his perfected egoism has emptied himself of selfhood to become the inverted image of his society, the counterpart of the perfect conformist who does not know what he wants unless society prescribes it to him" (Graham 1985: 180). Being an expert on Taoism, Prof. Graham notes that, for example in the writings of Chuang-tzu who was one of the most important writers of this tradition, the wise person is a mirror of nature, and uses his wisdom to conform to the requirements of nature. "We have here the exact opposite of a Western rationalist's conception of himself as reasoning Ego exploiting his own spontaneous tendencies, aptitudes and temperamental strengths in the service of his ends" (Graham 1985: 189). As a matter of fact this kind of Taoist perspective was very influential in what later became Zen Buddhism, which still is very influential in Japan.

Thus it is no surprise that the emphasis on ambition in America produces a Calvinist style to so many cultural movements, a self-righteous elite expressing their ambition in utter seriousness but in the process falling prey to all manner of intellectual fads as they often refuse to learn from the masses they hope to lead. The masses

meanwhile are often frivolous and hedonistic, ambitious but too often believing they can only express their ambitions in only the most narrow of channels. They also often refuse to listen, let alone learn, from those who claim to be wise. In traditional Japan the elites were less individualistic and more searching for causes or even more likely people to be loyal to, so that nationalism was more likely to be their ambition of choice, when it wasn't out and out feudalism, while the masses were conformist, not necessarily frivolous in their values and their loyalties though this could happen, but mostly conformist pure and simple. Modern Japan is now a mixture of individualistic and collectivistic tendencies, while modern America now has reacted against excessive individualism with a proliferation of causes and cults. The golden mean has not changed, but the cultures have.

East Asia and Western Europe have cultures that arise from traditions of weak and strong individualism respectively, as an ideal for elites to follow if no one else, yet in many ways the proponents of both traditions share the same ultimate values. That cannot be said of the nihilists from each tradition who take selflessness and egotism respectively to absurd extremes, or who nowadays merely reject their own tradition and seek to go to the opposite extreme with the other one.

The US up to now has held its messianic urges in check by emphasizing the achievements of the masses, not the glory of their leaders, achievements which are usually voted upon in market-fashion just because communal decision-making is so difficult to achieve. Yet markets function best for simple commodities, not for the production of complex communal identities, and as economic opportunities decline and as we become satiated with our commodities, we may ask for more out of life. At that point, when we want to regain communal identities and to have once again "meaningful" lives not determined by an economic rat-race, we may seek once again to dabble in social engineering.

If we do not get our priorities in order, our sense of the sacred and the profane, we may once again begin to emphasize the results of achievement, not its process which was once held in the US to rather strict moral standards, in the days when we still distinguished between those who merely became rich, and those leaders like George Washington who in fact sacrificed their wealth in pursuit of higher callings, serving the public good is what it was called in those days. When those standards will finally have become lost, then we like Nietzsche's followers will have set into motion a process of Social

Darwinism more virulent than we have known for generations, for it would not merely put economic royalists like those that disgraced American life in the 19th century into power, but perhaps given our now more powerful central government despots on the throne (figuratively, or perhaps not) and on our necks.

The weakness of modern community is real, and doing nothing about it which is the modern American (as opposed to the Continental European) solution has its costs as well. Yet putting nihilists into power is worse than no solution at all, for not the wisest but the most foolish would then rule us.

## CHAPTER NINE

### MAKING FRIENDS IN THE NON-WESTERN WORLD

Let's take the criticisms of the Islamic world as a prototype for our problems with the non-Western world in general, though it is understood there are many cultures in the non-Western world and they are not all alike. For that matter, the dislike of some aspects of American culture in the Islamic world involves criticisms, whether they realize it or not, which we make about ourselves. It is not as if we are unaware that there are commercial interests who encourage, not family values or even basic rationality, but tearing them down and selling cheap thrills in their place. Meanwhile, while we are barely capable of keeping our moral house in order, many leaders are good at lecturing the underdeveloped world that their major problem is that they're not just like us. A basic realization that universalistic values can nevertheless be achieved in more than one way may allow us to spread the message that, just like we expect other cultures to respect us, at least minimally, we fully intend to respect them.

In fact, many of the grievances of the Islamic world consist of remembering hypocrisies that we have so conveniently forgotten, and we can say the same thing about them. One of them of course is the way the US encouraged Afghan resistance to the Soviets to the last drop of Afghan blood, and when the Soviets left, leaving Afghanistan in shambles, we had absolutely no intention of helping them rebuild their country. That feeling of being seduced and abandoned would not have left us a great many friends there.

For that matter, our harping on the supposed militancy of Islam, which is of course a half-truth, seems to forget that poor people and societies are often more aggressive than rich ones. For hundreds and hundreds of years Western Europe was both economically and culturally imperialistic when it suited them. Just look at how nations in Western Europe colonized the Americas and a few hundred years later, after having to fight many, many anti-colonial wars, they tried again in Africa. Cultural and religious chauvinism is by no means an Islamic monopoly.

True, the West has evolved into much more anonymous, bureaucratized societies than many Islamic societies are comfortable with, and so they hate what they do not understand. Many such societies are comfortable with the greed of the wealthy on a more wealthy, albeit feudal, scale, which results in oil sheiks having gigantic families of perhaps 50 children, as in the case of the Bin Laden family of Saudi Arabia, and see nothing wrong with it, but are uncomfortable with the wealthy class of the West who also become rich beyond the dreams of avarice, and create impersonal societies that in many ways treat people like things in order to create all this wealth. So they see the slivers in our eyes, and not the motes in their own.

In similar fashion, the German Nazis and Italian Fascists were jealous of the empires of Britain and France, not realizing that their imperialisms would soon end, and of course overlooking the fact that their own imperialisms were in no way justified, but were in fact much worse. The Islamic radicals in their anger at maldistribution of income in the Islamic world, and at the weakening of family morality and community feelings there which they blame on the West for setting them a bad example, don't realize we are struggling with the same problems, though we think they have a fanaticism about it which we don't. As for those among us who really don't care about family morality and community feelings, it's only a few of us, not all, and heavily concentrated among the very rich and the very poor; little details that too many in the Islamic world, and in the non-Western world in general, don't seem to get.

In fact the West and the Islamic world have, in terms of basic values, more in common than differences. Of course we notice each other's hypocrisies, which often blinds us to our underlying similarities, at least in terms of ideals.

Then again, perhaps it wouldn't be so wise to show the oil sheiks too much of our fleshpots. Their visits here may turn out like, for example in this hypothetical conversation in one of our bookstores.

"Yes, I see the Bibles, the medical textbooks, but before I donate money to your university, let me see the magazines your young people read. What is this? 'How to Make Your Own Porn'?"

"It's all right. That's a British magazine."

"I was taught they had good taste."

"Lately they've been concentrating on just tasting good."

"And this kit, make you own goddess? I thought New Age people were so spiritual. And I thought you people don't worship idols?"



"Not exactly."

"What is it then?"

"It's like worshipping idols, but not exactly."

So our elites' grasping for money from the oil sheikdoms may need some fine-tuning. Perhaps our elites should pay more attention to not flouting the values which we share with them, and stop encouraging their elites from following our bad, rather than our good, examples. Also, perhaps we should suggest that they should be spending more money on their own region's poor before showering us with riches. Otherwise the Islamic world will see our hypocrisies, obvious to the Islamic world, as their hypocrisies are obvious to us, such as their family values which often means they don't trust other families' women around themselves, perhaps because they know themselves so well.

To go into more detail, one way to begin is to realize that Islamic culture is puritanical like Anglo-American Protestant culture but is non-individualistic, and has problems with controlling machismo and face-to-face social rivalries like that found in Latin cultures. Unlike Latin cultures with their Catholic traditions of maintaining cultural standards through an elite that is rewarded by a feeling of snobbish pride (something which American-style Protestantism also lacks), in Islamic society the secular society at the top of society often is known for their vulgar appetites (something which occurs at the bottom of society in Latin cultures). Thus in Islamic societies often it is the people closer to the bottom of society, somewhat similar to our own middle class, who are the puritanical rebels who worry about maintaining cultural (which they define as moral) standards, that is also historically the case in Anglo-American society. However they seek out not individual freedom but the social closeness and what might be called a healthy machismo that is also sought out in Latin societies, though in Latin societies they rarely use such puritanical means to achieve this.

It may seem odd to us that puritanism and machismo should be mixed so haphazardly in Islamic societies, as if Latin culture and Anglo-American culture would be combined simultaneously. This just goes to show the degree of social evolution in the West, where cultural elements have become dispersed geographically and even among various social groups and classes, but remain locked together in much of the rest of the world.

The puritanism of both Islamic and Anglo-American Protestant cultures is such that the emphasis is more on avoiding sin, not seeking forgiveness from someone in authority. In the Islamic world social

conformity in a somewhat tight-knit community is still relied on to enforce moral standards, and if this doesn't work the extended family can be relied on as the last line of defense to maintain these standards. It is no wonder that they look with dread upon the development of American-style anonymity. Americans tend not to be real happy with that prospect either, but in America the individual conscience, increasingly denuded of social support, increasingly reigns supreme.

Actually Americans are in some ways just as fatalistic as Arabs, but the Arabs are fatalistic about their social loyalties, as we are fatalistic about the weakness of these same loyalties. Meanwhile the Latin world admires these same social ideals, but for them they are ultimately rooted in the world of the spirit and not in the world of the flesh, so for them it is no surprise when except for a small elite these ideals cannot be practiced. This at least was the message of the novel *Don Quixote*, that most famous of Spanish novels, which mourned the loss of ideals in a world where hypocrisy was the reality and chivalry was too often a sign of madness.

There is a Spanish and Catholic resolution to this conflict between the ideal and the real. It was and is an emphasis on "salvation" which makes it oriented toward the individual psyche in a sense. This individual psyche tends to flee from its own individual longings and seeks release from its own anxiety through psychological merging with something outside itself, rather than from the feelings of accomplishment that comes from fulfillment of duty and interpersonal closeness, which besides being a rather this-worldly attitude is also an Islamic one.

For that matter, Anglo-American Protestantism also emphasizes this-worldly success, often in the economic sphere but occasionally in the social sphere as well. This is a social sphere which is so shifting and incoherent that Americans love the many chances to try again that a loosely-integrated society filled with many acquaintances offers. Partly this is because loyalties and social niches that we can count on and even enjoy are so few that we dream of many, many chances to start over.

For us our alternative is not the chivalry that Don Quixote hoped for the elite and their followers who knew their duties, nor the communal closeness so regulated by religion in the Islamic world that would preserve the purity of the family if nothing else, the "purity" of doing ones duty toward deeply-felt personal loyalties. These are considered important just because they are so primordial. For us what we have is the next best thing.

Now what are the political ramifications for all of this? In essence, especially regarding their enforcement Islamic family values tend to be communal while Anglo-American family values (reflecting a Protestant heritage) tend to be individualistic and Catholic family values tend to be bureaucratic. Thus in the Anglo-American tradition individuals follow a few rules, and improvise or muddle through the rest. In the Catholic tradition there is an holistic vision of moral community, but it is enforced less through individual initiative and more through bureaucratic controls. Islamic family values tend to be communal because individuals are bonded together by many small values, not a few big ones. This makes them like Catholics, but they also have more of an individualistic (often puritanical) sense of social responsibility to the whole, like Protestants (especially of the Anglo-American sort). But the goal is responsibility for and with the community, not merely practicing individual rectitude and answering only to God, which makes them like Catholics again.

Finally, there is just more of a living tradition, because Islamic societies even as secular entities tend to be more based on tribal or traditionally communal social structures than us, that Islamic leaders (including secular leaders) should lead by moral example. This is easier said than done, but the tradition remains alive just because there are enough local communities where it is considered possible, that is to say personal interaction between the leaders and the led remains a real possibility. This is of course not the case in more bureaucratized societies where there is a great temptation to try to enforce values on the population which the leaders do not follow themselves. The Catholic tradition is inherently bureaucratic so that the leaders of the Church set a moral example, but the mass of people do not so much copy their priests as are ruled by them. For that matter the secular authority, who on occasion may find their authority attacked by their priests, ordinarily have their own culture and their own sources of power, even though they also rule bureaucratically.

In America the whole issue of leaders leading by moral example is sidestepped, because though such a tradition exists to a certain extent locally, particularly in rural areas (together with much hypocrisy), national leaders particularly are expected to be leaders of bureaucracy. They are not expected to know their followers or to be known in return. In reality their main concern is to lead through setting a proper image and not by setting a moral example. In a sense Islamic government and American government (influenced by Anglo-American Protestant

traditions) have their similarities of trying to limit the damage caused by anonymous central governments far from the people, but the Islamic tradition still retains a hope for at least potentially converting the state into something approaching a giant tribal confederation, or even one, big, happy family. America has no hope for such things. Even Catholic countries have somewhat more hope of developing an overall communal feeling, in the modern era often taking the form of bureaucratically-induced nationalism. America has no hope for this either. Instead we put consumer society on a pedestal which allows for a maximum of individual decision-making. Even movements for cultural and religious revival tend to be individualistic in America, producing affinity groups at best, competing with each other for members and hopefully way off in the future converting the nation at large little by little to a desired outcome, perhaps a life of virtue, or more likely to try to gain bureaucratic power and the ability to control people.

In summary, political cultures are influenced by the cultural institutions that determine how manners, morals, and customs are learned and enforced. Thus both traditional Catholic families and traditional Islamic families tend to be somewhat authoritarian, but Catholic families tend to be encapsulated in broader chains of hierarchy, once part of feudal political structures, now rather bureaucratic political structures, and Islamic families to the extent they face these same tendencies, these tendencies toward effective state control have traditionally been much weaker.

One tentative conclusion is that all modern and modernizing societies have evolved away from their roots, away from their core traditions as well as supporting circumstances which justified their cultural institutions. America has evolved away from its traditions of puritanical individualism which justified its reliance on individual decision-making in the marketplace, now that that many social goods are no longer provided in the community and in the family, and are not commodities that can be judged at a glance through comparison-shopping. The American people themselves are now less likely to be puritanical individualists, and more likely to be narcissistic individualists.

Europe has evolved away from simple hierarchical societies where elites felt a sense of loyalty to those they ruled, even when they ruled bureaucratically, and the problems they dealt with were traditional enough that traditional solutions were also known and sufficient.

In the old days they felt they didn't need an extraordinary amount of input from the people they led, and what they needed they got.

Islam has evolved away from small scale, intimate societies where the state could be conceived as being like a large family, or at least a tribal confederation, with the leader supposing to lead through moral example, thought this was often more in theory than in practice. Leaders could use individualistic or bureaucratic solutions, when they could claim they were based on communal traditions, with full input from the people effected.

Europe and America obviously have gone further in the direction of using predominantly bureaucratic and individualistic solutions to dealing with problems of social order respectively, and both know their own traditions quite well, and know the benefits and costs of the other's traditions much less well. Islamic societies know individualistic and bureaucratic solutions to providing social order even less well, but they do have their own advantages, at least in communal settings. They just now have difficulty dealing with the problems of now big, in the population sense, and anonymous societies whose very anonymity predisposes them to bureaucratic and individualistic, market-driven solutions to their problems, which is a falling away from their ancient, communal ways of doing things.

There is also the question whether we in America have given up too much in order to be rich as a society, too much in the intimate, personal sense of communities that as one of their purposes exist to be enjoyed as sources of personal satisfaction (as to what that means is a whole other, complicated question). Our whole society is now so much based on making money that we have become very good at solving problems, or attempting to solve problems, but not at preventing problems from arising in the first place, that original basis for social order, which often requires reserves of personal honor, social cooperation, sympathy, and just plain self-control that was once the underpinnings for the growth of our economy, but now economic growth has taken on a life of its own based on other motives. America is not a place where many people lose sleep by worrying about how to prevent social disorder, and social problems, from occurring in the first place. Other culture areas including Europe and certainly the Islamic world have many people agonizing over the loss of social order in their communities, in both rational and irrational ways, so that we with our individualism and our materialism, and they with their authoritarian obsessions

over loss of social order, and hopefully over loss of social and personal morality, communicate at cross-purposes.

As I mentioned, American religion and Islamic religion are both ultimately puritanical, so that the Sufi mystics of rural Islamic areas and the Baptist traditions of America's rural South are not so different from each other as their partisans believe, even though in secular terms the overall cultures of the Islamic areas are probably more like those of the Catholic areas than the Protestant areas of Europe. True, the American ideal has become increasingly based on the belief that the competitiveness of the economic marketplace will force people to be rational, which it is also hoped will carry over into more emotionally-sensitive areas of life, particularly dealing with family and with interpersonal relationships.

Nevertheless it is obvious that in rural areas especially there tend to be fewer economic opportunities even in America, and family values tend to be imposed directly just because there is less expectation that they can arise as a kind of side-effect from economic rationality. All this is true of the Bible Belt areas of the American South, and is even more true of the Islamic areas of the world.

The American South, and particularly its elites, have always fought a rearguard action against the corrosive effects of individualism and ambition, often failing, and often hypocritically as a way to support the social status and the economic privileges of those with power. Yet they were right in understanding the temptations and weaknesses endemic to their own culture, that when there are few economic opportunities individual ambition and sheer aggression will be directed toward interpersonal rivalries and sexual conquests, all of which can be quite dangerous for overall society. Islamic people seem to be aware of the same dangers, particularly as they are now tempted toward even greater individualism and lesser communal loyalties. In fact their culture and their tradition has made them quite dependent on communal loyalties for their personal identities so that conflicts between the new cultural norms and the old can be quite painful emotionally. Hopefully, they will avoid the hypocrisies that emerged in other societies that also fought rearguard actions against the growth of individualism, and the weakening of community. It may be possible to combine both individualism and communal feeling, and many, many cultures are trying to discover the right combination.

But for now, all societies have their hypocrisies, don't they? Still, we can try to overcome them, in America as well as in non-Western

societies. After all, we in America defeated Communism by showing how we were better at enforcing values that we had in common with them, like ending poverty, not by trying to spite them by doing the exact opposite which would have meant trying to increase poverty. In fact the increase in maldistribution of income in America in recent years has in some ways given us a hollow victory. But that's another story.





## CHAPTER TEN

### ASPECTS OF HYSTERIA IN AMERICA, BRAZIL, GERMANY, AND AFRICA

When the European powers set out for the active pursuit of colonization in Africa in the 19th century part of their rationale for bringing “civilization” to the Dark Continent was that the natives were prone to the kinds of irrationality that the civilized people of Europe had overcome, including what can be aptly called “mass hysteria,” which would be remedied by the colonial powers impacting upon the natives’ cultures. As to why the European powers themselves blundered into two world wars, that was a question that probably certain Africans wished to ask later, but which the Europeans did not have to answer. One method, and a quite effective one, was to change the native religion, which the European powers sought to do by backing missionary activities by such mainstream churches of their native lands as the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England, and to a lesser extent Methodist and Presbyterian denominations.

Fast forward to present day Africa, and American-style evangelical churches seem to be undercutting these old-line churches and either changing their styles of worship and of social influence, or replacing them entirely with new denominations such as Pentecostals. What are the effects? One effect is to break down traditions of tolerance and mutual acceptance between Christian and Muslim populations in Africa. As reported in the article “Enemy’s Enemy” by Andrew Rice in the August 9, 2004 issue of *The New Republic*: “Back in 1970, 17 million Africans attended Pentecostal churches, according to the World Christian Encyclopedia. Today, more than 125 million do - roughly 19 percent of the continent’s population” (Rice 2004: 18–19). This development by itself can have many effects, a more emotional commitment to religion for example. It doesn’t have to result in defending this new commitment by extreme hostility toward rivals, as opposed to appreciating their similarities as well as their differences. However, in this case, whatever good effects of this new commitment, the bad effect of hostility is also on the rise. The examples in this article range from a soccer match in Namibia that resulted in a riot by Namibian fans when

officials of the visiting Sudanese team engaged in Muslim prayers during the halftime break, to in Kenya church leaders suing to outlaw special Islamic courts set up decades ago to arbitrate marriage and inheritance issues among Muslims, causing some Muslim leaders to threaten secession of their areas from the Kenyan state. As to what the Christian leaders hope to get by totally antagonizing their Muslim counterparts, they may have some rational reason, but I certainly can't figure out what it is except for a distaste for Muslim culture. The American anthropologist, Anthony F.C. Wallace, for one has written about the general circumstances of cultural revival movements, particularly the religious example of the Handsome Lake movement among the Seneca, then among the Iroquois Confederation as a whole, starting around 1800 (Wallace 2003). Of course there are "revitalization effects" from new sects which may uplift morale, public morality, and even promote economic growth, all of which are reasons for the generally favorable attitudes in America in general toward such revitalization movements.

However, America has one additional reason for looking favorably upon such religious revitalization movements. The conditions of weak social solidarity and, compared to other societies, extreme social distance between people in general (not automatically moderated by extremely close relations such as an extended family or extremely strong neighborhood loyalties such as found in many other societies) together with emotional repression (the result of extreme division of labor in the workplace, and lack of social outlets to adequately compensate in private life), all of this results in a lack of social outlets for emotional expression in American life.

No wonder Americans have a reputation for spoiling their children, compared to most other societies, at least in the material sense. Partly this is because most loyalties are considered weak in modern America, and increasingly so, and so the loyalties of children to their parents in recent generations also seems to be less and less taken for granted. However, in addition to buying their affection, children are also indulged out of sympathy because childhood in America is idealized as the last period in one's life when emotional expression is expected, and when one can relate to the immediate community and have an audience for one's emotional expression.

This doesn't last too long of course, and if anything children are increasingly expected to grow up quickly, not in the sense of becoming rational, but in the sense of becoming competitive and indulging in

consumerism. They're still childish of course, even during the teenage years and often for years later, but far from innocent. This is expressed in the bullying and status rivalries which teenagers especially inflict on each other as they prepare for an adulthood of endless competition. The one thing they do not expect from each other in general is sympathy and understanding, what can be described as feelings of neighborliness, that may have commonly existed during the teenage years earlier in America, but certainly no longer. Odd situations nowadays such as teenagers going on murderous rampages against other teenagers reflect this situation.

The conditions of weak social solidarity and extreme social distance in America are such that emotional repression is the norm in the heartland of these evangelical religious sects, not emotional expression, and the common belief in these areas is that anything that fosters social solidarity and emotional expression is a good thing. Therefore a peculiarity of American culture is the way we put on a pedestal any kind of mass entertainment, now spreading to the rest of the modern world. Even methods of mass entertainment once derided by elites are now supported because of the profits involved, and even extreme examples like gambling and pornography have plenty of defenders. These secular versions of "induced emotionality" of course are in a sense rivals to religious sources of "induced emotionality" so that religious fundamentalists tend to accept the general parameters of American culture, but prefer old-fashioned solutions to typically American problems such as a naturally weak sense of community.

In general American modes of mass recreation are so popular because of typically weak social bonding in communities to begin with, so that "fantasy-induced emotionality" becomes one of the only means available for creating social solidarity and rituals of social solidarity and social bonding. It is also believed that the potential bad side-effects, irrationality, will have a weak influence because under American circumstances at most the danger will take the form of individual hysteria, not mass hysteria, which shows the difference in effect between individualistic and collectivistic societies.

In other words, the benefits of "fantasy-induced emotionality" in the forms of mass recreation and evangelical religion are maximized in a society such as America, but may have different effects in societies more prone to mass rather than individual hysteria, similar to the commonly noticed pattern that America traditionally has high crime rates involving individuals or small ad-hoc groups, but few political

conspiracies involving criminal activities by political fanatics inflicting harm upon society at large through commanding the loyalty of large groups of people. Formalized warfare between groups, as opposed to warfare between individuals, is not the American way of settling disputes, though it is the way in more collectivistic parts of the world.

One way to look at the differing psychological propensities which arise in individualistic and collectivistic societies is to see how America (individualistic) and Brazil (collectivistic) dealt differently with the ending of slavery and the need to reintegrate the African-Americans and the African-Brazilians respectively into society at large.

In a nutshell, the American South, the homeland of slavery, after the freeing of the slaves was forced upon them by the Federal government made a great effort to make sure the ex-slaves remained integrated into the economic system as a factor of production, but to not integrate them into society at large, but actually set up a system of social segregation. Thus cultural tendencies toward dealing with social tensions by maintaining social distance and getting people to ignore each other were taken to an absurd level. The emotional side-effects of this rather individualistic method of social non-integration were dealt with to a large extent by evangelical religion, where people became bonded, at the very least in their own communities and sometimes across racial lines, by religious enthusiasm even when they remained unbonded in most other areas of life. For that matter, the reason America is so accessible to immigrants is not because Americans open their hearts and their homes to them, but because they ignore them.

In Brazil on the other hand, when the slaves were freed by the central government of the monarchy, which so estranged the landlord class that it was one of the reasons the monarchy was overthrown and replaced by a republic, they did have an easier time of becoming integrated into society than in the US. Brazil, like the other Latin American societies, was in many ways a rather feudal society, so that elites were essentially more snobbish than racist. America was and is a rather individualistic place where patterns of deference within the workplace often do not carry over into life outside the workplace, so that outside the workplace social loyalties often reflect psychological attitudes of "comfortableness" with people, not cultural judgments of their social status, their education, even their wealth in many cases which are relevant to their work success but do not automatically confer prestige in private life. Brazil on the other hand is a place where patterns of loyalty and social acceptance are such that the

status hierarchies of the workplace and the status hierarchies off the job tend to be consistent.

As a matter of fact most of the slaves had already been freed privately, for example by buying their freedom from their masters or simply because it was easier to deal with them as workmen than as slaves, by the time slavery was officially abolished in 1888. The ex-slaves quickly fit into the national social and cultural hierarchy. In fact economic growth was in many ways not as high a cultural priority in Brazil as it was in the United States, so that many cultural attitudes in Brazil were not conducive toward fast economic growth. In the first half of the 20th century immigrants were encouraged to come into Brazil, not to be the working class as in America, but to a large extent to become the business and entrepreneurial class, since in many ways the descendants of the slaves and the descendants of their Portuguese masters were more oriented toward leisure or at least prestigious professions than the discipline required by the Industrial Revolution. It will be interesting to see if the latest wave of immigrants to the US who are oriented toward highly skilled work and entrepreneurialism will have the same function in the US, with native workers taking on aristocratic airs and seeking prestigious work, or even leisure.

If the upper class and lower class of Brazil can be a model for their equivalents in the US, with the middle class increasingly coming from the ranks of immigrants, then what we will notice in Brazil and increasingly in the US is that what the rich and poor both have in common are interests in leisure rather than work, sexual dalliance, a certain amount of aggressiveness, and cultural expression as an outlet for emotional expression, though the leisure activities of the poor are in general probably less polished and cultured, you could say more obviously more escapist, than those of the rich though the rich are not immune from this, and the poor sometimes rise above this.

If one can generalize, the rich are more likely to sublimate with cultural expression, which is why so many are snobs, while the poor are more likely to seek their pleasures more directly through sexual dalliance and brute aggression (admittedly some learn to do this in a thoughtful, nuanced, even appropriate manner). All of this produce social solidarities as well as rivalries, or you might say certain people as well as groups bond together because it would be dangerous for them to face their rivalries alone. Nevertheless this diminishes the amount of cultural rootlessness and feelings of loneliness in society, encourages rather high birth rates, encourages sociability (sometimes

in the family, sometimes through hedonistic activities outside the family), as well as a good number of social rivalries as well as solidarities.

Given that Latin American society in general is governed by norms of hierarchy in the local community, but not always a strong central government, it is no wonder elites often feud with each other and bring society to the edge of civil war, partly because they always seem to have plenty of followers, both out of loyalty and out of ambition. While society at large seems to be always riven by feuds, individuals always manage to fit into some sort of hierarchy and some sort of communal structure.

In America society at large has rarely seen society so riven by feuds among elites that it threatened the cohesive structure of society as a whole, to a large extent because elites could never count on finding sufficient followers to take into battle with them. Thus society at large is not threatened by secession of local communities because local communities are relatively weak, because of the individualism of their members, and because what communities there are do not want to take on the functions of independent, total societies. The one attempt to do so by the American South led by its elites to protect the institution of slavery failed. Instead concern with economic growth integrates all elements of American society, not in a hierarchical sense, but often based on fluctuating, transient alliances that allow market competition to take its effect, to be consistent and ongoing.

Both kinds of society, however, the hierarchical, collectivistic, not particularly economically-oriented one of Brazil, and the American not consistently hierarchical (because of leadership fluctuating because of changes in the marketplace), individualistic, economically-oriented (more interested in controlling things than in controlling people, ambition leading to social rootlessness by encouraging endless striving for more rather than social rootedness as in Brazil), all lead in their own ways to psychological stresses. This is where hysteria comes in.

Freudian psychology and its offshoots treat hysteria as if it is a core concept, a kind of building block of personality. It can be thought of as the equivalent to "personal sensitivity" (in a sense hyperemotionality) or "an emotionally-based reaction to stress that is caused by environmental constraints." Hysteria has a complexity greater than that produced by simple anxiety which is itself something more complex than simple fear.

Especially in societies characterized by impersonality and extreme division of labor there commonly seems to be an intermediate stage of

neuroticism, where emotions are repressed so that the expression of hysteria is no longer direct emotional expression but the escaping or leaking out of emotion, in effect twisted and perhaps strengthened because of frustration. The fears embodied in hysteria often have social roots, reflecting fears generated by problems in social relationships, for example, fear of abandonment. In the European circles where Freudian psychology arose psychoanalysis was based on the psychoanalyst being able to induce psychological change by being an authority figure, a kind of substitute parent, helping the patient resolve ambivalent attitudes toward authority figures, particularly parents, who perhaps had taken their child for granted, easy enough in cultures that emphasized blind loyalty. In America psychoanalysis became more like a purchased friendship, encouraging self-confidence among those who needed to resolve their self-doubts so that they could go out and compete in the anonymous economic and social marketplaces of American society.

Hysterical individuals in the American context are particularly noticed among those with "histrionic personalities," rather theatrical types who "sell themselves" by becoming like actors on a stage in their social relationships, and in the process often beginning to doubt themselves, whether they have a "real" personality other than that which they use to sell themselves to others. In Latin cultural areas conformity to social hierarchies is so much taken for granted as an inevitable part of life that a kind of "theatrical fitting in" is considered normal, and worrying about the true individual "underneath the mask" arises less often than in areas of individualistic culture such as America. *Psychology of the Mexican: Culture and Personality* (Diaz-Guerrero 1975) places great emphasis on the combination of fatalism toward the natural world, and belief in the ease or at least the importance of manipulating others (often just smoothing over the rough spots) that together form a kind of typical adult personality in Mexico. As a matter of fact there is social enjoyment in the Latin world in a kind of theatrical expressiveness, sometimes theatrical exaggeration you might call it, a kind of playfulness based on one's everyday social role expressed even with acquaintances, all of which forms a common means of individual expressiveness, unlike for example in America or even in Germany (which doesn't mind the intellectual expressiveness of ideology, but rather dislikes emotional mushiness in everyday life except with intimates who appreciate such things-that is why it was so dangerous for them to find a demagogue, Hitler, who in his speeches treated everyone as an intimate).

In America excessive theatricality is looked down upon because there is a cultural assumption that expressing sincerity is expressing a truer or more basic self which is preferable if at all possible, which is why socializing with intimates is more desirable than socializing with strangers, which is also why political demagogues learn to fake sincerity. With the increasing bureaucratization of American society sincerity and intimacy becomes more valuable because of its rarity as well as because of its innate value, which was an early problem in Germany because of the early bureaucratization of that society. In fact interpersonal intimacy in America is increasingly not taken for granted as the norm of everyday life, but as something powerful just because it is both potent and rare.

Oddly enough, the major difference between German and British-style (and thus also American-style) individualism is that German-style Protestantism traditionally functioned within a bureaucratic environment that had little room for individual expressiveness, since it was almost totally created by elites rather than created in partnership, more or less, among equals. Therefore German individualism took the form of rather asocial, rather intellectual, brooding, that might tie one emotionally to God, but had little practical consequences for everyday social partnerships. All that was left for this-worldly achievement for this Germanic version of individualism was endless longing with no outlet, except perhaps for the religious or later on the nationalistic and/or political one. That is why Germans have been described as being like coconuts, hard (oriented to bureaucracy and to hierarchy) on the outside and soft on the inside (they long for expressing their inner natures, and so brood about comradeship that exists always in the past or in utopian futures, or at best with a few intimates who unless they have elite status never offer more than minimal protection against the dangers of life and of bureaucrats). The British (and especially Americans) are like peaches, soft on the outside (they are easygoing and can work in partnership with acquaintances, and so are usually gracious in doing so, since they never will know whom they will need as allies) on the outside, but hard on the inside (when they say they are essentially alone in the world and can relate ultimately only to God, they mean it literally).

To get back to Latin culture, like European culture in general it exists with the assumption that society at large is governed by elites, but their elites developed their culture before the Industrial Revolution so they take for granted that the bottom of society as well as the top are



pleasure-oriented, perhaps even more so and certainly in a more vulgar manner. For societies whose cultures were heavily marked by an Industrial Revolution that was forced upon them, like Germany, forced upon them by foreign competition and the destruction of native industries, the world of work is not considered a place for much sociability or for much hedonistic pleasure derived from the work itself, except for elites whose work often reminds others of play. Instead for them such pleasure is an aspect of the past whose memory is slowly fading, or of a utopian future as described in various political ideologies, but it is not an aspect of the present. The present for them is better described as offering rat-race economic competition. Oddly enough, Americans consider such rat-race competition to be freely chosen and acceptable because it is not forced upon them by elites or by foreign competitors, but freely chosen because it is rational, and it is rational because they think they have no choice, it being for them the product of nature and not of society.

So to get back to the main point, how does America and Brazil deal with stress, since they operate under individualistic and collectivistic assumptions respectively? Members of both cultures believe they have no choice in how they handle stress, except that even in Brazil evangelical Christianity on the American model is undercutting their sense of cultural unity (and justification for rule by bureaucratic hierarchy of both a secular and religious sort, though especially the latter), while America is growing tired of rat-race economic competition and like the Latins are emphasizing more and more emotional expression through art and music as a way to get back in touch with their feelings (except that such cultural expressions are usually created as commodities for the mass of people instead of by them, so that as corporate creations they take on the lowest common denominator understandings of their creators). Thus the Latins have a comfort level in expressing themselves emotionally, for good and for ill, that is expressed in their cultural creations in a way that Americans seem to get second-hand through corporate products, though the impersonality of the modern world is starting to impinge on Latin culture also. Also, Americans, still do admire sincere expressions of emotion among intimates, but the ability of this to compete with commercial methods of recreation as a basis for sociability is increasingly in question; you might say it is admired and valued highly not because it is any longer considered indispensable, but because it is potent and valuable just because it is so rare.

In Brazil the evangelicals are cutting their ties with their hedonistic, happy-go-lucky brethren, and are emphasizing economic rationality, ambition, and self-control for themselves and for their families, and are sacrificing overall communal solidarities in the process. They expect to provide for society at large economic advance, as do their counterparts in the US, but expect little can be done in regard to social change other than on a piecemeal basis, again like in America. Many of them will probably suffer from individual hysteria, again like in America. An example of such hysteria is the way a middle-class workaholic who for reasons of economic reversal, health problems, or just retirement finds it necessary to find a meaning to life other than what comes from both work and the competitiveness of the working environment, and can't.

One way to look at hysteria of the sort commonly found in individualistic societies such as America is to note that with the decline of faith in individualism as a social ideology, decline in faith that money can buy happiness, decline in faith that acquaintanceship will lead to strong social camaraderie, as well as the results of individual sources of unhappiness, the result can be (1) extreme hedonism - obsession with sex, for example, sexual fetishes, pornography, "swinging," and drug use; (2) experimentation with sexual identity; (3) serial monogamy; (4) a reaffirmation of workaholicism as if there is no alternative to a life devoted to work; (5) experimentation by joining cults, religious and secular; and (6) extreme social rootlessness. All these are individualistic reactions to stress, essentially an emphasis on personal experimentation. There are also collectivistic reactions to stress, essentially an extreme conservatism and a seeking for security that comes from not experimenting but from seeking extreme social order through for example (1) religious fundamentalism or (2) intolerance for what are considered to be threats to social order, usually social outsiders of some sort, that often takes the form of paranoia.

Reactions to stress in Africa may tend toward the individualistic forms mentioned above, just like in America, but more likely are the more collectivistic forms reflecting the collectivistic traditions innate to African cultures. This may take the form of tribalism and hostility to outsiders that compete with locals or who do not respect local traditions. This may also take the form of demagogic politicians who try to treat the state as if it is a giant community, and who demand that it be thought of as one, for example by encouraging a state religion to foster unity while also arousing hatred of a religious

minority. What is happening here is in many ways the equivalent at the state level of witchcraft accusations at the local level which are often used to attack those who are perceived to threaten communal unity by being too rich, by not sharing, by not being gracious to neighbors, etc.

Since family and communal ties tend to be strong in the African context, much like traditionally in Europe, and less so in America, there is often extreme ambivalence about family and communal loyalties, both because of abuse of authority by superiors toward inferiors and because of guilt aroused by the weakening of loyalties or because of conflicting loyalties. The result can take a physical form, perhaps a kind of paralysis, or a feeling of being possessed by an ancestor or a spirit, following the interpretations of traditional religion, all of which falls under the rubric of conversion hysteria, to use the traditional Freudian term. These are the kinds of hysteria which were noticed in Europe a hundred years ago, which still exist there somewhat, but are comparatively rare in America. These symptoms can be shared culturally and socially, and may take the form of mass hysteria, such as occurs in riots, radical political programs, and persecution of ethnic and religious minorities. Even in Europe soccer hooliganism reflects communal antagonisms that are much more pronounced in Europe than in America, where in effect communal loyalty is expressed by going to war, at least temporarily, against rival communities. In a sense strong communal loyalties plus innate hysteria, brought about by the various sources of unhappiness common to the modern world, including a weakening source of pleasure in communal life that must be revived through such artificial means as antagonism toward other communities, is reflected in a state of working-class dependency, in this case on a rather simple means for relieving their tensions.

Society at large under such circumstances is dependent on elite control for ensuring civility, since the working class with their interest in pleasure, even when produced by such bizarre means, shows little interest in self-control and the civility of forethought. Such elite control can of course backfire because it is often overdone, and in any case confirms and continues the dependency, and in other areas of life the docility, of the working class of Europe. Of course there is also such a thing as excessive self-control and a reaction to it, excessive experimentation, both of which reflect the kinds of individual hysteria found in America.

Whatever the dangers to Africa of tribalism and conflicts between tribes, the dangers are just as bad or worse for cultural revival movements to try to make out of each nation there a giant tribe, with its own state religion, intolerant of competitors. Then they would be going down the path of fascist European states who tried to create out of each state the equivalent of giant local communities with state elites pretending to be the equivalent of local elites, state loyalties pretending to be the equivalent of local communal loyalties. Americans have traditionally known they live among strangers, and we think it is the nature of the modern world, and nothing can be done about it. We do not necessarily deal with the circumstances that produce these conditions very well, and individual hysteria is one result, but mass hysteria is even worse.

Up to now the Christianity brought to Africa by the colonial powers was much like the Christianity traditionally practiced in Brazil in that it supported elite rule over tribal and village Africa. An Africa of American-style evangelical Christianity, without the checks and balances found in America of the rule of law and of having to compete for influence with non-evangelicals, may have quite different results than what occurs in America. It may prove to be very anti-intellectual, very escapist, having many of the good qualities of traditional African communal solidarity, but given the stressful circumstances of the modern world it may not have the intellectual capacity to deal with these stresses, producing instead blind rage and mass hysteria. A thoughtful Christianity and a thoughtful Islam, since fundamentalist Islam suffers from many of the same problems, would be a boon for Africa. Thoughtless mass hysteria would not.

One can say that Americans have a romanticized view of achieved status, of all the great buddies we will get out of our endless new acquaintances, while most traditional societies, even one so modern as that found in Germany, have a romanticized view of ascribed status, at least concerning the family and old friendships dating back to childhood. They sometime wonder why life can't be more like that, comfortable and traditional, and they sometimes wonder perhaps it can be if they could just get rid of the foreigners. For that matter, America's infatuation with endless opportunities to start over, much like endless shopping, in many ways has reached a point of absurdity, as in the way our entertainment media love to tell us about endless romantic opportunities, for celebrities that is. They love telling us how their getting married for the sixth time is so romantic, while the rest of us tend to wonder if this is not the triumph of hope over experience.

Hysteria in the American context is mostly seen as histrionic personalities, people obsessed with "fitting in" by playing a role in effect, fitting in to acquaintanceships and peer groups for the most part, less so anymore fitting in to family life, which just shows how weak American families have become. Hysteria traditionally in Europe, probably to a large extent in all traditional societies, involves fitting in to valued social groups, which means ambivalence arising out of hereditary loyalties, particularly arising in the family.

The traditional "role playing" of Latin societies is in some ways less extreme than histrionic personalities such as found among ambitious Americans just because the bureaucratic structure of their societies, as long as traditional cohesiveness is maintained, makes such role playing rather easy to do, and does leave room for a certain amount of attaining new social relationships freely chosen. This is particularly of the romantic sort, but also of the friendship sort so admired in America since we in America put on a pedestal sincere loyalties freely chosen. You might say culturally-structured pathologies, such as Latin machismo when carried too far, are relatively common in their societies but are ordinarily not as severe as pathologies arising out of very unstructured, idiosyncratic social situations such as are common in America, though there are exceptions to this rule, especially when fanatical elites seek to impose social order by pushing cultural traits to absurd extremes.

Modernizing African societies often have need to reaffirm communal loyalties, which Islam reemphasizes when they are weakening, and also have need to romanticize or just accentuate new loyalties freely chosen (though often predictable ones like neighborliness) which is accentuated by evangelical Christianity. Unlike the traditional mainstream Christian Churches which use elites to monitor processes of communal renewal, and seek to enforce communal morality which the elites may or may not enforce among themselves, evangelical Christianity relies on local individuals and also groups monitoring themselves. Though undoubtedly many fine, upstanding citizens will arise from this process of individual and communal revitalization, some will merely develop irrational, paranoid attitudes toward the world and their fellows. You can call it hypocrisy or just ignorance.

In America such irrationality merely harms the individual and a few innocent bystanders. Of course there is occasional mass hysteria in America, from mass conformity and not just an accumulation of individual reactions (as there is occasional individual hysteria even in

collectivistic societies). Also mass hysteria was more common in America's past when it was less of an individualistic society.

Still, in collectivistic societies which African societies still tend to be, mass hysteria is much more of a risk, especially when unscrupulous politicians get involved, and this is a risk which both fundamentalist Islam and fundamentalist Christianity face. Even in the community at large, there are those who treat religion, any religion, let's take polytheism for example, as a source of entertainment, and they don't care whether it is true or not because in general the difference between truth and falsehood isn't important to them, escapism and social conformity is. That is why missionaries for any religion should be wary about what they ask for. Lots and lots of insincere converts may not produce adherents who use religion as a source of moral responsibility, only as a source of identity, an identity which seeks sources of pleasure and meaning other than responsibility to ultimate reality.

In general taking the traits of one culture and transferring them to another where the checks and balances, the contexts, of the original culture are lost can lead to imperfect transmission of the culture. Ideologists too often forget this to their sorrow. True, much of this reflects disciples imperfectly passing on the message of their teachers, but partly this reflects the failure of their teachers.

If one wants to talk about cultural trajectories, the major difference between the culturally-driven German and American typical personalities is that Germans are extrapunitive and Americans are intrapunitive. Both cultures produce a certain amount of personal coldness in an anonymous social environment driven by work so they are comparable. Latin culture is much more the product of pleasure-loving aristocrats rather than work-oriented bureaucrats, and in any case crystallized at a time in history when social distance was less of a factor in community life which put on a pedestal intense communal interaction and an audience for emotional expression.

As a generalization, Americans are taught from youth to feel guilty when they are unfair, though the lesson doesn't always take, while Germans (partly because of the way they are raised, partly because of the lessons of life in that bureaucratic culture) are more likely to scapegoat others, particularly rivals. This is because the bureaucratization and lack of perceived opportunities in German society influences people so that (1) people do not have a wide-ranging life experience to offset their parochialism, (2) feelings of being trapped is offset by brooding that leads to fantasies, sometimes even to perverted

fantasies, and (3) the sense of hierarchy in life leads to the common experience of using others and not treating others as equals, as well as being used. To the extent American social conditions once again rebuilds an European-style class system, these "German" circumstances may return to America as well.

Traditionally, Americans' life ideal is one that admires action, not brooding, and certainly not perverted fantasies. Yet the conditions that made these ideals attainable, the existence of a frontier that offered many opportunities and that allowed generalized capabilities to develop as opposed to only the specialized skills valued in a bureaucratic society and the tunnel vision that comes with them, as well as the opportunity to constantly make social alliances as opposed to feeling trapped and developing loyalties to what often amounts to the conditions of one's enslavement, all this may be disappearing in America as an European-style class system reasserts itself.

For America to go even farther and be ruled by a culture-oriented rather than a work-oriented elite, in other words to become like a Latin culture such as Brazil's, it would in many ways be as if it had returned to the British culture of 500 years ago, the age of Shakespeare. That was an age when the British upper class was just starting to reconcile itself to the single-minded pursuit of monetary gain and the resulting vulgarities (even when moderated by personal religiosity) of the business classes, and they were just starting to accept that they must share power with them, to accept their conception as well as the upper-class conception of the common good. They were just starting to accept that the good intentions of an elite with cultural attainments who like to order people around, when they are not enjoying their own pleasures which is for them preferable which is why their rule is not automatically severe, cannot substitute for the management skills that come with getting down and dirty by working side by side with the common people. This is true even when these people are not especially interesting and have a single-minded devotion to their work and not much else, which is sometimes but not always the case.

Something complained about America by many Europeans, the lack of intellectual curiosity of much of the American population which results in cultural shallowness, which was acceptable in a world of many opportunities, may become a real liability when such opportunities disappear. However, even intellectual curiosity is no substitute for character, for gathering such knowledge may be the springboard for bigger and bigger crimes as well as, in a true democracy, the wisdom of



the mass of people acting as a restraint on their leaders' potential crimes. The accumulated wisdom by many people is often greater than the wisdom of any one of them, even though for managerial purposes the acceptance of responsibility by one person is often more effective than rule by committee.

Part of the sign of wisdom is the ability to separate fantasy from reality. Americans who put on a pedestal achieved social relationships, the endless switching of friends and even marriage partners, often romanticize what exists only in theory. Traditional societies, even those of Europe, who romanticize ascribed social relationships, the family most of all, often forget all relationships, even those based to a large extent on heredity, must be worked at. That is why the cultural ideal, the golden mean, tends to be much alike in all cultures. It is the belief about what is practicable that differs, and because no one knows everything one can learn from all cultural ideals even when ultimately they must be judged by standards separate from them but based on that reality which exists outside of all cultures, the ultimate reality if you will, to the extent that anyone can know it.

In summary regarding Africa, Islamic-style puritanism offers the possibility of reinvigorating communal loyalties and traditions directly. Its emphasis is somewhat more this-worldly and oriented toward traditional social ties than Christianity with its emphasis on "salvation" which makes it oriented toward the individual psyche in a sense, an individual psyche which tends to flee from its own individual longings and seeks release from its own anxiety through psychological merging with something outside itself, the proof of the pudding so to speak being in the feelings of "salvation" that result, rather than from the feelings of accomplishment that comes from fulfillment of duty and interpersonal closeness, which is a rather this-worldly attitude and also an Islamic one. Islam does in addition also have its mystical side that emphasizes a kind of uniting with the divine, which is based on its Sufi traditions, and Christianity does in addition also have its emphasis on practical, this-worldly morality. This is particularly true of its Protestant traditions which emphasize that the best this-worldly reward for a good character is success in interpersonal relationships, which is perhaps why Americans love the many chances to try again that a loosely-integrated society filled with acquaintances offers. Catholic traditions also emphasizes practical, this-worldly morality, but they believe it is best put into effect through fulfilling duty not in a local community of more or less equals (in many ways both the Islamic and the Protestant



ideal) but in the complicated, bureaucratized communities that produce the most complex cultures, and the elites, both secular and religious, that guard those cultures.

The ultimate hypocrisy of religion has always been practitioners who would not know what it means to live in a moral community if it hit them in the nose. They just want to feel secure by living in a goose-stepping community, and to secure their fragile egos by hating people who are different from them. Their attitude toward religion is much like the soccer hooligan's attitude toward the home team. I suppose multicultural nihilists who believe in nothing but their personal pleasure, a common elitist attitude nowadays in the "developed" world, is the opposite extreme. As usual, extremes are bad for the body politic.

For a final comparison, I once wrote an essay on "Social Isolation in Chinese and American Culture" found in my edited book, *Social Pathology in Comparative Perspective: The Nature and Psychology of Civil Society* (Braun 1995). That essay emphasized that individualism of the sort so idealized in America can produce perfectionism of both the saintly and the paranoid sort. In China both blame and praise are much more tied to social roles, and thus reflect social realities more than existential ponderings. In America "obedience to conscience" allows anxiety to be deflected by blaming others, by hopes of eventual self-perfection (forgiveness of sin), or by an ideological attitude of the sort, "If God approves, that's all that matters." In a sense loyalty to an ideology becomes proof of loyalty to God. In many other cultures around the world proper loyalty to people, and to social duties, is proof of loyalty to God. I mention in my essay:

When there is abuse in relationships, Chinese people are more likely to experience psychosomatic symptoms than to attribute blame to themselves or others. There is indeed a potential for hysteria, but unless induced by authority, paranoia will probably not be the result, because in general doing one's duty, even if it results in failure, is considered praiseworthy. It is not thought, as in the West, that failure itself is shameful and that blame must be attributed either to oneself or to others. (Braun 1995: 155)

American individualism is an extreme version of these Western attitudes, strongly influenced by the Christian salvation-oriented ethic. As long as lust for achievement (often resulting from "meaningfulness" that substitutes for a community that cannot provide it) is fulfilled, these attitudes have positive effects. If progress declines, so will the point of this ambition and this individualism. Africans should think

deeply if they really want to copy aspects of American culture without knowing our individualistic context, and all the consequences. It may merely result in a longing to blame others or to blame oneself, and an outlet in adoring God as a substitute for communicating with one's neighbors. That doesn't always work well even in America, though we can afford it, and will work even less well in African societies which are so much poorer than us, and where cooperation between people is increasingly problematic because of population growth and modernization, yet deeply longed for.

Community feeling being replaced by the state treated as if it is a giant community, where social order derives increasingly from self-righteous fanaticism and the need of the state to create order by force, however, is not an alternative even when clothed in religion. The state pretending to be an intimate community did not work well in fascist Europe, and the state pretending to be a giant tribe, governed by tribal unity and a tribal religion, is probably as unrealistic, an example of wishful thinking, and if it results in an attempt to produce social order by force, an example of mass hysteria.

Admittedly, though I emphasize differences between societies, such traditions can change within a society over time, sometimes in an evolutionary sense, sometimes reflecting mere chance. Thus the attack on Pearl Harbor that started World War II for America can be conceived of as precipitating many individual shocks that produced an accumulation of individual hysterias that produced popular support of, for example, war against Germany. However the entrance of America into World War I against Germany reflected less extreme personal anger against Germany, except among certain elite groups, and more social conformity and acceptance of this situation as produced by American elites. The effect of this social conformity, however, produced a kind of mass hysteria against German culture that was not present in World War II, resulting in changing the names of certain German-sounding foods, removing the German language from certain school curricula, etc. There seemed to have been a certain scapegoating of German culture at that time, quite possibly reflecting a general fear of European collectivist political ideologies because of the great mass of European immigrants to our shores and the fear that they would not assimilate, a fear that had become dissipated by World War II.

To get back to that early period, during World War I and shortly thereafter there had been great fear among American nativists of both German-style authoritarianism and shortly later Russian-style

communist authoritarianism, which likely reflected at least partially a nativist in-group loyalty and a dislike of foreigners including foreign immigrants to our shores more than objective political reasoning. This was an extreme version of what might be called the Ku Klux Klan (an American nativist organization known for hating those who are not white and Protestant) version of foreign policy. The scapegoating of Germans and German culture during World War I was one result. It seems that even America, at least during certain times in its history, was not immune to the conformist pressures of mass hysteria.



PART II

PRACTICAL ISSUES



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### FIGUREHEAD POLITICIANS AND DEMOCRACY

Remember the American Revolution? By the way, some of the “politically correct” now call it the American War of Independence (it seems they don’t like upsetting people who think of it only as a bourgeois revolt) but that’s another story. The politicians of the American Revolution saw the European leadership class (the aristocracy) as figureheads, people who did not earn their positions in society, but kept them through reimbursed advisors (their lackeys), who did the real work while their patrons engaged in public relations stunts. There was a fear that with the ending of the frontier an European-style class system would return to America, and with it this European state of affairs. Well, has it? Has the ending of the (social and economic) frontier meant that image-mongering by bureaucrats, in both the public and private sector, at least in the sense of creating jobs for themselves, become the major outlet for ambition in America? Their talents certainly often lie in the direction of lobbying for their patrons and for expansion of their own functions, their empowerment if no one else’s.

Image management, not real management - sound familiar? As a matter of fact, increasingly leadership cliques in cultural organizations are often more ideological than the mass of followers they lead, which perhaps at one time would have been resisted more by the leaders themselves, or if not by their followers, as being inherently undemocratic. But now in an increasingly anonymous and bureaucratized society, or to be more accurate societies, some people think that the mass of people don’t have any deep convictions. Poll results often aren’t a real substitute for true communication since they mix together real convictions and statements that are made to get the poll takers off of their backs. It’s not that followers can’t be unreasonable, it’s just that they have something to react to, their everyday lives, which their leaders, often much richer and more powerful socially, are often far removed from. Then again, followers who don’t communicate with their leaders often don’t learn the long-term purposes for their leaders’ broader vision, whatever it is.

Of course the bureaucrats who lead big business are also often far removed from the day to day problems of their businesses, sometimes more concerned with public relations stunts to drive up stock prices (whatever they do when publicized will sound good to investors who don't know the real details of how these businesses work), than with the day to day problems of these businesses. When the leaders of big businesses are paid as much as they are, they can afford to not stick around too long, and so not face the long-term consequences of their decisions. The employees, who often depend on things like pensions, they might want to stick around. Oh, I forgot, there are fewer and fewer businesses offering pensions anymore. Unlike their bosses, they stick around because they can't afford to leave.

The result is that elites of both the left and the right now act as if since there are fewer and fewer common values, it is up to them to create them. The result of course is often ritualism, symbolic morality rather than practical morality. Now let's look at the United States. Politically the Democrats who tend to get the votes of the urban working class nevertheless are led by professionals for whom monetary solutions to problems tend not to stick in the pockets of the poor, but in their pockets who make money off of the poor and the working class. And while the Republicans tend to get the votes of small business owners and property owners, particularly from rural areas, they also tend to be led by the leaders of big business, who love to have oligopolistic power and wish small businesses which threaten their market share would just go away. Competition, something which the poor and the working class and even the middle class face all their lives, which is why they are so concerned with fair competition, is not something their political leaders worry about so much. They worry about it for themselves, just not so much for the people they lead. That is why for their followers they so often offer ritualism and public relations stunts. Practical morality is something else. Here are some ways in which symbolic morality has driven out practical morality.

1. Affirmative action - What we now call affirmative action is not so much a prophylactic against discrimination nor is it really a remedying of past discrimination (since the people affected are mostly not around anymore) but it can be a boondoggle for the well-connected. Then it is like political patronage which rarely helps the poor members of target ethnic groups as much as the well-off ones. Affirmative action should be for the poor, as opposed to affirmative action for the relatively well-off, a reform of affirmative action which is a reform of a reform that should not be necessary, but too often is.



2. Law as blackmail - To have a functioning legal system one must start with a knowledge of certain basic realities that impose constraints, such as that this is an anonymous society and courts often don't in any realistic sense have the fact-gathering capacity to judge the cases set before them. Nevertheless, suits are brought and foolish and frivolous suits can wear down their opponents, because the legal system is so often avoided if at all possible. Actually, the fallibility of courts is recognized in law, for why do we have a system of appeals at all, if courts never make mistakes, or as the people on the bottom say it, aren't just plain ignorant at times? To honestly ascertain what problems courts realistically can solve and cannot solve, and sometimes this is just a matter of lowering their case loads, is a start at returning justice to the justice system. Many judges don't evaluate cases as much as sign their names to legal opinions essentially written by their law clerks. But then there are professors who add their names to papers essentially written by their research assistants, or sometimes just the graduate students they teach, which leads us to the next issue.

3. Education - I think you will find that in many universities in America the actual tuition of undergraduates is much less than the actual cost of teaching them, especially for majors that rely on large lecture courses or rely heavily on the use of graduate students to teach undergraduates. Tuition is based on an average cost, a cost that in reality includes all the ways in which students subsidize the rest of the university. Of course students themselves are supposedly subsidized, but all this means is that universities have many expenses, and their income can be divided by the number of students, but in reality it covers many areas which benefits only a small minority of students. Unlike Germany, for example, where higher education is somewhat restricted, but apprenticeships and later skilled-worker salaries are open to large numbers of people, here higher education is more open (though often leading to the high school graduate jobs of two generations ago), while apprenticeships often require personal connections. Which do you think working people would rather have?

4. Make-work instead of helping the poor - You would think that the great explosion in growth of the suburbs following World War II could have occurred during the 1930's as the government pumped money into the economy to create jobs. But it didn't occur, because this would have destabilized pre-existing markets by encouraging unwanted competition. Instead jobs were created through make-work, you know the sort, painting murals in post offices and the like, though in that case I could think of much worse ways to spend public money. Let's see if

our ongoing efforts to help the poor get off welfare follow the same pattern.

5. Business morality as public relations - Big business which so often constantly communicates with the rest of the world about how moral they are, makes us wonder, why are they telling us all of this? Morality is *being* moral, not just telling everybody how moral you are, especially when practice is far less obvious than the rhetoric. Their management consultants seem to have confused morality with public relations.

In all these cases, our bureaucratized elites rely more on theoretical reason, sometimes the products of university or privately-based consultants (a classic joke is that a management consultant is someone who borrows your watch and then tells you what time it is), than on practical reason, based on knowledge of the holistic effects of their plans. All this means is that what happens much too often is that leaders do not communicate with followers about whether their plans will probably work, what are the side-effects, and in general are more concerned for image-mongering and ritualism and the going-through-the-motions this entails than really helping people, the neurotic guilt of the wealthy classes notwithstanding.

In general our society is now led by production elites, many of whom are producing what some have called the McDonaldization of Society. Actually Prof. George Ritzer, a sociology professor, wrote a book called *The McDonaldization of Society* (Ritzer 2004). Meanwhile a good deal of our cultural elites are producing fantasy-driven sound bites as discourse and public debate, though more often with talking heads and without the public. Is it conservative to advocate money-making as the highest social good until maldistribution of income threatens the social order? That's become modern conservatism for many people. Is it liberal to advocate the state subsidizing hedonism in the short-run at the expense of a reasonable society in the long run? That's become modern liberalism to a large extent for many people. That's also why for years helping the poor has become not so much giving money to the poor as giving money to the people who make money off the poor.

What we have is a failure to communicate, but also a whole lot more. What we have is a failure to get together to communicate, a failure by leaders to recognize what the mass of people face in their everyday lives, the increasing bureaucratization of their work lives, the increasing anonymity of their private lives. What we have is less a failure of politics as a failure of community.

Even though, for example, politicians serve geographical areas, they rarely have much contact with the residents of these areas in any profound sense. Their contacts are more likely with lobbyists and various kinds of insiders. Do they have any basis for evaluating the half-truths the lobbyists feed them, even the high-minded rich people with plenty of time on their hands who supply our class of activists. Gordon S. Wood in his book *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* describes 18th century politics in the colonies before the American Revolution in these terms: "Translating the personal, social, and economic power of the gentry into political authority was essentially what eighteenth-century politics was about" (Wood 1991: 88). It would be a pity if that is what early 21st century politics in America is also becoming about.

In summary social order nowadays mostly comes through the desires of elites to maintain control, desires which at least in the short run tend to be more effective than the desires of the mass of people which are filtered through their representatives, or sometimes their rulers, direct democracy being almost unknown in the modern world. Nevertheless, once economic growth to a serious extent takes place it reduces social tensions and once there are no ongoing social conflicts, helps keep them from ever arising. In a sense if America ever becomes a poor country again, it would likely be accompanied by the rise of severe ideological, ethnic, and religious tensions until expectations for improvement diminished sufficiently to end all hope.

This is separate from the issue of the effectiveness of government. In a sense as long as there are economic good times, people will ordinarily overlook the ineffectiveness of government since they depend less on it. Ineffective here means something different from tyrannical or persecutory, where government becomes a direct threat to segments of the population. Nevertheless ineffective government produces dissatisfaction which can eventually reach a critical mass, particularly when economic growth is no longer available to buffer the effects of ineffective government.

One reason for ineffective government is when the leaders of democracies are no longer the notables of the communities they represent, but are merely people who run for office as their way of making a living, or occasionally out of boredom or ideological fervor. To the extent there develops a tradition of figurehead leaders (not all that different than what happens in monarchies where the originators of dynasties were competent but not their descendants), they tend to become dependent on advice from think tanks, universities, lobbyists, and

public relations consultants, which they may or may not know how to evaluate. No doubt such modern methods of gathering information can be used effectively, but in the case of figurehead leaders they use them because they don't know the problems of the people they represent and don't know how to ask the people, at least directly.

In a sense the problems of nation-building exist in all nations, rich and poor alike. Only the severity of the problems, the costs of failure particularly, differ. One way to look at the standards for government, including democratic government, is to look at the following functions of government:

1. Representativeness of government (representing the will of the people, and also understanding their problems)
2. Efficacy of government (which is the same thing as doing a good job)
3. Accountability of government (Can the people control or at least influence the politicians they enable to gain power?)
4. Relevance of government (this is in terms of problem-solving as well as in terms of personal identity. In many societies local communities are more important than the central government.)
5. Relevance of political parties (Do they produce a spirit of compromise and cooperation between political rivals?)
6. The social and cultural qualities of the overall national community (for example, does the size of the community inhibit communication between the leaders and the led, are there common standards for evaluating intellectual competence and moral character, and is there a tradition of trust between the leaders and the led?)

Regarding effective government, the theory of American politics is that local government should be the most competent because it is the closest to the people, and the Federal government should be the least competent because it is the farthest. Instead the Federal government is commonly thought of by those who compare local government and it to be the most competent, partly because it is the branch most filled with people from elite families offering themselves for public service, while local government is that branch most filled with those who enter government service not for the public service but for the money.

The American ideal, which was once also the British ideal even when not well-practiced in the 18th century, has become an ideal not well-practiced now either. Those were the days when the most respected American politicians really were amateurs, who did their job, then got out, rather than try to seek to spend a lifetime living and getting rich at

public expense, which is what made the American governmental elite consider the British governmental elite of that time to be such hypocrites. Unfortunately, the more things change, the more they remain the same.

E. E. Schattschneider in his classic of political analysis, *Party Government: American Government in Action* (Schattschneider 2004) originally published in 1942 by Rinehart & Company, claimed that in the American party system, the influentials, like senators and presidents, needed the leaders of political machines to get out the vote, more than the other way around. For that matter, the leaders of political machines were sensitive to special interests and their lobbyists, for they might disturb the passivity of the electorate which the machines relied on, and took for granted that small group of people connected to those who benefited from machine politics who loomed large just because the political influence of apathetic average citizens loomed so small, and of course they were also quite sensitive to money-making activities which the rich offered them, sometimes legally and sometimes skirting that issue. But what they really were dependent on was an uninvolved electorate. Again, the more things change, the more they remain the same. Things are better now, I suppose, than they were in 1942 regarding the influence of machine politics in America, and in other societies as well, but not that much better.

Things are also better than they were in 1776 under the British. But again, not as much better as we would hope, or even as much as the people in 1776 hoped it would be. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams all were rather disappointed at the end of their lives at the direction American politics was taking. They had all tried to be statesmen, all in their own way. Ralph Ketcham's *Presidents Above Party: The First American Presidency, 1789–1829* (Ketcham 1987) describes the reasons for their disappointment. The same can't be said about all their successors.

To sustain a democratic society we're going to need much more politics based on recognition of the experiences of the people we're trying to help, mainly because we need to communicate with them, to produce inductive reasoning based on common experiences, not deductive reasoning based on ideological preconceptions. That is the lesson of American pragmatism. The alternative is something similar to the 1920's German Weimar Republic politics, and we know where that led.

Regarding present-day American politics, we also know where the increasing ideological tone of our top leaders as represented in both

our major parties is leading us, facilitated by the get-out-the-vote machine hacks. It is not a surprise when typically the mass of voters vote for gridlock between Congress and the Executive Branch. It is the only way they know how to watch over them and keep them out of trouble. This is especially so when they fear it is the permanent bureaucracy that is doing the real governing, they and the lobbyists with whom they exist in symbiotic embrace, with the benign figureheads smiling and grinning and watching over it all, like constitutional monarchs.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### SOCIAL ENGINEERING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS STUNTS

It is always odd to learn about democracy from elites. This is especially true when they are politicians who distort the nature of democracy in their rhetoric. Thus their common talk in praise of the middle class as the basis for democracy rarely discusses the middle class as a group that provides a basis for communication and even political compromise between the rich and the poor, or the middle class who in terms of character behaves in a way that avoids extremes of either arrogance or obsequiousness that is a great temptation for the rich and the poor respectively. Instead politicians often merely assume that if the middle class are the biggest group in society, and are rich enough, then they just won't need much done for them by government. They mistake social order for democracy, so that any society that is orderly so that the mass of people don't have complaints must be democratic. In other words any society that gets the support of the mass of people according to them is democratic which means almost all societies are democratic.

In some ways 18th century America is a better model for Third World democracies than present-day America because our leaders knew then how to get public support through embodying as well as enforcing public morality, not merely trying to bribe the population with bread and circuses, which only works as long as the economy is good.

A book that very much recounts some of the dilemmas of modern democratic politics, particularly the tendency to go from mass political interest as a social ideal to privatism and disdain of politics as being inferior to absorption in individual ambition and then back again is Albert O. Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements: Private Interest and Public Action* (Hirschman 2002). He starts by distinguishing between pleasure that arises from emotional peaks (that are inherently difficult to sustain) and comfort (like air temperature and a happy family life) that are a truer source of happiness since they are more consistent and reliable than simple pleasures, yet are so easily taken for granted and noticed mostly when they are missing. Involvement in public affairs,

like involvement in family life, in many ways evens-out “emotional highs” as a source of personal fulfillment, but because political activism is so often initiated because of propaganda campaigns and unrealistic idealism it often leads to disillusionment and feelings of futility, while returning to concern merely for private pleasures in fact often leads to unrealistic hedonism that is not sustainable, leading easily to satiation, and ultimately to boredom. “Just as the public life comes as a relief from the boredom of the private life, so does the latter provide a refuge from the paroxysm and futility of public endeavors.” (Hirschman 2002: 129)

As a matter of fact this book gives reference to another interesting book, *Themes of Work and Love in Adulthood* (Smelser and Erikson 1980) which shows some of the unreality of the modern division of labor between work that has become so utterly instrumental that it is hard to find personal meaning (or “love”) for it, and an idealization of private personal endeavors that are a search for “love” that cannot be realistically fulfilled because that which is enjoyed must reflect some effort, some commitment, not mere endless consumption of pleasure. It is a lesson as old as Plato’s that happiness is not mere itching and then scratching and is in need of constant reminding just because there is so much profit to be made in idle promises, the appealing to fantasy function of modern mass media and its political adjuncts.

In fact American politicians tend to refuse to discuss what most everyone discussed in the 18th century at the time of America’s founding, again that old story, that America is a mixed polity with democratic, aristocratic and monarchical elements, though admittedly the democratic elements have become more and more important over time (see *The Creation of the American Republic 1776–1787* (Wood 1998)). American politicians certainly never discuss how America’s presidential democracy is different from Europe’s parliamentary democracy. Europe’s democracy has fewer checks and balances, less emphasis on separation of powers, and is both more democratic and often more unstable. That is why European states sometimes fluctuate between many governments one after the other, as during Germany’s Weimar Republic, and rule by decree, which is the ultimate repudiation of democracy even when it is claimed to be the true will of the people as in the case of Hitler, Mussolini, and to a much lesser extent, Charles de Gaulle in France.

The theory of American government originally was that the notables of the community would be elected by acclamation, which is



another way of saying people would know who they were voting for. Now instead political machines exist in order to make sure there are always political candidates in the pipeline because for the most part there are no natural notables of the community to achieve positions of leadership. Thus the natural checks and balances of society, the communal checks and balances rather than the bureaucratic kind, that people will know enough about the candidates they vote for other than to react to scandals in their past, or to blame them for general political and economic conditions, often those they are not particularly responsible for, has too often fallen into disuse except under the unusual circumstances of scandal or extreme social disorder. That is to say extreme public concern and involvement, which is one way of describing democracy, itself has fallen into disuse except as an extreme measure, like breaking a glass and pulling out the fire extinguisher, to get rid of scoundrels. A classic discussion of the reality of America's political party system that I have referred to before but it bears repeating is E. E. Schattschneider, *Party Government: American Government in Action* (Schattschneider 2004; originally published by Rinehart & Company in 1942).

The original ideal at the time of the American Revolution was of the notables of the community being elected to represent their neighbors, essentially amateurs who would make their point and get out. They would not be professional politicians and their lackeys who would work the system so that they would forever feed at the public trough, and would make civil servants feel that keeping certain politicians in power was part of their job description. That hope did not last long.

As Gary Wills in *Explaining America: The Federalist* (Wills 1981) points out, you will notice that I referred to this book in my essay dealing with "Prospects for Democracy" in the first chapter, but again this bears repeating, both James Madison and Alexander Hamilton were greatly influenced by the Scottish philosopher and essayist, David Hume, who in his essay "Of the First Principles of Government" mentions that government gains its support from the people by appealing to their self-interest, by the ambition of notables and all those who seek to be notable, by social conformity and loyalty in a very basic sense (typically the major source of loyalty from the masses), by the use of force, and by influence-peddling (the dispensing of honors and payoffs which is the hallmark of patronage-driven government). David Hume was himself a monarchist for whom politics was so difficult to run properly that inherited leadership at the top of the executive branch

was considered a viable substitute. He likewise believed in the necessity of political patronage to grease the wheels of government in those areas where politics was unavoidable. For a while anyway, America's political leaders were more idealistic than their British counterparts and thought politics could be run without resort to figurehead leaders or complex patronage schemes.

At least through the administration of President John Quincy Adams there was some belief at the top of our government that presidents should emphasize the common good as their ultimate goal, and not build up their personal power through patronage machines, that their intellectual arguments should be credible and serve the same end, and that ultimately leaders should try to represent the common good as articulated by the mass of people for whom ongoing communication between the leaders and the led was considered a sign of a healthy community. What was opposed was manipulation of the community through sophistries, the foolish ritualism more apropos to decadent monarchies, and catering to special interests who would support patronage machines, something which would also induce passivity in the mass of population. These values were ideals of the ancient republics as well, and the falling away from these ideals in the Roman Republic especially was a standing warning for dangers ahead for modern republics at America's founding and it seems even now.

America's two party system, a cultural, not a legal tradition, is often criticized for being so much alike, as if they are two factions of the same overall party. Well, like Communists who tolerate factions but not competing parties, we in America follow the 18th century tradition that excessive factionalism is bad. We don't like four or five or ten competing parties each siphoning off particular social constituencies and producing a politics of extreme factionalism. In Europe this is done because people express their social loyalties that way, and the necessary compromises are handled by elites in Parliament. In America each candidate for a major government position is the head of an immense coalition, given our two party and not six or ten party system, and electing this candidate is a means to legitimize that particular coalition.

In fact in the early days of the republic the Federalists (the Republicans are their spiritual descendants) were a traditional upper-class party who believed the rich should monitor society including themselves not only to facilitate economic growth but to enforce public morality, while their opponents the Democratic Republicans (as the

historians call them, who eventually became the modern Democrats) were largely a rural party who believed that the rich and the powerful needed government monitoring, not so much the poor. To a certain extent the two parties have switched places over time in the sense that the Republicans now believe in limited government rather than an organic society where elites would actually set standards and enforce them, while the Democrats now believe in activist government partly because they see no way for the working class to remain independent and without need of government intervention in their lives. The Republicans, however just as in the old days of the Federalists are still moralistic, just they aren't particularly good at being thought of as moral leaders anymore since so many of them have no higher goal than to enjoy their wealth in peace. This sets a model more for hedonism than for morality. The Democrats don't so much take for granted the moral virtue of the working class (which Thomas Jefferson, the leader of the Democratic Republicans, certainly did), as mainly concentrate on government subsidies. It is as if they feel personal morality is not of much concern to the government even for the rich (something which Thomas Jefferson would not have stood for, since he felt that though the poor did not need that much monitoring of their morals, the rich at the head of society certainly did).

In many ways American political parties have become more and more like European left and right-wing political parties. The great concern of modern government is with trickle-down economics and with bread and circuses for the masses, but with direct input from the masses, other than at election time, hardly at all. Between elections elites and bureaucrats pretty much set the agenda for government, in modern America, and in much of the rest of the world also.

So how is America now different from Europe? The traditions of communal practices differ, not the ultimate ideals which are pretty much the same now as they were the same in the 18th century, and they have evolved in the same direction over time in both America and Europe, toward increasing anonymity and bureaucratization of society, but not at the same rate. America is still a less orderly, a less bureaucratized society than Europe, for good and for ill.

In fact a society as obsessed with achievement, and thus which ignores its working class as much as we do, will define democracy as social mobility for the few, rather than as producing good working-class lives for the many. If even this social mobility slows down, then we will probably become a society troubled by snobbishness, which is

a traditional problem in Britain. The cult of celebrity which so dominates modern American life points in that direction. One of the reasons why we are increasingly offered demagogic politicians and policies that function as public relations stunts is that it is thought that is what motivates us, or at least what political consultants tell their clients is what motivates us. Politicians increasingly avoid hard questions, and because of that so do we.

In a sense the entertainment, the recreational, and the narcissistic aspects of virtue (the kind that allows one to feel self-righteous, but never guilty) have become emphasized in American society. Meanwhile, our sense of political and even moral community stagnates. The individualism of American life, to the extent it turns into narcissism, offers isolated intellectuals who ponder endlessly and take nothing on faith, isolated religious folk who take everything on faith, and very little communication between these groups. It is increasingly hard to achieve depth of character, which should result in trust in people, in politics, in culture, and even in ourselves. We are a social species after all, not a robotic one. The desperation that leads to insipid materialism as if it is all there is then rebounds to bland religiosity, as if that is all there is as an alternative.

Without a realistic feeling of community, a feeling of the possibility of learning from others, all that is trusted is one's own prejudices, the narcissist's source of truth. It is little surprise that atheists and religious alike often pray for what they really want, which is not to have to change, or think, hardly at all.

A politics of public relations stunts produces disillusionment, not hopelessness among those that never hoped for more, just disillusionment at not knowing what the odds really are for the success of policies opposed by special interests or pushed by special interests. As a result we become either non-judgmental or excessively judgmental, and in either case we no longer have great reservoirs of public trust for our governing class.

We have gotten used to "spin" as the way politicians communicate to the public. "Spin" which is a combination of excuse-making, distorting, and outright lying, was perfected to handle the scandals of "celebrities" by discussing their lives in a manner to accentuate the entertainment value of their actions and to minimize drawing any conclusions and learning anything. We have gotten used to polling as attempts, not to learn our opinions, but to learn what images we react to so that they can be attached to almost any policy and fed back to us.

With such an emphasis on image, is it any surprise that the temptation is to rely on image as a substitute for competence? Like the monarchs of Europe who eventually became more important as a place in an organizational chart than for what they did, the temptation is for our leaders to become figureheads too, merely fronts for the "advisors" who provide them with ideas.

It is dangerous when judges act like kings, and legislators act like aristocrats. It is dangerous when government becomes both bureaucratic and distant from the people they are meant to serve, and not merely at the highest levels. You would think local government should reflect our local sense of community, but often it doesn't, but is often the prime example of political machines and patronage politics at work. It is dangerous when all these levels of leaders, so often far removed from and even more likely lacking concern for the common experience, become dependent upon intellectual fads for ideas because they have so few ideas themselves, and need a constant supply of slogans.

In comparison to us, European life increases working-class dependence on ruling elites, and gives a tone to cultural life where fantasizing about even more orderliness, utopian ideologies and political radicalism, has more legitimacy there than among us, since they expect more from government and from elites, even when it is merely a matter of changing elites. Our unhappy people tend not to be so politicized, and learn self-reliance to such a degree that in our slums this reaches the point of criminal absurdity.

Obviously Europe can learn from us to stop expecting so much from intellectual fads. So can our own intellectual classes who often consume these fads like candies. We of course can learn that merely having money in one's pocket cannot buy happiness, that some kinds of happiness really do require social cooperation, that in fact social disorder can create jobs to repair this disorder without creating happiness to any great degree.

Once ensuring the independence of what would otherwise be the dependent classes, which is basically the working class in general, and continuously judging the honor, and the competence, of the leadership classes, that they remain worthy to rule, was what Thomas Jefferson considered to be the goal of American politics. What he feared for America was what Europe already had, figurehead rulers. It would be a real pity if what he feared should come to pass.

In some ways the Democrats and the Republicans have become much like the aristocratic parties of 18th century Britain. The Democrats

as the party of the cultural elite are like the Tories, and the Republicans as the party of the business elite are like the Whigs. True, the Democrats get their mass base of support from the urban working class, but they still tend to get their marching orders from the professional classes who make money off of the working class. Programs to help the working class offer them services, but the money will probably stick in the pockets of the professional classes. And the Republicans get their mass base of support from small town moralists and property owners, but the party is still dominated by big businesses who flick like lounging hippopotami with their tails against upstart small business competitors. Thus both parties take for granted the votes of their mass base, while often driving their parties to serve the interests of what they consider to be swing groups, these small but powerful special interests.

In fact there seems to be an “intellectualizing” of government functions throughout the world. Partly this is because it is thought that the mass of people will not give honest answers when it comes to asking if money should be spent on them, as is increasingly the case. So instead outsiders are asked to survey the situation and come to conclusions independently. That they often make mistakes by being so far removed from the people they serve is an unfortunate side-effect.

Competency in leadership, as opposed to public relations stunts, is what determines that the people who deserve to be helped are helped, and not merely those with the most aggressive lobbyists. Among the disabled it should be people with back injuries who get to return to work through access to ergonomically-designed chairs, not alcoholic airline pilots. Among women it should be those whose good service has not been appreciated by those who pay them as little as they can get away with in sweatshop working conditions, not wealthy and powerful lawyers and accountants who want to be promoted to partner without having to work long hours or bring in customers. Now to return to a more typically Republican issue, business efficiency, why are military budgets so bloated and wasteful? Is it because small businesses are afraid to bid on military projects? Often this is because these are contracts so filled with abstruse, untypical for business language and regulations. Insiders know this is hot air but they make the effort to bid anyway on these contracts because they know outsiders will be scared away and thus they will be lacking competition.

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Now is as good a time as any to discuss the psychological consequences of all of this, the production of the idealized (at least by the mass media) personality type, the Yuppie (Young, Urban Professional) personality. Since in general terms we as a society, or at least the mass media that specializes in entertaining us, idealizes the values and achievements of the ambitious or when they are not available the achievements and conspicuous consumption of celebrities, though when they are in a pinch they will settle for the conspicuous consumption of the idle rich, let us remember there is a down-side to all of this, a down-side for us the audience.

We tend to forget that great people, that is the most successful Yuppies we can think of like Napoleon, are not necessarily good people. Their ambition tends to hide their hidden agendas, or sometimes just their profound ambivalence. Nowadays passive-aggressive personalities are fairly common among them.

Thus we ordinarily think of passive people as being rational about it, like waiting at a bus stop quietly and calmly, yet there are people for whom their passivity masks their rage, or for whom their passivity serves their rage rather than the other way around, being mules in their stubbornness whenever they are needed. They are commonly found among our managerial classes who commonly do not think of themselves as public servants, but more in terms of the average citizen being their servants.

The passive-aggressive personality is in some ways like the neurotic of 50 years ago, the person whose personality constantly contains hidden agendas, but it is not the working through of childhood ambivalences anymore that is at issue, the looking for father-figures and mother-figures to emulate that was so common at that time. Now it is the "ambitious" personality surrounding a hollow core that we see so often who tries to get through ambition of either the passive or the aggressive sort what will not satisfy them because they really aren't that rational, they have too many hidden agendas. However, unlike the mere authoritarian neurotic who seeks a master to serve, their narcissistic fantasies are more open-ended and insatiable, like the top executives who can never make enough money to be satisfied.



Perhaps it is the result of the way our society is now organized, around the needs, almost the worshipping, of the ambitious and its hidden side, manipulation of followers by their leaders, that is the price of a bureaucratized society that treats everyone as objects. It is this scheme of things that makes so many people divide up their peers as winners and losers, and so seek to manipulate them appropriately. This is certainly true among young people who in idle fear or hopeful expectation seek to employ simplified versions of the ideals, and more often the practices, of the adult world that surrounds them. That is why they seek to be “cool” or at least admire that trait in others, the ability to manipulate the world and others without getting upset, or in fact without getting particularly emotionally-involved at all, in some ways not even caring about the consequences of their actions on others.

They don’t even realize that in more traditional societies it is more common to be “hot,” to be emotionally involved in the world around them and to be very much concerned about what people think about them, either in the good sense of seeking respect for their moral virtues, or in the bad sense of indulging in endless vanity. Of course for the “cool” kids after the endless attempts at managing their lives and sometimes in the process denigrating or at least manipulating others, the eventual reward, not the immediate reward which is more common in traditional societies that reward “hot” personalities, ends up being the same thing, the achievement of self-confidence which in a shallow culture is the same thing as vanity, and in a non-shallow culture is true fulfillment, when such a thing is possible.

Thus our society is founded on the ability to defer gratification, and not on immediate emotional responsiveness which is more the claim to fame of more traditional cultures than ours. Yet the hope is that the ability to defer gratification will eventually pay off in a more permanent and deeper happiness than would otherwise be possible. It is not a surprise that in a society such as ours which is a society of games, in the emotional as well as in the childish escapism as well as practicing for reality sense, full emotional resonance is often not found. The authenticity of facing another person’s presence is often hidden behind the games they play.

The end result is that people so often feel dissatisfied at what they are, and the nameless hunger that gnaws at their insides means that any rational plan they devise, be it passive or aggressive, will seem emotionally unsatisfying because it is not its rational purpose that needs to be satisfied, but something more basic and often its opposite in emotional tone. The passive-aggressive person in their passive mode



is often feeling stubbornly aggressive, and in their aggressive mode is often feeling fearfully petulant. It is no wonder emotional satisfaction is often a major problem in our society. It drives our ambitions, if that is any consolation.

By the way, very ambitious people often don't do as well as might be expected in interpersonal relations, even though when they are successful people do play up to them. Even in the relationships they do have since they fear they are not being appreciated but for their accomplishments, they may fear rejection or if things are going well they may find fault in the people around them, wondering if they can't find better. They're ambitious after all.

Often the successful people of our society can't really get close to others, for with that success comes fear that there is nothing to really share, for what can that emptiness at their center bond to? But they can still trade up an old model for a something different. They can get bored, and they can get new trophies. This is too often true for what should be close, personal relationships as in marriage. Without all of this our divorce lawyers would have a lot less work to do. To the extent that we are developing a society where so many of the poor and the trapped get marriages of convenience, and so many of the rich get trophies, the divorce lawyers won't have to worry, they'll never be out of work. We in fact may be reaching a point in human evolution, in the cultural if not in the biological sense, where many of us will live lives so impersonal that we will not know how to fulfill common emotional needs, which will often remain buried and amorphous. Then we will become not like individuals but like competing groups, like nations in fact, for whom it is sometimes said they have no permanent friends, only interests.

An interesting book on this very subject which I have referred to already is *Postemotional Society* (Mestrovic 1997). He is not the only one who has written on this subject, for example, many people who call themselves critical theorists have also done so, as well as people who write within a psychoanalytic, psychodynamic, and even a culture and personality tradition, but many of these writers are themselves too snobbish and elitist to really be familiar with the common experience, or perhaps have just lost a certain amount of common sense from their academic perches. In any case, where we will be going emotionally, as well as economically, seems to be a common problem of the human species, true of the past, and just as true now. The pressures, and temptations, may differ, the ultimate goals much less so.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### LIBERALISM AT THE CROSSROADS

All presidential elections in America are treated as if the nation is at a crossroads, and even if the election eventually confirms that no election makes much of a difference in the short run, there are nevertheless long-term changes in culture and politics, and in that sense an election often represents resistance or confirmation of these changes. In our case, both major parties arise from the liberal tradition that is at the core of American culture, the tradition that the mass of people should be supported in their aims, that is to be allowed to live as they please, rather than be manipulated to live another way. Oddly enough, this tradition requires a supporting environment which in many ways has opposite assumptions. In our case our public culture of live and let live, that is of tolerance in a rather anonymous society, has historically depended on a rather virtuous citizenry who are not at each other's throats. This results traditionally from a rather puritanical culture that enforces their self-control because to a large extent they do not trust themselves, let alone each other.

It is both the public culture and the private culture that is breaking down, and reverting to more traditional norms, traditional by the standards of much of the rest of the world, not by American standards. In other words we are re-developing an European-style class system. The Republican Party dating back to its Federalist Party ancestor once stood for social order through the duties of the leadership classes, though more recently it has emphasized more the privileges of the wealthy to not be taxed heavily than their duties. The Democratic Party dating back to its Democratic-Republican Party ancestors as the party of Thomas Jefferson once emphasized the dependent classes and how to make them independent, while the Democratic Party now pretty much assumes the dependence of the dependent classes and emphasizes not them as much as various bureaucratic elites that gain through serving them, a trickle-down economics stance not too much different from that of the Republicans.

Regarding the mass of people, both major parties take for granted dependence, not independence, and primarily are concerned with the

ideas of elites, mainly because neither party gets ideas from anyone other than elites and activists anymore. Even though politicians nominally represent geographical areas, it is far-fetched to assume they have much social contact with what can be called the common people, that is their constituents.

As a matter of fact, the bureaucratization of society is proceeding apace in both the private and public sectors of society. Just as in Britain for the most part no matter who wins the election, the government bureaucracy reflects the whims and the cultural fads of the Oxbridge elite, just as in France this process reflects the influence of the graduates of the most prestigious schools of higher education, so in America government bureaucracy reflects the cultural elitism of the graduates of a few prestigious universities and their fads. The Fortune 100 companies with their increasing hold on the economy reflect a similar process of elites reproducing themselves, with affirmative action changing somewhat the color and the gender, producing a little sponsored mobility, but otherwise not changing much in terms of social networks and social allegiances. The mass of working-class people will remain in their working-class lives no matter how much mobility there is into and out of elite positions.

Oddly enough, just as organizations in both the public and the private sectors become more dependent on elites for their ideas, the intellectual quality of these elites is in many ways declining. Especially at universities, though obviously think tanks suffer from this too, research, particularly social science research, often functions as a kind of modern version of political patronage, various specialties developing symbiotic relationships with political groups and telling them what they want to hear. The result is a kind of tabloidization of scholarship, as shock scholarship and trendy scholarship drives out the quality kind, at least as sold to the public, helped along by cultural and communications media also interested in culture that sells through shock and titillation. This phenomenon has been around to a certain degree forever, though increased by the increasing reliance on escapist formula by the mass media, and by those who gain publicity through the mass media. Such changes were remarked on years ago, for example in Jacques Barzun's *The House of Intellect* (Barzun 2002), originally printed in 1959.

The phenomenon of image-mongering in fact has become too often the preferred methodology of all the professions in our anonymous and bureaucratic society. Thus bureaucracies can sell their wares on the basis of competency, or on the image of competency, or a mixture,

but then its competent members must carry the rest, that group of marginally competent people which may or may not include the leaders. That is for example why there is too much of the phenomenon of publish or perish in academia, where because of information overload other than for “stars” many academics expect they will be judged more on the number of their publications than on what is in them.

Bureaucratization and anonymity weaken professional standards in this as in so many other modern professions. The hermeticism of professional politicians matches the hermeticism of professional scholars, professional artists, professional activists, and of so many other types of professionals who feed economically off the public, but are less likely to socialize with them outside of work to any major degree. Thus they no longer have a good chance to understand them in a practical rather than in a theoretical way, while still trying through proper image-management to maintain a demand for their services. In this way the prestigious law firms and accounting firms are endlessly spreading the word about the fame of their managing partners, people who will probably never see your case if you ever use their services.

Thus liberalism as maintaining the independence and dignity of the mass of people has become subordinated to liberalism as selling products to them, so that the independence and dignity of that elite producing these products (both the business and the cultural elite) can be maintained while the mass of people are offered, well, more products. It is no wonder the underpinnings of traditional American liberalism as a cultural point of view, as opposed to the European-style class system based on an absolute distinction between leaders and followers, is wearing thin, and the bread and circuses state so feared by the founders of the American Republic seems closer at hand.

Now let's get to some history. In all of American history only President Andrew Jackson considered himself a true populist, reflecting the prejudices and inconsistencies of the people he represented in his own life. Charles Sellers in his book *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America 1815–1846* (Sellers 1991) reveals why a truly populist political agenda has been so rare in American politics. Basically, most politicians have favored economic growth no matter what the cost, even when it produced market instabilities and ecological destruction, and the mass of people went along or even agreed, that is until there occurred a market crash. Then the people felt like throwing the bums out. Yet the new group of politicians would eventually feel no choice but to foster economic growth, and would eventually split with the majority agreeing that elite mercantile interests should be coddled

in order to foster economic growth, that a trickle down of economic benefits should be fostered even if certain groups benefited disproportionately. For them egalitarian policies meant sharing the poverty, not sharing the wealth, and so it would seem until the next market crash.

Democracy was less of an issue in the 18th, and earlier, centuries because traditional societies in many ways really don't vote on things. It doesn't make sense to ask if fishermen and farmers are equal in importance if the occasion never arises to compare them. Even concerning the conflict between the rich and the poor, or the leaders and the led, 18th century America, and other even more traditional societies to a large extent, didn't deal with the issue is one group more important than the other?

No doubt inequalities of power and influence were recognized, but not until later would massive social change raise the question should the state differentially offer various benefits, and how should they evaluate who should get them? Just following customs, and often not really knowing why these customs arose, was no longer enough to justify social authority. In fact in many ways the rise of republican institutions in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries, and in time in their American colonies, was a conservative reaction to the rise of absolute monarchies, or in the case of Britain the rise of a Parliament with absolute powers, where authority no longer functioned like policemen, merely enforcing the old laws and customs, but instead they felt they could make pretty much any new laws that they wanted.

Thus the liberalism which is the inheritance from 18th century America and is based on tolerance and working for the common good arose out of traditional notions of working together and respecting each other's dignity and individuality. In the liberal theory of legislative law-making which we inherited from that time, as opposed to law coming from religious leaders or even mere custom, each law should reflect a weighting and balancing of costs and side-effects affecting society at large, not a vote based merely on temporary political coalitions. This is different from certain other cultural traditions that have existed to this day where a temporary majority in the legislature is expected to try to destroy its opposition because the majority is expected to run roughshod over the minority, that a temporary political coalition, like kings, can do whatever they want. We on the other hand remember that the word republic comes from the Roman term *res publica*, the common thing, or as we interpret it, the common good.

What we find in many of the nations that arose long after the American Revolution was a stalling of social change, and then a great speeding up of the process encouraged and even forced upon the population by the central government. Almost all modern ideologies have a hurried feel about them, no doubt because market rivalries to late bloomers seem to be like an imperialist sweepstakes. In many such societies it is not a surprise when conservatives more or less idealize a feudal-like hierarchy and nationalism as defined from the center (usually the central government) replaces the low key social order of 18th century conservatives, while liberals now not only support social change, they ram it through in the guise of their version of socialism.

We in the US though driven in this direction are still not on the cutting edge of this. Yet we are to a certain extent driven by competitive pressures in that direction, and both the traditions of conservatism and liberalism are being radicalized (in the US both are offshoots of 18th century liberalism, since we have no political parties that want to bring back feudalism or a modern version). A large number of common values are being sacrificed for the achievement of a few simple values related to economic growth (not economic happiness), and nationalistic pride (not an intimate sense of community). The unfortunate result is we are treated like factory hands, driven by the marketplace and the priorities of our leaders. Like other factory workers we are faced with speed-up.

Too many other societies, in some ways even more modern than we are, retain even less traditional values. The sacrifice of justice for order was often their weakness in their past, and continues to haunt them, as they run headfirst into a new order. They attained democracy without attaining liberal values first, and often idealize their feudal past while trying to integrate it into a cold, sleek, "postmodern" future.

Thus the politics of many new states is one of bickering, and if you think we bicker, just look at them. Of course one reason consent of the community is maintained for our government is the ideology of limited government which takes so many issues out of public debate so that democracy is not stressed. This also, however, gives great power to special interests, including big business, who take advantage of our apathetic public.

It is no surprise that in many new nations the rise of politics is also the rise of cutthroat competition between interest groups, just like it is with us, but unlike us they have no tradition of competition being buffered to any great extent by an advancing frontier, nor by liberal

standards of compromise. In Western Europe high rates of voting compared to America reflect a more ideological electorate, though this is starting to change somewhat, and in Eastern Europe in many countries low rates of voting reflect an alienation from politics, without as in America the saving grace of material abundance. The danger there is that elites will keep politics to themselves, and for a while it seemed as if many Eastern European states were destined to be ruled by academics. This is better than being ruled by the military, I suppose, though it is not the same thing as being the voice of the people.

The American ideal, of course, is not merely creating social order from the top down, though in our case we make sure democracy is not stressed by not expecting too much from government. We also tolerate a degree of social disorder than many other societies would not tolerate. We both compromise, and this art of compromise defines our liberalism, and we buffer our social interaction, that is we run our social lives so that it is easy to ignore each other, so we won't have to compromise. These methods can be contradictory and when they break down and we face our own social conflicts and rivalries with full force we do not even have the clockwork social order of more orderly and traditional societies to ease the strain, or at least through common values to point us in what most would consider to be the right direction.

We may eventually reach a more durable consensus of what are our common values, but until that takes place we may be in trouble. Under the worst conditions, since we are not used to it, we may develop European-style political militancy, without their safeguards in an innate respect for order, though sometimes an order without justice.

In summary, the American nation was the product of a great compromise, resulting in a belief that the greatest good for the greatest number was achievable through rational self-interest, which included a great deal of sympathy for others and therefore self-respect for oneself, not hysterical, whining, narcissistic, slavish, miserly self-interest which could prevent any kind of compromise other than the kind of social order produced by force. Strangely enough, that early period in American history, not really democratic since the governing classes demanded the respect they felt due to them, a respect which they felt maintained the proper social order, was in an informal way not a mass society, but one where the mass of people did reason together.

Social turmoil eventually increased the amount of formal democracy, but partly because informal reasoning together was declining and something had to be done. Also there was an increase in the number of



people who were economically middle class, and because they had more of an economic stake in society, there was more faith in their political input, especially regarding taxes, since it would affect them as well, and not just a small group of rich people. At the same time it was no longer a small group of rich people who would essentially pay for government, but now this large group of middle income voters as well. A very interesting discussion of this whole historical process in America is *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (Wilentz 2005).

The earlier America feared a strong central government, but not a strong local government, and certainly not strong families. With time the pressures for democracy, partly because of pressures to help the poor and partly because of pressures to help the middle class who increasingly paid for government, became tempered by ideologies that encouraged weak government at all levels, so that government was democratic but didn't do much. This was because it became felt that economic growth, not government, was the proper means to help the poor, and for this the mercantile classes should be left alone or even helped. But even that decision is returning to haunt us, as economic growth is obviously not working as a substitute for public morality, and for concepts of the common good. We are increasingly aware that the squeaky wheel getting the grease, that in an anonymous, mass society the loudest interest groups getting the government's ear, is not an adequate model for working together for the common good.

One old-fashioned way of describing our society is as a commonwealth, that is one that shares in the common good. However, the tensions which economic displacement has produced for other societies it seems we too must face. We can work together for the common good, fulfilling liberal values, and not merely aim for quick, easy and simple solutions, that in the long run do not work as well as we would hope. But to learn how to do this requires getting together as a community for real exchange of ideas, not merely the niche-marketing of the communications media.

Someone who has emphasized communication as the core of democracy is the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (see Habermas 1990 and Habermas 1991). Though some may see his approach as substituting how to organize a high school debate team for how to organize politics, nevertheless even the high priests of academia now recognize that the mass of citizens are not merely empty vessels for the ideas of those who consider themselves to be their leaders. On occasion the average citizen has something to add to public discourse as well.

Of course the questions remains, exactly what is liberalism? Liberalism can be described as institutionalized tolerance. But tolerance of what? Is it tolerance of excessive individualism, is it tolerance of excessive bureaucratization, be it in the government or in the private sector, or is it tolerance of even excessive social conformity? Such factors can affect both the elite and the masses. Obviously the concept of liberalism by itself doesn't inform us what it is that is being liberated or tolerated.

Critics of liberal government are usually complaining that the state, whichever nation-state they are complaining about, is doing too much or too little, or they may have a slightly different complaint, that the local civil society that is closer to the people than the government is doing too much or too little. The latter criticism is harder to answer because it doesn't lend itself to simple technical solutions such as holding more elections, expanding the right to vote, increasing taxes, lowering taxes, term limits, no term limits, etc. In fact many of the problems of communal life reflect rather intimate issues such snobishness, lack of friendliness, lack of appreciation by snobs of people who would otherwise be their friends in a just world, etc. whose solutions are usually social and psychological, all within a communal context, but only rarely political. The British political philosopher John Gray in his book *Post-Liberalism: Studies in Political Thought* (Gray 1996) recounts many of these critiques, particularly the overbearing nature of some government activities, and evidence for the fact that there are some things that government is not good at doing. In fact modern liberal governments institutionalize social tensions and rivalries, and so the 17th century European ideal of a monarch that stands above such rivalries long ago fell into abeyance, though the social ideal of working together toward the common good, in this case by the people themselves through participation in government and not through the fiduciary responsibilities of the monarch, still exists.

Yet the questions remains, can the community, including communal morality, produce a backbone to society that the state cannot? That is the great hope of liberals, and the great disappointment of would-be liberals when they discover that everyday politics does not meet their expectations.

Nevertheless, certainly in the Anglo-American political tradition politics was supposed to have as much to do with individual responsibilities as with individual freedoms. Small-scale communities expected that there would be concern for personal honor among one's peers in

order to maintain individual and communal morality. Thus at the core of the Anglo-American political tradition, a theory which has not really changed though it is often honored mainly in the breach, communal politics is to be determined by civic liberalism (the influence of character) at least as much as if not more so than by monetary liberalism (the influence of money).

*Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Pocock 1995) illustrates the sources of the American political heritage, going back to its British roots in the 18th century and even earlier. He makes clear that the "natural law" theories behind our Declaration of Independence reflected the culmination of centuries of English political debate, much of it legalistic in form, concerning what rights and duties a subject had and what were the corresponding rights and duties of his sovereign. When cultural and economic change in the 18th century culminated in a state oriented toward the interests of the money-making classes, this resulted in a kind of backlash among those reduced in influence including the cultural elite, all of whom never gave up their attachment to civic humanism, that the state should be oriented toward producing character among its citizens in the pursuit of political compromise oriented toward the common good, not law as the result of merchants' haggling with their political customers. This politics of virtue which was so concerned about whether a regime founded on patronage, public debt, and professionalization of the armed forces would corrupt both governors and governed, carried over to the American scene and combined with the traditional English concern for the rights of subjects, now citizens of a new republic, together formed that moralistic view of law that so inspired the founders of America.

But in terms of cultural changes, these changes in the 18th century which so frightened the moralists of that age were only a foretaste of changes to come. Thus the bureaucratization of society, not for moralistic purposes but for essentially hedonistic and narcissistic ones, something so feared in the 19th century, particularly in early America, has essentially appeared on schedule. These bureaucracies are productive enough, you have to give them that, but they exacerbate the loss of community, as these bureaucratic niches become for some people all that is left of community, as they constantly move to where their jobs take them and have very little contact with the community around them.

The original meaning of liberalism meant tolerance and reasoning together in order to eventually work together for the common good.

It was used in effect as a synonym for being rational. Nowadays however liberalism is increasingly not an outgrowth of the sense of community but is something entirely different, centered on the state and using its powers for personal or group benefit. Liberalism has become a tolerance not for self-directed civil society, nor for the independence of individuals and communities, but a tolerance for bureaucratic intrusions for good and for ill. It is what legitimates an increasingly European-style class system in America. It is also a kind of liberalism that both the political right and the political left in modern America feel at home with, with the left feeling at home with the bureaucratic intrusions of the state, and the right feeling at home with the bureaucratic intrusions of big business.

In a sense bureaucracy has become a machine in many cases that functions for its own sake, not for any higher purpose, and liberalism has turned into tolerance, not of community, but of bureaucracy. There is of course liberalism as tolerance of the foibles of the masses, but such a state of affairs is quite often the result of dereliction of duty by the people who get rich at their expense, their leaders. This produces a liberalism which is only concerned with the movers and shakers of society, which in this unhealthy state of affairs excludes the mass of citizens who are reduced to the role of consumers.

Liberalism which at the time of the American Revolution was tied to republicanism (and later to democracy) and to what we now call communitarianism, now has become tied to a kind of multicultural mosaic society which emphasizes not so much tolerance anymore (which requires the question: Tolerance for what purpose?) as for autonomy, hedonism in terms of consumption of goods, social engineering/mass production to produce these goods, and nihilism concerning the ends of human life, that overarching *res publica* or the common good which was taken for granted as something of importance in all traditional societies before the modern age. Now compared to the 18th century the conservatives and liberals in America, and in many other places, have switched places for the rich no longer wish to any great extent to exercise moral leadership as much as to preserve a hedonistic lifestyle, and the liberals no longer wish to maintain the independence and dignity of the dependent classes, but more than anything wish to cater to the rich who control the economy. The result is a bread and circuses state which both liberals and conservatives in the 18th century, particularly in America, so greatly feared.

What should we learn from all of this? One thing we can learn is that our society which is individualistic and yet bureaucratic, individualistic in our private lives but bureaucratic on the job, can lose its purpose and flounder in moral anarchy, the breakdown of the family and a rise in crime. More traditional societies, which are likely to be more collectivistic and ritualistic in their private lives but less bureaucratic on the job (traditional peasants are a good example), can break down in a communal way, resulting in mass hysteria and communal rioting between groups. In either case, the golden mean of avoiding extremes is preferable. In our case, we must try to remember what justice is. In their case, they must try to remember what is liberty.

It is also possible to have a modernizing peasant society where the peasants act out their frustrations in mass hysteria and rioting between communities, where the middle class above them is composed of bureaucrats who believe in not much of anything other than doing their jobs, and above them is an elite of intellectuals who think they understand well the other groups in society, but don't, and so instead seek to control society by reference to romantic ideals of community that exist in their fantasies, perhaps fantasies learned from books and from the mass media, but not from their social interactions with the community around them, which they don't have.

This is the downfall of democracy so common in the modern era, for example what was seen in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, this combination of authoritarian followers and narcissistic leaders, facilitated by a middle class that is like the American middle class in its pride in technical efficiency but is different in its lack of concern (its loss of a tradition) of moral values to underlie its technical competency. It would be good if America would learn not to make the same mistakes, just as other societies will no doubt say the same thing about learning from our mistakes, particularly our dependence on frontier conditions, and our development of a wasteful mentality, that survived after the frontier ended. And then? Then we will see if we will all learn from each other, from the best elements of each other's cultures, or from the worst.



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### WHAT DOES THE WORKING CLASS REALLY WANT?

Talking about the American working class, which is to say most everyone except for those small, influential groups who claim to speak for them and proceed to drown them out, is difficult because they tend to be mute, to be acted upon rather than be actors. That is why our leaders so often speak of democracy, without giving us a clue as to what they mean by that. In the 18th century democracy was often thought of as mob rule, which was a bad thing, or people ruling themselves without intermediaries, which was considered an impossibility. The best examples of democracy were then all in the past, ancient Athens whose democracy didn't prevent imperialistic adventures, and tribal peoples like those of Central Asia or of the New World, where democracy presupposed economic equality, literally. Societies oriented toward economic growth through extreme division of labor, and with it extreme inequalities of wealth, were by definition aristocratic, not democratic, which in those days was not considered automatically a bad thing if elites proved themselves worthy of their positions.

In the 19th century, almost by sleight of hand, or like a rhetorical card trick, in America democracy became defined as equality of opportunity to rise in society, as opposed to being primarily concerned with the conditions of life of those who remained in working-class circumstances. Thus in many ways 18th century aristocratic society, which was concerned with the problems of the elite, by sponsoring a little bit more social mobility, allowed itself to be redefined later as democratic. In fact, the 18th century concern for the common good, for that which the elites administered and which the masses lived, which nevertheless allowed for a good deal of governmental intervention at the local level, became replaced by rather extreme theories of limited government, far more extreme than what were in fashion at the time of the American Revolution. Democracy in the 19th century soon became the same as "electionocracy" as the right to vote became increasingly widespread at the very time that citizens didn't have much to vote on since government in many ways had less and less relevance for people's lives, or so many of the elites who developed political ideologies taught.

It is not as if government in the early US was particularly overbearing in the 18th century. It was understood even before the Revolution that most people were concerned more about their private lives than what government did. They were willing to let government be in the hands of the people who paid most of the taxes, since many of the poor people were barely part of the economy at all, let alone paid much in taxes. Yet though there was no equality in making the law, since the people who paid the taxes made the law, there was equality before the law, since the goal of the law was common fairness in pursuit of the common good. Certainly the American colonies, and then the early Republic, had no patience for a class of libertines or even of the idle rich to rule over them. That was one grievance they had with the British aristocracy.

All this goes to show that though there is nowadays much more equality in making law, at least as far as elections are concerned, there is less equality now than there has been in a long time in terms of one's place in the common good, if increasing maldistribution of income is any measure of this. The elite it seems increasingly rule for their own benefit, not as trustees for the common weal (the common good).

The major issue in determining the effectiveness of democracy has always been the existence of the right to vote, and the existence of people to vote for, a system for communities to throw up people to represent them rather than people who are out to represent themselves, turning it into another job. The two sides of democracy are inexorably combined, though the second part is rarely talked about nowadays, unlike in the 18th century when it was hoped after the Revolution that the notables of the community would be elected to offices by acclamation. It were these very notables who were expected to show concern for poverty, for honest trade, for economic opportunities for the next generation, for everything a self-conscious community does in preparing for its own future and that of its children.

So what does the working class want? Thomas Jefferson thought that a nation of small farmers would be one where the mass of people basically took care of themselves, and so not the poor but the rich would need monitoring to prove their worthiness to rule. The merchant princes of Northern cities and the Federalist Party which represented their interests were much more concerned about monitoring the poor, and letting themselves be given the freedom to pursue the wealth which would benefit the nation at large, eventually. Though they believed in trickle-down economics, they often were rather moralistic,



and believed communal reputation at least among one's peers was important too; something that is not quite so obvious nowadays.

Of course Thomas Jefferson's dream of a farmer's commonwealth barely outlived his own administration. By the time of Andrew Jackson, who ran for the presidency against Thomas Jefferson's own party for being economic royalists, or at least factions of them, they had taken on almost all the ideologies of the Federalists, in all but name. For that matter, Abraham Lincoln's vision of a moralistic, democratic political party, his version of the Republican Party, barely outlived the end of his own administration. Succeeding administrations of his own party were far less populist and far more mercenary, once again favoring, like the Federalists, an economy that trickled down ever so slowly, with the elite classes always raking in their percentage taken off the top.

So what does the working class want? They want what Thomas Jefferson hoped to get for them, control over their own fate, and what Abraham Lincoln hoped to get for them, a fate that was of intrinsic worth, not only in economic terms, but in moral terms as well.

Right now the working class of America has little control over its fate in either economic or moral terms. They are compelled to maintain their standard of living by having both spouses working, which is not an improvement over their quality of life in the 1950's. For that matter, the office work of the present is increasingly beginning to resemble the factory work of the past with its controls and lack of freedom. While working people work very hard, we see our leadership class increasingly drawn from a narrow segment of society, a leisure class who often can afford to be "activists" of both the left and the right because they don't have to worry about working for a living; either that or they are in fact paid lobbyists. In general our leadership class is becoming more and more like celebrities, whose finely honed images, sold in the wide-open spaces of our amorphous, impersonal society, are more important than what they do. Many blue-collar workers claim that their experience with management is that they do the work, and the managers take the credit. True, many managers are worthy of their positions of responsibility, just not all. That the leadership class should prove they have a sense of honor, to be worthy of their places in society, is as important an issue now as it was in the days of Thomas Jefferson, and even harder to enforce.

So what can we offer the working class? In a general way we can say that like Thomas Jefferson said they want some control over their lives, the kind of dignity which cannot be bought as a commodity though it

can be produced through a social contract that produces cooperation, and like Abraham Lincoln said they want a moral environment, one where the people who rule there are worthy of their rule, and are not mere celebrities. Thomas Jefferson thought a nation of small farmers would be sufficient to produce such an environment. It didn't last. Abraham Lincoln thought a nation of small farmers, small businessmen, and of workers with real bargaining power would be able to approach their competitors as equals. The growth of sheer size in American business guaranteed that that golden opportunity would not last very long either. So what's appropriate for our era?

I am not interested in postulating utopias. We have had too many authoritarian movements who dreamed of making the state into one, big, happy family, something the medieval European monarchies believed in theory, but would never dream of imposing in practice, because they knew they couldn't succeed. That was their form of limited government. Modern authoritarian movements are not so modest. Our form of government on the other hand was developed in the 18th century and consists of strong local institutions, and a central government which can do what it does best and which refrains from trying to fine-tune control over society. Without this restraint government plans would tend to degenerate into enforcing ideological preconceptions, or just serving special interests and ignoring the rest of us. The squeaky wheel gets the grease is the motto of modern politics, much more than the greatest good for the greatest number.

Since the central government is better at producing a bread and circuses state than a true workers commonwealth, the best they can do is, in addition to its oversight responsibilities, to facilitate what can be done best at the other levels of society. This can be governmental levels, if local government can get off its can and do something about wages, working conditions, community life, preparing the next generation, etc. Since in fact local government is in many ways not local enough, more like a smaller version of the Federal government, perhaps we can try another venue.

Perhaps we can return control to the people by doing just that, by experimenting with more direct democracy. In most Western European countries there is collective consultation between management and the workforce, in the form of works councils that, depending on the country, may have rights to information on changes in working conditions, or even a certain amount of joint control with management. If you take Germany for an example, works council participation rights are strong in social matters, less strong in personnel matters, and weak

in financial matters. Of course there is always danger of this arrangement becoming mere window dressing, agreements between works councils and management being on trivial subjects that everyone can agree on, but no real meeting of minds between workers and management. In Germany though works councils cannot call strikes, they can appeal to an internal arbitration board, chaired by an outsider, or to the labor court.

Of course we don't have labor courts, we don't have the system of professional associations that set standards for industries, that both cooperate and bargain with strong labor movements, we also don't have laws that allow government to enforce wage agreements from high-wage employers industry-wide. We also for most of recent history don't have Germany's high unemployment, and high level of unionization for that matter.

Some say this type of representation of working-class interests has reached its high-water mark in Europe and is receding because of the competitiveness of the world economy, and in any case the more typical consultation rarely leads to control, or even necessarily strong influence. The US system is predicated more on individualism, that individuals will be able to control their own fates, to bargain for the best deal they can without either help or hindrance from outsiders, and can get all the benefits of, let's say the German worker, without the bureaucratic hassles. We're still waiting.

Right now we still have our traditional system which is closer to socialism for the rich, and free enterprise for the poor. For example, big firms cannot be allowed to fail, small firms are on their own. Our representatives in government represent their own interests quite well, but when it comes to concrete results cannot even run decent mass transportation systems, good urban planning, and affordable health care on a mass scale, compared to Western Europe, and any changes in these areas are still in the planning changes though American politicians are starting to talk about such changes. Improving these areas of public service are proving difficult, let alone programs that deal with the everyday problems that working people face. We are no longer a nation of small farmers, nor of small businesses either to a large extent. Yet the working class still would like to have a voice over what affects them, and not be driven hither and yon by blind competition, through direct democracy if feasible, if not through representatives who can monitor the situations they are responsible for, and will be monitored by their constituents in return.



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### FOOLISH RITUALISM AND DEMOCRACY

It's not quite unexpected, though nevertheless amazing, how things don't change, but the same problems occur over and over and over again. Mostly we forget, until we're forced to remember and then it all seems so natural, until we forget again. Like we have pretty much forgotten the reasons for the American Revolution, that the British rulers themselves had forgotten the reasons for the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and were unwilling to extend to their colonies the rights of Englishmen, the civil rights that made us safe and secure from oppressive government, and the political rights that the mass of people be consulted rather than merely have the government impose on them (the no taxation without representation argument). That this was no temporary aberration, not a sign of the mother country elite's temporary forgetfulness, is obvious, when you consider the same complaints coming over and over again from Ireland, from India, from all their colonies which are now ex-colonies.

Of course all cultural traditions it seems have their hypocrisies, their blind spots, their egotisms. American society is so free and so market-oriented because it was thought, even long before the American Revolution, at the time of the Protestant Reformation, that the kings of Catholic Europe were tyrannical and their subjects were hypocrites, and it was the latter that concerned the reformers more. They saw the mass of people as drowning in a sea of low moral standards because the rules of the Catholic Church had become so complex that the mass of people ended up picking and choosing the ones they wished to follow, and then it was up to the bureaucracies of both the Church and the State, either alone or in tandem, to monitor the people and remind them when they the bureaucrats thought standards had fallen too low. So ultimately, it was these bureaucrats, not individual consciences, that set moral standards, and the hypocrisies of the rulers of both Church and State ran unabated, for they often set standards for others which they did not follow themselves. They were no longer expected to be moral exemplars as was often the case for rulers in simpler societies, and in a hierarchical society were the only ones who for all practical

purposes got to forgive themselves, and so were not held accountable to the people they claimed to serve but in reality ruled over.

The end result in Britain was not quite what the Protestant reformers had in mind, for they simplified the rules, leaving a few in place which were given special weight (such as basic morality regarding family life) and allowed individual improvisation to handle the rest, so that individualism, that bane of Catholic and Islamic thought, was born, in a sense spreading from elites to the masses, or at least to the middle-class part of them. The effect over time as communities continued to decline in cohesiveness was to give puritanical morality an all-or-nothing quality, for what was left to enforce these rules was the individual conscience (often what was learned in childhood), and without a bureaucracy to monitor things, standards could over time decline, and did. However, in reaction evangelical revival movements have also remained a constant in American life. If anything, such tendencies were stronger in the colonies than in the British motherland, but it took a long time for such tendencies toward extreme rootlessness to become obvious, and there was enough of a sense of community at the time of the American Revolution that the leaders of that revolution could still claim with accuracy that they followed the standards of true British gentlemen, and that the leaders of the motherland were the true hypocrites.

Yet moral decay had already set in, particularly in the slave colonies. One obvious effect of this all-or-nothing approach to individualistic morality was that Protestant slave owners were not supposed to have children with their slave mistresses, nevertheless they often did and just pretended it didn't happen, while in the Catholic colonies of Latin America they had a long-standing tradition of how to handle moral relapses, in this case what to do with children out of wedlock, and were more likely to acknowledge these children and pay attention to their upbringing. If nothing else the State and Church bureaucracies were there to step in and make sure certain standards were met, even if the father wasn't so inclined. Their stepping-in, however, was often heavy-handed and authoritarian, destroying native people's traditions and religions in the process. Thus in the Spanish colonies no matter how many native mistresses soldiers took, the elite made sure there was no dilution of Spanish Catholic culture among the leaders of society since society would always be ruled from the top down.

What does this all have to do with democracy? Well, even in Britain the elites wanted to step in before social cohesion eroded too much,

and the Protestant Ethic never did challenge elite rule in Britain as it eventually did in their American colonies. As a matter of fact the degree of elite hypocrisy among all the elites of Europe, including the British one, became quite extreme by the middle of the 18th century. There was a kind of bureaucratization of society as the monarchs, who once centuries before had really been the administrators of society in an active sense, though other elites resisted their gaining more power than was necessary, became increasingly both bureaucrats and figureheads simultaneously; let's call them incompetent bureaucrats, to give it a modern ring.

They monitored society in a quite authoritarian way, often rather clumsily and arbitrarily in practice as the rulers were increasingly socially and often physically distant from the people they ruled, but that was what maintained social order, not the monarch as moral exemplar, but the monarch as role model bureaucrat. If anything, Britain was slower to evolve in that direction, and with many more misgivings than the rest of Europe, which led to two revolutions in the 17th century, including the Glorious Revolution of 1688 which was supposed to prevent this social decay from occurring again, but didn't, so the American Revolution arose to try again. The supreme model for the ruler as figurehead and bureaucrat-in-chief, but not moral exemplar, was the French king Louis XIV in the 17th century who as long as he produced an heir to the throne could have as scandalous a life as he wanted privately. For that matter, as long as he monitored society and persecuted Protestants, it didn't matter that he wasn't a particularly good Catholic himself.

That tradition of over-bureaucratization and foolish ritualism that characterized the rule of the Sun King, Louis XIV, who got to be the rock and roll star of his era, has continued to our day, with revolutions, political and cultural, occurring and the rising of new leaders, and the old problems of over-bureaucratization and irrelevant or inappropriate rules, the public relations stunts so endemic to all governments trying to justify their rule, occurring over and over again. In fact American-style, rather puritanical, individualism tries to be a counterweight to this, and when it fails it increases the tendencies toward bureaucratization of society. Though America has a greater tradition of individualism, and individuals relying on their own consciences to determine moral choices, than anywhere else in the world, society still does not rely on this alone to maintain social order, even here.

Nevertheless, the common middle-class moral code that arose from the Reformation created eventually common moral standards in America that were so taken for granted that a society almost totally devoted to economic concerns could be built on their foundation, but now it is being forgotten, declining, evaporating, take your pick. Increasingly interpersonal morality is becoming relativistic in the sense people do whatever they want and consider its benefits for others little if at all, while bureaucratic roles, social morality in a sense, is becoming increasingly absolutist in that demands are increasingly made upon bureaucrats to bestow good things upon us and increasingly power is bestowed upon them to heed these demands regardless of side-effects. The most extreme example was not in the US, which is still only moderately bureaucratized compared to many other societies, but in the Soviet Union where the leaders had the mandate to end poverty, and the right to use any means, war, internal persecution, harassment of minorities, anything to meet this goal.

Yes, American movement down this road of producing very passive citizens and very active leaders is still very moderate compared to other times and places. But is it going in the same direction, in effect is the ending of the (social and economic) frontier in America redeveloping an European-style class system here? Probably.

The issue what does America stand for becomes even more relevant now that much of the Islamic world has decided they can't stand America's (lack of) family values, and we have decided to repay the compliment. The two cultures are of course totally talking past each other. The traditional Islamic ruler is modeled more after an Arab sheik than a European king, and as such is hoped to be a moral exemplar (obvious this exists more in theory than in practice), not like Louis XIV, that figurehead ruler and bureaucrat-in-chief.

Thus a person like Osama Bin Laden, admired by some naïve tribesmen because of his personal adherence to the Islamic lifestyle, is excused for the fact that he is utterly naïve, and now we say criminally naïve, about modern politics. He thinks he can express his anger at American politics like an 8th century Islamic ruler making border raids on the Byzantine Empire to tell them to back off. Maybe in those days there was no other practical way to make an impression on a political competitor, but now there are many, many other ways to communicate! For that matter the Islamic critique of modern American life is very little different from the Christian Coalition's (in America) critique of modern American life, and the socialist left in Europe's



critique of modern American life.. All of them criticize a society where the natural sources of enjoyment are disappearing, and the artificial wants of consumer consumption are multiplying, almost to the point of absurdity.

Nevertheless, though the extreme naivete of some Islamic leaders about human politics is exasperating, it doesn't seem that having a leader who is only a role model bureaucrat works either. Both Hitler and Stalin were from early on in their careers known to be morally deficient, but it was thought that the weaknesses of their characters which were so obvious in their private lives made no difference, because they were somehow omniscient bureaucrats! Well, character does count for something and there is no such thing as omniscient bureaucrats, no matter how much pomp and circumstance they use to disguise this fact.

This gets us back to present-day America. No matter how much we would like all moral decisions to be done by resorting to the individual conscience, it can't be done. The effect would be anarchy. We don't run businesses by letting all members meditate and "follow their bliss" and cooperate when they feel like it. Governments don't run like that either. Well, neither do societies. Nevertheless, the atomization of American life is quite severe, and in many ways we have evolved from an individualistic to a narcissistic society; this includes the self-righteous middle class who increasingly do not associate with the more narcissistic idle rich and escapist poor, but merely snub them, that traditional method by which our "self-righteous" get along with the rest of society whom they consider to be "heathens." After a number of generations of this, we seem to be more atomized than ever. Public discussion requires at least a minimal sense of community in order to have common experiences, common facts, common interests at our disposal, and all this has weakened.

In the long run such a sense of community may reemerge, but for now we are stuck with bureaucracy to integrate society; that and minding our own business. The Islamic peoples criticize us for not rushing into a more intimate sense of community, with moral exemplars as leaders, but there is no possibility on the horizon for us to turn into tribes ruled by sheiks. Nevertheless, perhaps we can still become somewhat more communal.

This is where the problem of figurehead leaders posing as competent bureaucrats becomes so relevant, and with it the problem of idiotic ritualism. There obviously are rituals that do integrate communities

and mold characters, but bureaucrats often have their own agendas. Even though bureaucracies as a whole are more efficient than uncoordinated individuals, this doesn't mean particular members of bureaucracies, or even their leaders, won't be inefficient. As the specialists of bureaucracies find it hard to get together to set a common agenda because their specializations inhibit communications, they settle for just keeping their jobs, and unless the overall community sets their agenda (which is the heart of democracy) it will be the generalist ruler, their monarch as it were, who will set their agenda for them. We have plenty of experience from the past of rulers who were in effect mere policemen, monitoring everybody, and other than that offered little leadership. That is the source of the culture of many authoritarian societies in the modern era, not communities setting agendas, but figure-head rulers who live like little kings, and other than living a life of sloth and of pleasure create order simply to justify their own jobs, and whims. The result? Foolish ritualism.

The examples in modern America are becoming almost endless. Read the cartoon series "Dilbert" to see examples from the business world. Or how about recent rules for accountants that just go through the motions, like officially making it very difficult for low level accountants to buy stock in companies they are familiar with, even though their purchases would be too small to make a difference in market prices, which will have little effect on true inside traders. Or how about doctors who go through the motions of filling out endless paperwork to prove they are following procedures which they are already following, which proves the existence of the obvious, but solves no problems. Foolish ritualism is much more dangerous in politics and in law, when for example legislatures pass laws so badly written that they rarely specify "Who, What, Where, When, and How" some dispossessed group should be made whole. This opens the door for judges who really are like monarchs, with badly written laws to spur them on to ordering people around. They get to use empty rhetoric and burden of proof reasoning to enjoy themselves by getting to tell other people what to do and fulfill their prejudices at the same time.

This is a round-about way of saying they never have to say "I don't know." It is not a major surprise that one problem of modern American legal practice, especially for working-class clients, is the tendency of mediocre lawyers to practice defensive law, constantly telling their clients to settle out of court, so they the lawyers won't have to go to court; or at the very least constantly advising their clients to go beyond the

law in stringent adherence to rules, so that they'll never get in trouble and never get to do what they want to do even when it is perfectly legal. It is this kind of advice which causes manufacturers of heating irons to warn their customers not to iron their clothes while wearing them.

Obviously there is plenty of foolish ritualism on campus, often taking the form of intellectual fads, as each generation of professors gets to claim they have discovered something earth-shaking and important, when they haven't. This is also the reason why each generation of academics gets to invent new jargon to hide the same old ambiguities, just as each generation of politicians gets to invent pseudo-solutions to seem to solve the same old problems (like poverty). Particularly with politicians, this results in public relations stunts such as ending welfare but only in a cosmetic sense, improving urban planning but only cosmetically so as not to offend real estate developers, and to helping the poor so long as there is no real cost to the rich.

All of this we've been through before, when we were the subjects of any number of previous monarchies with their figurehead rulers who had to look busy by monitoring us, without asking us what we needed monitoring for. No doubt the rulers had "activists" telling them how the nation needed input from the Church, from the universities, from the professions, but rarely from the rest of us.

It's amazing how the more things change, the more they remain the same. Louis XIV, the French king who claimed to be worthy to rule France because he defended the Catholic Church, did not make France a moral, upstanding, trustworthy place to live. He just spied on his fellow Frenchmen in order to weaken Protestantism, and engaged in endless, endless public relations stunts. The Soviet Union did not uplift its workers as much as produced a change in management, the kind that oversaw mediocre working conditions and mediocre pay just like everywhere else in the industrialized world. What the Soviet Union was good at producing was endless propaganda. It would be a pity if the US should forget what it stood for when it was founded, a certain independence for the working class and a ruling class that was obligated to prove its worthiness to rule. Instead we have seen too many, just as in Europe, figurehead rulers, chosen by who knows what cabals among elites, who sought to impress the population with endless public relations stunts and foolish ritualism.

Let's back up a bit, and look at the source of some of our values. It is safe to describe American middle-class values as tending toward the golden mean in the Aristotelian sense by avoiding the arrogance so

predominant among the rich and the obsequiousness and escapism so predominant among the poor (both groups tend to be narcissistic for opposite reasons, the first because they have almost nothing to lose, the second because they literally have almost nothing to lose). America is unusual to the extent that the rich and the poor tend to copy the culture of the middle class, rather than the other way around which is actually the norm in many other societies.

Thus America actually does have a culture, no matter what some Europeans may say about us, and simple though it is, it tends to take its inspiration from the values of the middle class, and put it into practice through the manners, morals, and customs of the people, together with individual strategies for self-actualization and assertion. Increasingly however American culture is being created from bureaucratic blueprints. If anything these middle-class values are in decay, since they arose in more homey communities where they were understood, and now we live for the most part in more anonymous settings where their rationales are increasingly forgotten. In a sense America is an archaic society, whose formative period was the 18th century, much like traditional societies that are controlled by communal custom and individual muddling through, not by bureaucratic social engineering. When such social engineering works it can be fine, but it can also be manipulated by pseudo-experts and figurehead leaders in the direction of producing not competent leadership, but ritualism and public relations stunts. If anything, America is evolving in the direction of increasing bureaucratization, and weaker communities.

It is no wonder it is hard to teach traditional American values to other societies, no matter how much we try to spread our brand of democracy around the world. For as any anthropologist knows, it is difficult to teach or even to articulate taken-for-granted, almost unconscious customs and values, especially when they themselves are in danger of disappearing in the home country because nothing in America is firmly rooted nowadays, or so it seems at this time in history.

The Third World's intellectuals who look for blueprints for social evolution, partly because their societies would like to replicate at the state level the kind of social order that works at the local level, and which Americans traditionally think cannot be done, often look for blueprints for social engineering from European intellectuals as being more their style. Even that in practice is often understood to exist with qualifications and exceptions which are known to the European cultures that practice these rules, but the sense of context may not be

passed on to other societies, or even from generation to generation in their own society, people being forced to learn these rules in simplified form from books when the living communal tradition is dying, which is too often the case nowadays. This issue, the decay of one's own culture, exists in America as well.

The paradox of modern American leadership is that once, let's say at the time of the American Revolution, leaders who were aristocratic in terms of education, drive, wisdom, and character nevertheless were expected to use these traits to represent the interests of the vast masses of society, to understand them and be self-sacrificing for them, rather than serve self-interest alone. Now the masses who represent themselves in our democracy, by voting though often in no other way, in other respects are expected to live through celebrities and uphold the standards of celebrities. American society decreasingly has a place for the golden mean as the defining characteristic of the good life, avoiding upper-class arrogance and lower-class fatalism, but offers in its stead lowest common denominator materialism ("vulgar" pleasures which have their place, but not by taking over everyday life), and living through celebrities by admiring their achievements, as if their achievements are the only ones worth having. Even worse is learning from experience that having a balanced or an interesting life is not something they will ever achieve on their own. In other words "celebrity" leaders are not self-sacrificing in the service of others, but live hedonistic lifestyles and we adore them for it. Interestingly enough, these celebrities often have as their hobbies working-class skills of generations ago that working-class people rarely have a chance to practice on their own anymore.

However, America has not yet become totally feudal, and probably won't. If you compare traditional America and traditional Latin America, you are more likely to find a somewhat unhappy upper class in the former, an unhappy lower class in both places (the cost of economic insecurity without a safety net is high), a somewhat happy middle class (which includes large elements of the working class) in the former and a somewhat happy upper class in the latter. In traditional Latin America the living reality of a kind of feudalism meant that the rich had ongoing social relationships, but because of extreme maldistribution of power, the rich were also constantly having their egos massaged, which made them pretty happy if not exactly moral. For that matter, since many of them were powerful ever since childhood they could start at an early age to live lives devoted to pleasure,

such as by getting sexy girlfriends and later sexy wives, and women could do that too to the extent they held financial power in their families.

In America traditionally only some of the Hollywood stars were expected to both live hedonistic lifestyles and have sexy mates, and in general to live like hedonists. In fact they and a few of the idle rich with similar lifestyles might feel they have to move out of traditional communities to avoid being criticized for their decadence if they ever risked living like average citizens. The typical businessman and even politician was expected to live a life of struggle and to need a partner who was more business partner and confidante than concubine. All this kept the American upper class on their toes, but taken to an extreme made them so unhappy that they sometimes abused whatever power they did manage to get. All this reflects a combination of puritanism and competition that characterized much of American business life until fairly recently. In Latin America the relatively happy upper classes could afford to be paternalistic, just as long as the lower classes refrained from revolting, and lived off the crumbs the upper classes threw to them.

Obviously a truly happy, and just, society is in some ways a combination of these two ways of life. It would not be an atomized, cutthroat society which would be like America carried to the nth degree, and it would not be a rigid, feudal paradise where everything depends on the goodwill of those gracious benefactors, the rich and powerful, which would be Latin American society carried to the nth degree.

No doubt, there are probably certain cultural peculiarities which are missing from both Anglo-American and Latin American cultures, perhaps found among the Indian tribes which were ignored by the mainstream cultures in both areas, who had traditions of social intimacy modern societies can only dream of. At the very least, Latin America would probably be better off if its traditions of enjoying life in the present, being rather than becoming, would become democratized and would result in a version that the mass of people could enjoy, rather than living like servants of their social betters; no matter how paternalistic they are treated in the short run. Abuse of power always remains a danger. Anglo-America would probably be better off if its traditions of moralistic individualism would be closer to its 18th century roots from the time of the American Revolution, if it was only relatively individualistic and had plenty of room for communal bonding and for values other than materialistic ones. Nowadays these values tend to

celebrate and to be limited to what money can buy, since now atomized communities are filled with individuals who have few ties to each other, certainly little neighborliness, except by trying to buy happiness. In general drug use and "getting high" together is just an extreme example.

There is always the question to what extent the ideals of a culture represent their attainments, or what they have not achieved but should be aimed for; also to what extent these ideals are popular ideals, or more the aspirations of elites. For example, the ideal of Latin American culture is the achievement of harmony both personally and socially, in the service of social order. At least it is the ideal of elites who are very much raised to respect these ideals derived from Greek and Roman culture that was once the core of their culture's education. At one time the source of their leading culture was based on commonly held aristocratic culture. In fact these values are not merely an aspiration for the upwardly mobile, but are a common attainment among the leadership class. This is partly because the culture at large so much takes for granted an innate emotionality reinforced through supportive social occasions, that sublimating this emotionality in the service of personal and social harmony becomes an ideal, even if it is more likely mainly for elites to achieve it.

In general in the cultures of Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe, and also in Anglo-American culture areas, there is more of an appreciation of occasional explosive emotionality, not because it is common in everyday life, but because it isn't, and with outlets for everyday emotional expression being rather rare, they admire not only emotional harmony, but something which people in more emotional culture areas take for granted but which they find to be exceedingly rare: intense emotional expression as catharsis. Since this catharsis is not the product of education teaching the etiquette of socializing and even of reasoning together, but of mass movements be it in sport or warfare or the result of political demagoguery, on the rare occasions it occurs it is likely to have a mass effect rather than reflect the molding through education of elites of how to express their emotions. For that matter, such moments of catharsis do occur in Latin American culture areas, but because emotional catharsis in a sense occurs more in everyday life there, so it is less hungered for except under unusual circumstances, such as political demagoguery, and in the modern era, sports spectacles. Also, even in Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe in some areas such mass catharsis, even when rare, is an ordinary expectation,



like in some areas when soccer riots occur, while in other geographical areas it is so rare that it really is an anomaly rather than a part of everyday life.

Still, the ideals, the ends of life, are remarkably similar in all cultures. It is only the means which draw them far apart, for good reasons no doubt, but which the followers of each culture are duty bound to try to understand in order to control, for their own peace of mind if not for that of their oblivious, or resentful, or jealous neighbors. At the very least Latin America can learn from us Americans to appreciate deferring gratification for the greater good, and we can learn from them about not constantly deferring gratification, again for the greater good.

Our society is one whose modes of justifying authoritative decisions is awash with empty rhetoric and burden of proof reasoning. Partly this is because we are awash in specialized knowledge, and specialists who cannot see beyond the limits of their specialties. Even the generalists who lead them often have developed their own specialty, that of public relations stunts and foolish ritualism. Humanists who don't know science, scientists who don't know values, or even much psychology, have become leaders by default. It is no wonder they fall back on empty rhetoric and burden of proof reasoning when they reach the limits of their knowledge.

In fact this is a danger which all leaders in all cultures face when they go beyond the limits of their understanding of the world around them, and the limits of their competence. The problems of limited horizons have plagued leaders in all societies, from the most primitive to the most advanced, from time immemorial. John Ralston Saul, one of the premier writers of Canada, has written on many of these issues. I particularly recommend his books *Voltaire's Bastards: The Dictatorship of Reason in the West* (Saul 1992), *On Equilibrium: Six Qualities of the New Humanism* (Saul 2003) and *The Collapse of Globalism: And the Reinvention of the World* (Saul 2005).

In fact Anglo-American culture, unlike that of much of the rest of the world, can be described as being a "neurotic" culture because it encourages personal neuroticism through its encouragement of repression of emotion and its discouragement of very many opportunities for expression of emotion except through the "entertainment" industries, rather than as is so common in so many other places a "hysterical" culture which encourages acting-out, the flowing out of emotions, especially common when it allows one to socially fit-in or to complain



when one doesn't fit-in. Most of the rest of the world has to deal with barely repressed emotionality, a quickness to argue, all of which sometimes "clears the air" and sometimes causes endless feuding, and what sometimes reaches the point of producing societies always on the verge of civil war.

America, and our other English-speaking cousins, have very few of these problems. We instead avoid such problems by becoming so rigid in our emotions, a kind of bureaucratization of the parts of the self, producing self-control, once for moral reasons, but now going way overboard in reaction to social anonymity (a lack of intimate others to produce an audience for our emotions), and of course also to meet the requirements of intense work stress in bureaucratized environments. Now for most Americans endless arguments is not their problem. Their problem is being alienated from their emotions, and being motivated by promises of emotional release in the future, in other words endless, endless fantasizing, usually through their recreational industries, which substitutes for heartfelt communication between intimates, even substituting for intense friendship.

A foolish ritualism can develop in societies plagued by endless feuding as a means to keep it under control, but this ritualism in some ways does not teach the inner self, it develops social order more than it develops the personality. It produces etiquette, it produces fashion, it may also appeal to superstition and the fear of punishment from the divine. Of course not all ritualism is foolish, and some societies achieve through their ritualism and etiquette social order without much sacrifice of spontaneity and even sincerity in emotional expression which is necessary for true intimacy. Still, if absolute sincerity must be relied upon for close social relationships it'll be rather rare. As a practical matter both etiquette and sincerity can be used to maintain social bonds.

However, ritualism can also be used to shore up rather weak social bonds. In our modern American society foolish ritualism is often used to stabilize the neurotic self, to give backbone to people who lack self-confidence because their relationships with others are so shifting and uncertain in a world where people don't so much argue as not communicate period. Thus ours is less a shame culture, produced by social conformity, than it is a guilt culture where it is hard to have elementary self-esteem (that which automatically comes from living in a supportive social environment) unless we prove our worthiness to layer after layer of bureaucrats, as well as acquaintances who treat us as

competitors before they treat us as friends. There is the possibility of a healthy guilt culture, but it requires very wise and moral bureaucrats running these impersonal institutions used to mold and judge their fellow citizens.

It is not surprising, however, when self-righteous political “activists” endlessly seek more and more ritualism, often not so much to solidify society as to try to humiliate those they dislike. Such ritualism is common practice in the environments which socialize children.

To constantly seek the approval of taskmasters who for their own purposes deny us approval unless we jump through all the hoops they set up, all that ritualism which is their way of looking busy and making it look like they can advance society’s goals for making a humane life when they really don’t know how, is so neurotic that it is no wonder young people so often divide up their own society into extreme conformists and extreme rebels. A healthy society would be without such extremes because there would be honest and sincere communication between its parts, not just playing expected social roles, not being image-mongering toadies, not fanatics seeking social acceptance by appearing to be perfect, not entertainers trying to seduce others into loving them, not outrageous rebels who have no clear goal in mind other than being rebellious as a form of entertainment, just people who respect and communicate with each other. For a healthy society, that is enough. An interesting book on the place of ritual in modern society is *Ritual and its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (Seligman 2008). As for the hysterical people found in modernizing traditional societies, perhaps they could use becoming somewhat more neurotic (if we mean by that being more self-controlled), but not as much as we often are.

Such authoritarian societies filled with mass hysteria also have their own kinds of propaganda coming from their leaders, ideological demagoguery about producing a perfect social order that prevents all problems from arising; what we in America call just a dream. Non-ideological demagoguery, because it doesn’t promise much social order, works best in narcissistic societies such as ours where wishful thinking takes the form of believing leaders who promise that economic growth will solve all problems, or at least the only problems worth solving.

Paradoxically, authoritarian societies in the modern era tend to be ones where emotional satisfaction and caring communities, which go hand in hand, are in danger of disappearing, and so are sought to be protected through heavy-handed impositions from elites under the

guise of protecting social order. Narcissistic societies on the other hand are the ones where emotional satisfaction and caring communities have already been lost, and so substitute satisfactions are sought through bought pleasures, particularly through the recreational industries, again relying on the self-serving promises of elites.

One reason the vapid promises of modern American politicians so often fall on deaf ears in the rest of the world, unlike the intellectually vigorous thought of the Founding Fathers in the 18th century which influences foreigners even now, is because modern American political rhetoric has become so vapid and demagogic, ignoring the difficulties people face in forming cohesive societies (think of it as the causes of "sin.") We in America have gotten used to our leaders' demagogic rhetoric, as more authoritarian societies have gotten used to theirs. Both sides tend to be resistant to the other side's propaganda because it doesn't fit in with the assumptions of their own culture.

More authoritarian societies get angry at simplistic American propaganda which leaves out so much about the difficulties of practicing democracy, particularly when dealing with issues other than economic growth, such as social solidarity and social justice. They often feel they don't have much to learn from us, and we feel likewise we don't have much to learn from them. If they learn to temper their fanaticism, perhaps we will learn to temper ours. It seems Americans are quite willing to hear their politicians tell them that democracy doesn't involve much work (mainly because the politicians and lobbyists will do the work for them); foreigners are often resistant to this message.

The demagoguery of authoritarian societies about achieving the great chain of being, the holistic society, through rule by an intellectual and moral elite, doesn't really work that well in practice as the fall of Communism shows, but neither does the demagoguery of narcissistic societies. In the latter case an atomized society is treated as the norm, and elites constantly seek to manipulate markets to their advantage, be it through seeking monopolies, through fostering vice and ignorance by appealing to the lowest common denominator prejudices of target audiences, or through fostering the belief that markets are the only way to set standards for society, thus fostering the illusion that it is possible to buy happiness as if economic growth is the only good and through it this economically-oriented elite will bring a narcissistic utopia into existence. True democracy serves neither extreme. Why? Because it is more than the mass of people living off of promises.

The demagoguery and foolish ritualism of authoritarian societies as shown in their propaganda is not effective in the US, not with all their promises of order and social justice which we doubt their leaders, and our leaders of the same mold, can fulfill. Also our demagoguery and foolish ritualism is not effective there, with all our promises of freedom and markets serving individual choice as a substitute for social order, as if a society is nothing more than an agglomeration of individual choices (hint: there is something known as the free-rider problem in economics). America in fact is known as a place where the sheer inefficiency of parts of our society create jobs, e.g., a poor public transportation system creates a robust automobile industry, even if now it is mostly owned by foreigners. Perhaps we can still learn from each other if politicians from both kinds of societies stop making exaggerated promises, and stop trying to manipulate both outsiders and its own public with public relations stunts and foolish ritualism.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### THE PLACE OF LAW IN A DEMOCRACY

What does law have to do with justice? That's the old conundrum which has plagued all societies since mankind was in its infancy. For tribal societies, law is custom and custom is law, and the purpose of these customary laws may be forgotten, usually regarding the minor ones, but for the major ones they are obvious as everything else is in a society which holds few secrets from its members. That's why theft is nonexistent in a society where nothing can be hidden, where everything anyone owns is known to everyone else who cares to look, and often can be borrowed just for the asking.

The enforceability of virtue, or better yet the non-enforceability of virtue, is the dirty little secret of modern law where law has become greatly elaborated in its traffic light function, simply to give order to the complex movements of modern society, but is increasingly cut off from its function of molding character, once described as punishing sin and rewarding virtue. True, it is harder and harder to define these terms when people do not relate to each other in moralistic ways, but only as buyer and seller, landlord and tenant, user and used, or that is what the Chinese Tao Te Ching seems to say with its emphasis on following the great Tao, the order of the universe.

Every society gets the law it deserves, and in the US the Protestant Ethic, in a nutshell, has become interpreted to mean, you can't make people happy, but you can make them rich (some of them, and then some of the money will trickle down to the rest, but that's another story). Prof. Grant Gilmore of the Yale Law School in *The Death of Contract* (Gilmore 1974) recounts a certain disillusionment with this process, this production of law that facilitates arms-length business transactions but also arms-length social relationships. Traditionally in the US the way businesses related to each other was not the way neighbors, friends, relatives, strangers bumping into each other related to each other, and for good reason. Businesses increasingly were expected to be relatively cold and heartless, they weren't people after all, though over time judges have been increasingly found to treat organizations as persons under the law, and to treat people as being as cold and heartless as corporations (but that also is a story for another time).

By the end of the 19th century contract law as recounted by Prof. Gilmore was very much a law that didn't expect or require good intentions, and only expected the fulfillment of the black letters of the written contract, all to be judged in a spirit of "buyer beware." In other words, there were no longer, as did exist in the 18th century, standards of right and wrong, just the formalities that proved a contract had been made in the first place. As a matter of fact, one member of a contract could be expected to break the contract just as a policy of doing business if that person was willing to pay the designated penalty since the law had little interest in punishing malicious intent. There was even some evolution of tort law in the same direction, that law involving lawsuits over injuries to self or property, that "pay off the person and be done with it" should be the standard, and not get involved in ascertaining intent, conscious mistake or error, or even past practices. Perhaps that is why under present legal circumstances, following a parallel process, the rich often escape their crimes, they pay off their victims to not file charges, but not their torts, they are sued for everything whether in any moralistic sense they are responsible or not. Such evolution never went very far even in torts for obvious reasons; it went against what remained of our moralistic grain.

Nevertheless, Prof. Gilmore makes clear that edifice of 19th century American business law is increasingly under attack for similar reasons; it has gone too far in separating law from morality. Yet our legal system is far removed from public morality for the same reason we have limited government. The government is not trusted to be less than self-serving or even to know what we want let alone how to put this knowledge to good use. Yet we still have a government that has to look busy, and also has real problems to face in society at large. The result is often law that sounds good, that has good intentions but is not enforceable in a practical sense because the government is not capable of getting the information required to put the law into effect in a judicious manner; that and political considerations result in law as public relations stunts. It is the exact opposite of what had developed in so much 19th century business law, where the government never got involved in setting standards other than "buyer beware."

The problem of enforceability arises because government can't be in all places at all times without producing a definite authoritarian cast to our society, and so must rely on lawsuits which makes so many laws in effect merely variations on the "legal profession full employment act" and even then only the rich who typically can afford such suits are the

most likely to benefit. This includes partners in law firms and the like who can afford to raise cries of age discrimination, women professionals who can sue for not advancing ever farther, and handicapped people with deep pockets who can sue such as airline pilots with drinking problems. Business may be afraid of them, but often not of the rest of us whom they may discriminate against in even fiercer fashion in order to maintain their power.

Thus the standards of the law are inconsistent both because it is the nature of reality to require goals that cannot be coordinated easily, and because of the social reality that different people and different institutions differ in the power they have, producing the political reality that the political class caters to interest groups in a way that benefits themselves, which also means in a way the reinforces the power differentials of society. Sometimes the latter takes the form of those public relations stunts that result in badly written laws, or it may take the form of badly decided legal decisions as judges put on their philosopher king caps but in reality make decisions based not on timeless law or timeless morality, but on their own personal prejudices. Badly written laws, often a form of public relations stunts to appease some interest groups, and badly decided judicial decisions, often made because judges are part of interest groups and cannot tell the difference between their pet prejudices and the needs or desires of society at large, both reflect a weakening of democratic society so that leaders literally are unfamiliar with the needs and the ways of life of people outside their social cliques. This mostly reflects upper class bias of course, be it the neurotic guilt of the wealthy and privileged who aren't particularly interested in helping the poor in any practical sense, just in relieving their own sense of guilt, or the neurotic resentment of the wealthy who fear any political militancy among the poor is aimed at them and must be crushed, for society's good of course according to them even though it benefits the rich and powerful most of all.

More about the decline of democracy later, but first let us notice that part of the increasing wedge between law and morality is the result of the change in legal culture so that American lawyers, and this is less so in Britain, increasingly believe that their job is not to ensure a fair trial, but merely to get their clients off at all costs, or to win frivolous lawsuits. The latter is often done by lawyers acting as if they are the directors of a play, and trying through the proper theatrics to produce a suspension of disbelief in the audience, which means the audience will no longer be able to tell the difference between fiction and reality

if these lawyers are successful. The way this is practiced is by raising bizarre accusations or defenses, hoping that there is no living societal tradition of manners, morals, and customs to serve as a frame of reference. In a procedural sense, the practice of presenting arguments is often the opposite of “good” legal practice; it is not the focusing of analysis on core legal issues, but the reverse, obfuscation by raising all kinds of trivial issues hoping that the core issues will be obscured.

The ability to win by appealing through propaganda to basic emotions, and of course lots of irrelevant arguments, does not only appeal to the lowest common denominator attitudes of the public; it also appeals to judges when their own prejudices are aroused. Whether judges are becoming more and more prejudiced because they are increasingly not socially connected to society at large (at least at this time in history), but are literally an upper-class elite who are increasingly consumed by their prejudices (be it right-wing or left-wing politically) because it is all they know in their social isolation (which is a common social phenomena, not a rare one) is something we must face if we are to maintain a democratic as opposed to an aristocratic legal system. The fact that prejudiced, egotistical, snobbish and not-well-rounded people like becoming judges (this is not to say that many of them succeed) is another problem, especially when as is likely an anonymous society that fosters narcissism is creating a good number of them.

The ability of a society to produce rationality depends on the information-carrying ability of the society, especially the ability to enable bureaucratic specialists and communal generalists to communicate with each other, mainly so that bureaucrats will provide for community members what they need and not what the bureaucrats, out of their own ignorance, laziness, or prejudice, think they need. There is also the whole other issue of having a common culture to provide a frame of reference for interpreting situations, and the loss of such a culture and its replacement by bureaucratic, and other, subcultures, some of which demand rationality, and some of which encourage wishful thinking.

Nevertheless, a society must make do with what it has, which is a crucial theme of that 18th century classic, the Baron de Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* (Montesquieu 1996) which was an influence on our Founding Fathers. If it is a monarchy it will have a bureaucracy driven by a sense of bureaucratic expertise serving the will of the generalist who is its master. If it is an aristocratic society honor, not social



mobility into a place in society, but trying to be worthy of the place you now have, will be what drives a sense of achievement. Republican and democratic societies will be driven by a desire for social mobility and out of a sense of loyalty to one's peers respectively, but may not be able to achieve levels of bureaucratic expertise found in more hierarchical societies. Such were the common sense notions of the 18th century. That was why the Baron de Montesquieu didn't recommend interfering with the customs and values of small religious groups who tried to maintain very high standards among themselves, just as he considered it impractical for such small groups to try to impose values and practices among society at large who see no point in them, and cannot see their purpose given the limitations in communications and sympathies of large, anonymous societies.

As a historical aside, but with ramifications for the modern era, one way to look at the effects of the Reformation in Britain, and subsequently in America, was that the extremely hierarchical sense of intellectual endeavor which the Catholic Church maintained for centuries broke down after the Reformation. An extreme intellectual seriousness developed in Britain as some of the common people as well as scholars took it upon themselves to ask questions about "the good society" that once only monks and bishops would be expected to ask. This democratizing of high intellectual seriousness and standards eventually broke down, and the kinds of questions Shakespeare and John Milton and John Donne asked were rarely asked in the 18th century and later, certainly on a mass scale. By the 18th century the intellectual accomplishments of the 17th century were known, but not always the reasonings behind their conclusions. Freedom of religion and freedom of speech were now considered good things, but the reasonings behind them, the who, what, where and how of the human experience was often forgotten, and if anything this trend has extended even farther into the present day. We in America have an intellectual inheritance of the "American way of life" but for most of us we have forgotten the benefits and limitations of this inheritance.

One crucial effect is that when courts reason about the meanings of the clauses in the American Constitution, they do not necessarily have a living tradition, or at least one in very attenuated form, to tell them the historical context to enable them to interpret these clauses. For example, we historically have followed the Protestant tradition of natural law theory, not the Catholic one. The Protestant tradition of Britain takes for granted that the means for enforcing morality, natural law if

you will, should be determined by the mass of people as expressed through their legislative representatives, and overturning legislative intent under the guise of enforcing natural law should be used very sparingly. This is not the Catholic tradition where until relatively recently the Catholic Church often derided legislative attempts to categorize natural law, and often claimed since their knowledge of this was superior the legislative attempts were therefore ineffective and perhaps even illegitimate. Thus for good and for ill the Catholic Church has a greater history of conflict with secular authority than do the Protestant Churches. The most famous examples are probably their conflict with the British government in the 17th century which they treated as illegitimate, and their conflict with socialist political parties in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. For that matter in present-day Iran there is a clerical council that can veto the work of the secular legislature, which is not totally different from what our Supreme Court can do.

In fact there has been an increasing tendency by modern American courts to override legislative enactments on what they call constitutional grounds, but what many others call public policy grounds, as if they too are a clerical council of oversight. Their rationale is a kind of updating of natural law doctrine but without the Protestant ideology that law should arise from the will of the people with only rare exceptions, not to be ordinarily superseded by princely or judicial fiat.

There is a rationale that the courts can make law, but historically this has been to deal with emergency situations, to prevent a great injustice not addressed by present law, and more often than not to fill in the gaps in present laws because of unforeseen circumstances that were not recognized when the laws were made. The original common law of the medieval period from which our modern common law derives was made at a time when the king was the head of the judiciary and had ultimate responsibility for the judicial system, and also the judiciary was very much influenced by communal and religious custom. In fact the legislative branch of government was barely in existence, so the issue of overriding legislative intent would not arise. Even when the common law arose in the Middle Ages, it was primarily concerned with property rights, particularly to land, and which proved somewhat rigid in practice with its reliance on writs to prove causes of action. This rigidity itself partly reflected the nobility jealously resisting giving the king too much of a free hand. The remedy of developing equity as a source of alternative causes of action was developed by the kings

through their religious advisors rather than through the judicial system based on judges. Thus the claim that judges can literally make law in anything other than an emergency sense is a new, not an old, development.

In fact now the American judiciary have learned to make laws out of acts of prerogative just like monarchs used to do. Thus the judiciary, being the most monarchical sector of government, suffers from all the temptations of monarchical government, particularly self-assertions of power (often through claims to having knowledge of natural law), and like the British constitutional history of the 17th century, such claims are both asserted unilaterally and can produce constitutional crises.

Like in a monarchy, only tradition and community custom can cause judges, like monarchs, to exercise self-restraint, and like in 17th century Britain new circumstances based on new issues to be dealt with can cause the breakdown of this self-restraint. Nevertheless these are issues that very rarely faced in American legal circles, mostly because like in 17th century Britain, no one wants to face power that arises from "the divine right of kings." Also, all professions have a poor track record of regulating themselves as long as there is no true countervailing power in place.

Thus the problems of the American judiciary are in many ways the problems of the aristocratic element, and even monarchical element in the sense that Supreme Court justices have their jobs for life, in government. One modern result of this diminishing of the custom of self-restraint among the judiciary is the way some judges, so far a small minority, seek to override legislative intent to a great degree. This acceptability of "activist" judges has produced left-wing activists, and in reaction (or perhaps the other way around) right-wing activists. Judicial politics has become increasingly like the politics of Weimar Germany in the 1920's, left-wing activist intellectuals who ignore society at large and grasp for power face off with right-wing activist intellectuals of the same ilk, and the mass of people who put them into office, or in the case of non-elected judges do not even have this level of influence over them, pretty much have little control or even influence on what these activist intellectuals do. This monarchical element of government, most obvious in the Supreme Court whose members serve for life, is something we refuse to face, partly because we refuse to face what 18th century Americans knew full well, that the American government is a mixed polity composed of democratic (House of Representatives), aristocratic (Senate) and monarchical

(Supreme Court through overriding legislation, Presidency through administrative assertions of power but with some legislative check on this) elements. If anything the Supreme Court is more monarchical in power than the Presidency because it is less frustrated by checks and balances than other sectors of government.

As a matter of fact, our knowledge of the historical background to British constitutional practice which we inherited and which provided a context for understanding the American constitution is so poor, that some lawyers claim we no longer know what “high crimes and misdemeanors” means in order to run a proper impeachment. The fact that there are many 17th century precedents to look up seems to escape them. In a nutshell, unlike those people who think we’re governed by the Führer principle, and presidents can only be impeached for the most horrendous violations of the oath of office (like for setting up concentration camps for political opponents, but not for getting 10,000 traffic tickets, or for shooting at pedestrians outside the White House), the 17th century precedents show that impeachment is a means to remove a person from office for doing a bad job, essentially for malfeasance in office, not only for committing a crime, and certainly not as a source of immunity from punishment for committing crimes, as if a President is above the law. The British tradition which American inherited is that even the monarch is not above the law, so how can a President be? Of course impeachment should not be done for frivolous reasons. Nevertheless, we have never successfully impeached a President (including Andrew Johnson who seemed unclear about why the Civil War had recently been fought, but for whom helping the slaves wasn’t high up on his list of reasons), probably for the same reason all professions do a poor job of policing themselves. It saves their members and the rest of us from embarrassment.

In general our society, or more accurately our leaders, have turned to social mobility for a small proportion of the population as the touchstone of democracy, all the while using it as an excuse for ignoring the lives of the mass of working-class people. Thus do the leaders of our democracy increasingly take on an aristocratic tinge in lifestyles as they refrain from listening to or paying attention to, or certainly associating with in their non-work hours, the mass of people they claim to represent. This holds true for judges even more so than for the rest of our leaders, as they insist on judging even though some lack practical knowledge of the manners, morals, and customs of society at large. No wonder they increasingly rely on experts, sometimes so-called

experts, to tell them how society works. It is also no wonder that burden of proof reasoning is behind so many of their decisions. Unlike real science where if the facts are not available a phenomenon is considered unexplained rather than jumping to a burden of proof explanation, judges can't say "I don't know." They will privilege an explanation and assume it is true even if the facts aren't there, as long as these judges and their peers assume that certain assumptions are necessary to maintain social order, even if these no longer or never were in reality the assumptions of society at large.

In many ways our secular culture at the hands of elites is starting to have the qualities of a secular religion. Law is developing from these same hands qualities once reserved for religious law, having something approaching absolutist goals, and giving its enforcers something approaching absolutist power for achieving these goals. Much the way "elective" monarchies evolved into absolute monarchies (beyond their original duties as war leader and supreme judge, to enforce law rather than to make law except in emergencies), there is an increasing tendency for "activist" judges from both the political left and the political right to in effect make law rather than enforce it, facilitated by legislators who don't take their responsibilities seriously so that they confuse law-making with public relations stunts.

Traditionally in America, unlike let's say the Soviet Union, rights basically enforced negative liberties, which means they, like freedom of religion and freedom of the press, enforced themselves by government not getting involved. Increasingly laws proclaiming rights have become so vague and general that they can be used for very vague kinds of burden of proof reasoning, as well as cases where clear and convincing evidence is present. The effect is to energize judges to make proclamations justified by very vague clichés. This is not the traditional spirit of the common law, which was always oriented toward specific and concrete standards, for the most part anyway. Isaiah Berlin, the British writer on philosophy and on intellectual history is known for emphasizing the distinction between negative and positive liberty. See in particular his book *Liberty* (Berlin 2002) as well as *The Roots of Romanticism* (Berlin 1999). As for a critique of rights talk in general, see Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse* (Glendon 1993). For a historical account of the American Supreme Court, though some will call it a polemic, read James MacGregor Burns, *Packing the Court: The Rise of Judicial Power and the Coming Crisis of the Supreme Court* (Burns 2009).

Law in a pragmatic sense must deal with concrete possibilities, in effect with left-wing issues and right-wing issues simultaneously, for that is how communities judge. In reality progress comes from changing some things and preserving others, not pie in the sky left-wing promises, nor pie in the sky right-wing obstructionism. When politics fluctuates between these two extremes, like it did during the German Weimar Republic, then you know it is elite-driven, passing along their fantasies and public relations stunts as pragmatic policy. That is why even when left-wing politicians win office the mass of more conservative people can deal with their issues even when these aren't high on their own list of priorities. The same holds true, in reverse order, when right-wing politicians win office. It is ideological elitists who find it so hard to compromise or even to work together with their ideological opponents because so many of their plans arise less from practical knowledge and more from ideological fantasies. The same holds true for ideological judges.

One of the peculiarities of American democracy is the way a belief in getting along at the communal level is also our goal at the national level, in effect for society at large. In many societies, the heritage of poverty and of feudalism is one of extreme bickering at the local level, and the only way to produce social solidarity at the national level, so that anything can get done politically, is nationalism. Nationalism is a form of idolatry when they do it, because it is a way to overcome their own weak sense of social solidarity by forgetting who they are, and drowning their selves into a mass self which amuses them just as it makes their own desires irrelevant. Traditionally, the moral goals of American society were middle-class ones, which allowed for compromise between the goals of the very rich and the very poor. In "nationalistic" societies leaders often do not seek a golden mean, but instead they seek to structure society by their own conceits, not by listening to the ideas of others. This can produce extreme fluctuations in politics as one ideological party succeeds another in succession. Or this can result in one ideological party seizing control, in which case the end result of a democratic election will be no more democratic elections.

The dangers of such ideological politics are obvious enough in the legislative arena. They exist in the judicial arena because checks and balances in the US in that area, particularly for controlling the Supreme Court, are weakly developed. The principle of appealing judicial decisions to the next higher level of the court system shows the need in principle for such checks and balances; they just disappear at the

highest level which is what makes the Supreme Court so much like a collective monarchy who answer only to God.

The ultimate level of analysis for describing what is the place of law in a democracy is to describe what is the relation of law to values, and how does democracy enforce or create or is created by law and values. Public morality as a historical inheritance in the US reflects to a large extent rather puritanical, as opposed to rather fascistic, middle-class traditions that are considered a model and an ideal for both the rich and the poor even when not practiced to a great extent by either of them. This is different from Europe where the middle class is considered just one more interest group, and often a rather passive one at that, and this interest group tends to follow the leadership of intellectuals whose focus of attention is usually on the rich (a group that supplies almost all social leadership) or the poor (who are to be helped out for the most part not by their standards but by the standards of the intellectuals who lead them). As public morality which is rooted in communal feelings weakens in all modern societies, we are hard-pressed to find a substitute, so that we tend to be stuck with more commodities to consume and more bureaucracy. The former tends to be the alternative of choice in America, with Europe, being more elite-driven, tends to tinker with bureaucracy in order to produce more social order (and perhaps social justice) rather than merely producing more liberty (which in the modern world is mainly the liberty to consume commodities, as well as avoiding the tyranny of overbearing leaders).

You might say in both Europe and America social morality is highly developed, as we have lots of money and lots of technical, bureaucratic expertise on how to spend it, but not any longer a strong communal feeling on what to spend it on, which reflects a weakening in effect of interpersonal morality. We are increasingly "consumers of justice" but not "public spirited citizens" who stand for something, so that democracy can continue to serve as the steering mechanism of society.

One major result is that as communal feelings weaken people are increasingly judged, not according to their characters by their neighbors, but as markets for consumer items by bureaucrats. While ethics for people in their communities are increasingly relativistic, ethics for leaders are increasingly absolutist, not regarding their personal characters since they are expected just as most people are expected to be increasingly narcissistic, but regarding their public bureaucratic duties they are expected to engage in social engineering with little knowledge of and thus little concern for side-effects. While the people who know



the pragmatic effects of values are expected to be mainly interested in personal pleasure, those who do not know the practical effects of values, and who may well be figurehead leaders interested in politics as public relations stunts or may be just simple ideologists, are expected to have the right to enforce absolute values (more accurately described as absolute goals) through bureaucratic rules.

Values in the modern world are increasingly treated as hobbies rather than as ways of life. As hobbies they are the concern of “activists” but are not integrated practically into the ways of life of the mass of people. If anything, “activists” decreasingly appeal through common understandings to the mass of people, though they do try to convert them through propaganda, and increasingly seek power by connecting to leaders or themselves leading groups, not by connecting to the mass of people who are followers. The result, if carried to an extreme, is likely to be moral anarchy at the communal level (along with the loss of middle-class norms in the US as the balance wheel of society) and increasing authoritarianism at the higher levels of society.

In conclusion, modern society which is predicated upon extreme division of labor and extreme anonymity produces very weak social solidarity so that social order is not produced by the mass of people expressing their relatively absolute values, but only by expressing their individual interests which are accommodated by marketing of commodities or by bureaucratic controls. Bureaucratic leaders are left with the responsibility for coordinating values, but in doing so are often cut off from society at large with little concern for contextual effects. They produce absolutely relative individual values but relatively absolute bureaucratic rules, and in the political process often react to the mass of people in a shallow, opportunistic manner, in effect treating people like objects. To the extent that government relies on input from non-bureaucrats, it is from “activists” (who themselves are not fully representative of the communities they claim to represent), who reflect more their own individual interests and ideologies, rather than communal culture, if there is one.

Law of course must be coordinated with the sources of social order, that is with custom, self-interest, and moral imperatives. Socialistic government, more common in Europe, is organized through reliance on bureaucracy and social conventions. Liberal government, more common in America, is organized through reliance on individual self-interest expressed in markets, and on social conventions. Conservative (civic republican) government, rather rare nowadays, is organized



mostly through reliance on social conventions, that is on custom and morality, communally based. All three forms of organizing government rely on individual concern and self-sacrifice for society, but in the first two methods for organizing government to a rather limited extent. A good start for learning about the debate between liberalism and civic republicanism to become the present-day American political philosophy is Michael Sandel's *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Sandel 1998). Bernard Bailyn *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Bailyn 1967) and Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776–1787* (Wood 1998) discuss such issues in the context of political debate that led to the American Revolution. For a discussion of the continuing debate among scholars regarding the influence of liberalism and civic republicanism in American political thought see Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Appleby 1992).

The paradox of modern law is that with great possibilities for social morality (enforced through government bureaucracies or through bureaucracies that serve markets), it has to rely on weakened interpersonal morality. This weakens the basic underpinnings of social order, the elementary degree of social order which is ordinarily taken for granted, producing social problems that government or big business are increasingly expected to solve, just as it weakens the interest of individuals in both community and in government (as opposed to their own petty self-interest) so that community as the source of ideas for government is weakened. By having great wealth but poor communication with the mass of people on how to spend it, government often uses law-making for public relations stunts to appeal to high profile minorities and/or “activists” rather than to the mass of people who need and deserve help. Traditionally, European populations expect their elites to produce social order, while in America there is still more popular input into politics, but there is less expectations for social order other than through economic growth, so less is expected of democracy and less pressure is placed upon it here.

You might say we are evolving toward something like a civil code law system (much like Continental Europe has) with laws often written in the legislature to such an amazing degree of generality that we have neither the communal culture nor the administrative competence to give adequate content to these general laws, in effect producing a mediocre version of a civil code law system. The result may well be that

we will fall back as a first or last resort on “creative judicial constitutional interpretation” which has all the dangers of “creative accounting.” Some judges think that if the other branches of government are not particularly competent, they can fill in the gaps. It will be amazing if they succeed, since they are in the modern world that branch of government most cut off from the community at large, though this may not have been the case long, long ago, and even that is debatable.

Courts are expected to judge the appropriateness of laws, of whether they should be enforced, which is essentially the issue of constitutionality, by preexisting standards of fairness, which are also part of the law, but as part of this balance of claims of fairness they are expected to be cognizant of their own inadequacies and thus when to defer to the judgments on policies by the legislature. Just as the executive and legislative branches of government by being blatantly unfair can be tyrannical, so can the judiciary by making judgments on policy that they are not qualified to make. In such conflict between branches of government or between branches and the people at large, there can be only a kind of muddling through, though in extreme cases this can result in a revolutionary situation even if it is just a matter of the people or one branch of government disregarding the actions of the other. Thus the judiciary in general must remember that just as there are standards of fairness which everyone is expected to agree on, which courts can enforce, so there are policies which reflect majority opinion as expressed in the legislature for which the judiciary should not substitute their own opinion.

However, like with an absolute monarch, it is not easy to use custom to force self-restraint upon the members of the judiciary; the same holds true for setting standards for society at large given trends in popular culture and even popular values. Nevertheless, irrationality is usually a minority position. Perhaps, and this is only a suggestion, by requiring Supreme Court Justices after their first ten years on the bench to run for reconfirmation by public vote at the time of the closest public election, and for every ten years thereafter, would remind them that the “divine right of kings” doesn’t cut it anymore, and that they serve the people and not merely their own ideologies. It’s only an idea, and like most ideas without lobbyists behind them, probably won’t happen, at least soon. It would however allow us to act on the democratic principle that small groups of people can be driven by their prejudices to the point of irrationality, but large groups of people more likely will not.

History shows even when mass hysteria occurs among a large group of people, it is usually because a small group has corrupted them first. Part of our system of checks and balances, even if it is just in a cultural sense, is that that small group of judges must ultimately compete for the allegiance of the mass of people with that small group of politicians. No one, not even judges, gets a free ride. It is by having so many suitors for their attention that the mass of citizens have the option of changing after the honeymoon period from being a blushing bride to a true partner in society.



## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### THE “STAR” SYSTEM IN AMERICA

It is possible to imagine a society where the perceived lack of social mobility, and class tensions in general, stress the society so much that elites feel they must stress their own competence, since they cannot stress their common touch. Britain was once such a society, to a certain extent still is, as opposed to, for example, 19th century Spain, where elites could point to the achievements of their ancestors more than to their own achievements. Basically in Spain what they could do was to benefit society by monitoring it and keeping it orderly, something anyone in power could do. No wonder the Spanish grandes, like many Hollywood stars, became famous more for their egos than their talents, which existed but was secondary in the public perception. It is also possible for social mobility, or more likely having earned many trophies in competition, to be used to warrant one's social position as a substitute for competency. In effect individuals are being judged by the wrong standards. Increasingly, this seems to be one American trend, though not necessarily the only one.

The influence of a “star” system becomes increasingly likely in a society that is competitive but also big and anonymous so that people don't have the chance to get to know each other very well. Let's take America for an example. Here image often ends up what is being judged because competency is just not known or even particularly understood by those doing the judging.

To see this more clearly, look again at Britain where snobbishness runs rampant just because it is just intimate enough a society for acquaintances to get on each other's nerves. In America, in academia for example, Ivy Leaguers will less obviously lord it over their Midwestern Big 10 (officially an athletic association of Midwestern universities) peers because in reality they will have few dealings with each other. In Britain even professors who don't like each other for ethnic and political, essentially snobbish, reasons, can still know each other enough to respect each other professionally. This is possible only when the community of scholars is small enough so that they can get to know each other in order to judge each other's work, in depth rather

than just superficially. By the way, Steve Fuller, a Professor of Sociology in Britain who wants to bash university-based scholars for their lack of appreciation of “intellectuals” who are interested in the broad consequences of academic knowledge, and not merely to be paid “to learn more and more about less and less” has written a quite interesting book on this subject. It is called *The Intellectual* (Fuller 2005) and does reveal many of the non-intellectual consequences of academic life, for those who are interested.

In America there is so much information overload, because so many people are trying to make impressions, let's take academia again, that increasingly academics are judged by the number of their publications, not what's in them, since very many of these publications are hardly ever read. In fact the number of job candidates, and the number of people seeking tenure positions, are so great in American academia, and the level of trust coming from mutual fellowship and understanding is so low, that invariably it is almost impossible to make the case that one's great book or one's potentially great book is a better achievement or will be a better achievement than someone else's five mediocre pieces of trivia. It is also true that being judged by standards of quantity rather than quality are more of a problem in the anonymous, bureaucratized environments of the state universities, while the prestigious private universities are places for academics to for the most part ignore their colleagues in the state universities and write on broader subjects of more interest to government and social elites, who because they also suffer from information overload, also get to ignore the state universities if they can help it.

Particularly in the humanities and in the social sciences, where rarely do the facts speak for themselves and where values and taste count much in their interpretation, the state universities get to be the Rodney Dangerfield (an American comedian known for his punch line “I get no respect!”) of academia. When you can think of a time when someone at an Ivy League school writes a book in the humanities or in the social sciences, and someone at let's say the University of Kentucky writes a book on the same topic but with an opposite conclusion, and the scholarly consensus is that the book from the University of Kentucky scholar is better, will be a time when both books are read and compared, which will be about the same time as a snowstorm in July.

In many fields, such failures to get to know each other to take each other seriously, and the end result, judging each other by irrelevant

images rather than by relevant standards of character and accomplishment, is endemic in American society, just because of its physical size and population density, and the culture of social distance and image-mongering which allows us to stand each other just because it is so easy to ignore each other. That is why teenagers admire their peers who are "popular," which doesn't mean they are known well; it means they are entertaining and give off good image. They are popular in the same sense movie stars whom you don't know but you think you know are popular. For that matter, American movie stars, much more than their British peers, are primarily known not for their acting ability but for being famous. What happens is that, somehow, perhaps through blind luck, they become more well-known than their peers, being known in many cases more for being likeable than for being good actors. To the extent they must show technical competence, often they do this by essentially playing a version of the same character over and over again.

This is of course the ultimate image of the "star" in American life, the person who blazes far above his or her peers, not necessarily for any discernible reason, except that like guests on TV talk shows, many of them are "known for being known." This "star" quality is increasingly the distinguishing quality of opinion-makers in academia, and in professions in general, especially in America unfortunately. It also has become increasingly the distinguishing quality among certain major executives who are not the people who know the nuts and bolts of their businesses, and can be a resource to any employee who walks in the door, but like the company's bankers, can read financial reports and determine profit centers in the company but also know hardly anybody there and what they do, and hardly anybody knows them. Yet because chief executives are increasingly chosen from a small class of business "celebrities," because the board of directors don't know hardly anyone who work there either, this may help explain why, like movie stars' salaries, the compensation of the top executives of our very large firms have been going up and up; certainly much more so than that of the workers they supervise. The workers always have people competing for their jobs; celebrities much less so.

This is not what was originally meant in America by authority earning and being worthy of its position of power. Certainly what was meant by authority was not organizations run on image, and leaders who bring prestige to organizations, and often little else. But it works if people expect celebrityhood from actors more than technical

competence, it works if people expect babysitting from college, not quality education, it works if stockholders expect stunts to drive up stock prices, not efficient management, and it certainly works if people expect public relations stunts from politicians, not leadership. This is especially true of those hard decisions that politicians love to defer if possible for their successors who then defer these decisions to their successors who then defer them to their successors ad infinitum.

At least one can say movie stars arouse an interest in their audience through media gossip about their private lives, so that their screen personas and private personas merge in the public perception, which translates into public interest and ticket sales. However, people still don't purchase cereal or cars based on media gossip about the private lives of the chief executives of the companies that make these products, or at least not yet. This doesn't prevent some of them from getting the perks of celebrities, at least from their boards of directors.

An analysis of the growing "star" system in American life that complements my own, but that is ultimately quite different, can be found in *The Winner-Take-All Society* (Frank and Cook 1996). Both of the authors are specialists in economics and public policy analysis who, like many in academia, take the attitude that just because markets work well doesn't mean they shouldn't be overruled by government intervention. This is because they have one small disclaimer regarding the efficiency of markets. Unlike traditional Marxists who wanted government intervention because they didn't think markets work well, they and many other academics of the modern era think that markets work, but unfortunately they often have a winner-take-all quality to them. I still take the position that though this may be the natural outcome of market situations on occasion, in many cases if markets could be made to work well they should, they would then not produce winner-take-all outcomes, and government intervention would be much less of a favored alternative.

In many cases what prevents markets from working the way they're supposed to are cultural factors. The classic example of a winner-take-all market is the way movie stars provide economic success to their employers by their "popularity" irrespective of their technical competence, but this doesn't mean chief executive officers should be treated the same way, let alone politicians. The fact that they are increasingly treated so reflects more the anonymity and the media saturation of modern American society, and an encouragement of trends toward adoring celebrities rather than judging their competencies, cultural



trends which were once much weaker in American life, and perhaps can still be reversed.

The ultimate example of a winner-take-all market, and greatly highlighted by Prof. Frank and Prof. Cook, is an athletic contest, where the winner by a few points is treated with all the prerogatives of a winner just as much as someone who wins by many, many points. Thus an Olympic athlete who wins a number of events by a few points goes on to make a lot of money from product endorsements by being a marginally better, not necessarily a greatly better athlete, than the competition. This is quite different from the traditional ideal of a market where one's compensation is supposed to be proportional to one's output, not all-or-nothing depending on "winning."

A similar family of phenomena mentioned by Frank and Cook are markets for status items where there is neither competition against nature, so that efficiency is a matter of science rather than of public relations, nor is there a point of satiation, like one has with non-status products like food. Competing for status often does not have an end point, and these authors compare such occurrences to arms races between nations, so that for example requiring uniforms in schools, like arms race agreements between nations, cuts down on the costs of status rivalries that can spiral out of control. For that matter, when status requirements are induced by people who don't pay for it, like children who want expensive athletic shoes so long as their parents foot the bill, and bosses who request irrelevant degrees from employees who want to be promoted because, again, they're not the ones paying for it, reveal the never-ending quality of status rivalries that cause many people to pay exorbitant sums just to compete, even when only a few can ever be considered winners. Both the psychology of making, often irrelevant, demands upon competitors by the ones with power over them, and the very desire of so many people to compete for high status because they're not satisfied with where they are now, produce an arms race quality to competition for high status that these authors are quite critical of. Their solutions lean toward increased government intervention in the form of consumption taxes that will reduce wasteful consumer spending (the equivalent of the sumptuary laws of such past theocracies as Calvinist Geneva), tort reform to stick it to lawyers, more government intervention in setting goals for health care and higher education, in some instances easing up on anti-trust enforcement to encourage "administered" markets, and increasing government intervention such as enforcing longer vacations and encouraging

less crassness in the mass media such as by making it easier for parents to block out TV shows that they don't want their children to watch.

In general, they seem to be describing a family of phenomena, status position markets rather than markets that deal with efficiency in a physical sense. They don't trust the powerful to expand their power and their requirements over the people who compete at their pleasure, and they don't even particularly trust the "rationality" of the mass of relatively powerless people who spend their time competing with each other when they could be reducing the arms race quality of these competitions. Obviously what they are talking about is the difference between people competing with each other, often at the beck and call of the powerful, and sometimes just with each other in a wasteful manner, and competing in a physical sense against nature through the knowledge gained by science.

They have a point certainly, but they may be throwing out the baby with the bathwater, not telling us when and how markets can be made to work well, not just that they can work badly in a winner-take-all sense when they approximate the results of athletic contests where the major product is fame. In fact my explanation here is that fame is the major output of such markets, often more than productivity, and that a concern with image often interferes with a concern for competency. Their explanation is the opposite of mine, in emphasizing the efficiency of winner-take-all markets. While I am describing imperfect communication resulting from increased anonymity, they are describing ever more perfect communication so that, like among athletes and entertainers, they can compete with ever more people by expanding the reach of their fame, and take in more and more money from more and more fans. All this is true for markets that function like athletic contests, where the rules are simple and objective, and where the output is also simple and objective, and yet consists of overtaking the output of others in a winner-take-all sense, which makes it more like a game and less like many traditional aspects of real life, where people are rewarded in proportion to their productivity. They are describing markets that approximate the qualities of entertainment and athletic markets where the public can only pay attention to a limited number of "winners" rather than greatly rewarding the large number of potential "players."

However, what I am describing are markets that are far from saturated, but where psychological and cultural factors inhibit efficiency, often because image is maximized at the expense of efficiency, which is an odd way of playing a game. For example, I postulate that it would be

possible for professors at non-Ivy League universities to compete with those at Ivy League universities if, as was once the case, a cultural acceptance of judging professors by other than the number of their publications (mostly impinging on non-Ivy Leaguers because there are so many more of them and they are so far removed from the halls of power) would once again allow for qualitative and not just quantitative evaluations of professorial worth in higher education as a whole. The limited number of professional athletes that can be appreciated is a physical limit, the existence of publish or perish in academia is a cultural limit, in some ways particularly American since, unlike Britain though they may be evolving in our direction, we are under constant pressure to prove we are not showing favoritism even if it disallows almost all qualitative standards in decision-making. This result of anonymity and bureaucratization, which the Soviet Union had to a much greater extent, also produces a certain rat-race quality to many aspects of American life, which foreigners notice and which we find upsetting to talk about since we ordinarily don't think we can do much about it, which is another thing we had in common with the Soviet Union, though thankfully to a much lesser extent.

Still, maybe we can do something about it, if nothing else through cultural standards that help us deal with these rat-race qualities of our present society. For example, much like non-funded Federal mandates on local government, where the Federal government is constantly happy to increase requirements so long as somebody else pay the price, so does much of our leadership class in general take a similar attitude of constantly expecting more from the people they lead, as long as somebody else pays the price.

Let's look at some of these ethical issues. Manipulative elites can be defined as those who don't support self-evident moral causes, those which are in no way controversial, unless they get something in return. Since their power so often comes from their leadership of coalitions, they force the poor and defenseless to support these leaders in causes they don't believe in simply because their leaders don't believe in doing right to others unless they get back, usually disproportionately, in return. Think of a king who refuses to help starving peasants unless they agree to oppose a minority religion and to support the king in a war against a peaceful neighbor. A morally self-evident cause, helping the starving peasantry, is lumped in with morally dubious causes because the leader doesn't help anyone for nothing. In modern politics, a comparable situation is where the mass of supporters of a political

party are taken for granted, and their leader expects them to support the causes of swing voters, which will enormously increase the leader's power if nothing else, even if the mass of followers are opposed to these very causes. It is the kind of situation which gave various communist parties a bad name in the 1930's, as people who merely wanted to end poverty were expected to support the various causes and political coalitions that the communist leaders put together, without having any say in the matter.

This is quite different from coalitions arising out of communal discussions and communal consensus, as opposed to being put together in jerry-built fashion by leaders who ignore contradictions in policies so long as coalitions can get larger and larger. Such coalition-building often consists in putting money into the pockets of various ethnic "leaders" with the expectation they can deliver the vote and the loyalty of their communities. One source of "political correctness" consists of creating political alliances of people who agree not to criticize each other because the existence of such coalitions makes their leaders powerful, even if their followers have not even discussed what it is they agree upon, let alone what they don't. "Political correctness" puts a damper on such discussions so that the alliance reflects strategies of coalition-building among elites, not consensus-building among the masses these leaders supposedly serve.

Such coalition-building thus becomes for the purpose of making strategic alliances, which benefits elitist leaders, not for the purpose of reaching communal consensus on what values they hold in common, and what is necessary to implement these values. Such "politically correct" coalition-building is in fact a substitute for consensus-building. It is what happens when each political issue is not decided on its own merits, but leaders horse-trade political positions in order to maximize political alliances, irrespective of the merits of the causes they espouse, which they often don't really discuss with their followers, and perhaps don't even think about themselves. It is what happens when communal leaders do not arise out of communal consensus-building and thus arise out of acclamation from the community, but are "stars" anointed by elites and then confirmed by the media, purely for their celebrity status. I'm not advocating political fanaticism or any avoidance of political compromise. I'm advocating building political, and yes even cultural, consensus through mutual discussion, not through trading votes. Political stands among elites in alliance with other leaders in

these communities is too often a substitute for political discussion in all communities as a basis for reaching a consensus.

At one time the US defined democracy as fair competition, and that hierarchy would be justified by the competence of the holders of these positions. By throwing open positions of authority to endless competition there was always the danger of being overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of people competing, something which the meritocratic societies of Europe tend to try to avoid, and sometimes this reinforces the snobbishness of their elites. But the opposite extreme, of producing a mass society that communicates so badly that a leader becomes defined as literally one who presents a good image, not competence, is not such a good solution either.

At one time large societies often had hierarchy without competency (but maintained a certain basic social order), a later improvement was hierarchy with competency, and finally we in America thought we could achieve a claim to fame by showing it is possible to have competency with social mobility. It can also be a matter of social mobility, or just triumphing over rivals, without competency, which is too often the case when a large, anonymous society suffers from so much competition and so much information overload that it learns to rely on image-management and a defining down of competency to fill its positions of power, helped along by extreme division of labor and extreme bureaucratization. True, such conditions of extreme division of labor and specialization of function makes it unnecessary for any individual to learn extreme competence, since most jobs have become so minutely subdivided that most anyone can learn to do them adequately; except for the generalist leaders who rule over their bureaucrat followers like little kings.

But is that what we want, celebrities ruling over bureaucrats? If that happens, society will continue to coast along on its own momentum, the real work being done by the technocrats underneath, the agendas being set too often not by leaders or statesmen, but by entertainers who pose as them. They still may be engaging in coalition-building; they just won't be asking our opinions about it. These coalitions will probably be reflecting more their strategic needs and values than ours.



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### WHAT IS HAPPINESS? THE LOSS OF HUMAN NATURE IN PSYCHIATRY

What can I say about Psychiatry that hasn't been said already - that it is faddish, that like any business it promises more than it can deliver, that it tells its audience what it wants to hear, that it dislikes being the bearer of bad news, that it serves as the stalking horse for cultural and moral crusades? *A History of Psychiatry* (Shorter 1997) makes similar points as do plenty of other histories of the field. I also recommend *Approaches to the Mind: Movement of the Psychiatric Schools from Sects toward Science* (Havens 1987) as well as *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (Zaretsky 2004).

Meanwhile, many in-house writings offer more boosterism than scholarship. As a matter of fact, discussions about the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR) in its various incarnations of increasing complexity too often complain that this increasing complexity cum sophistication reflects the desire of professionals to justify their detailed diagnoses for which reimbursement is due, by showing that such detailed descriptions are theoretically possible, not that these professionals are in fact capable of pigeon-holing their patients with such minute accuracy. This is especially true when such diagnoses are not the result of long-term experience with their patients, but are snap judgments. Just one of many criticisms of this tendency toward professional hubris is *Making Us Crazy: DSM: The Psychiatric Bible and the Creation of Mental Disorders* (Kitchins and Kirk 1997).

As a matter of fact, John Horgan in his review essay "Why Freud Isn't Dead" in *Scientific American* (Horgan 1996: 106–111) reveals how little practical control, and therefore knowledge, the field of Psychiatry has over its subject matter. He discusses a National Institute of Mental Health study that ran for about 20 years before 1996. "But for the majority of patients, there was little or no significant difference between any of the treatments, including the placebo-plus-clinical-management approach. Only 24 percent of the patients were judged to have recovered and not relapsed for a sustained period" (Horgan 1996: 111).

He also describes a Consumer Reports survey of its readers that was reported in the November, 1995 issue.

Respondents reported the same degree of satisfaction whether they were treated by social workers, who require only a master's degree; psychologists, who need a doctorate; or psychiatrists, who must complete medical school. Only marriage counselors scored lower than the norms. But readers reported more satisfaction with Alcoholics Anonymous than with any of the mental-health professionals or medications. (Horgan 1996: 111)

This may reveal something about surveys, mainly that we often don't know what they are measuring.

Therefore, psychiatry seems to be in a quandary about its subject matter and its efficacy. Here is, therefore, a few comments about where psychiatry is going. In a nutshell, it is my understanding that the pragmatics of personality, that is of motivation and choice, has been split in the world of academic specialization that feeds into psychiatry into emphasis on motivation in a vacuum, that is personality as determined by chemical processes (the drug addict's ideal), and choice as an object of intellectual contemplation. The latter consists of pondering over choices that exist not in the real world of limitations, but in the fantasy world of aesthetic contemplation. The implication for people who indulge in such contemplation is that one really can have it all. By the way, many of them (commonly found among postmodernists, social constructivists and people with similar such titles) also don't believe there is much that can be inferred about human nature, but any discussion of that issue is just a way for the representatives of the power elite to keep us from doing what we want to do, whatever that is. Oddly enough, people who postulate such cultural trends tend to be members of the cultural wing of the power elite, chafing at the restrictions imposed by the business wing of the same elite. Heaven help us from a civil war between them, where we suffer no matter who wins!

Both those who think of us as a bag of chemicals, and those who think of us as philosopher-kings contemplating our way into sublime perfection, are often not very pragmatic. One example, from the cultural side of this civil war (at least it sometimes feels like one), can be taken from *The Maladies of the Soul* (Kristeva 1995). This French psychoanalyst and literary critic writes:

How distressing, unbearable, deadly, or exhilarating it may be, this psychic life - which combines different systems of representation that invoke language - allows you access to your body and to other people. Because



of the soul, you are capable of action. You psychic life is a discourse that acts. (Kristeva 1995: 6)

I don't think so. In this mass of assertions she is telling a half-truth. She is saying there is a kind of means-end structure to human personality, which can be described in traditional religious language as a soul, that which remains constant in the personality, partly because of the goals for which it strives. Language is one way to conceptualize and motivate oneself for these goals. But language is not the only way since we have the motivational and instinctual mechanisms of animals as well. She privileges language and the culture it embodies as if we are ethereal souls without a body, at least as a goal. So the 19th century war between science and religion lives on in this up-to-date version of psychoanalysis, a version which is far less science-oriented than its predecessors, even if not explicitly theological. This mixture of linguistics and psychoanalysis can easily be like the physicist who, instead of studying patterns of phenomena and then describing them with the shorthand language of formula, instead develops the formula before fully understanding the phenomena. Other "cultural" and "literary" psychoanalysts often leap to using the weakest elements of the Freudian corpus, the essentially mythological constructs such as Oedipus complex and penis envy, which may have some truth in a very general sort of way, but we cannot get any more exact than that, as if those constructs are variables in an equation. They're not.

Now to the "bag of chemicals" school. Though there is obviously a biochemical basis for physiological reactions, and thus for personality, it doesn't mean you can gain a personality by taking a pill. We are not yet at a point where a hypodermic needle provides a better education than a teacher. There are so many interactions between neurotransmitters and chemicals in the brain, as well as hormonal effects, that though psychoactive drugs can provide relief for various dysfunctional states, including emotional problems, there is a serious question whether this relief is sufficient to justify a dependency on it. There are other ways to achieve a long-term change in habits, so that we still consider dieting through changes in eating habits to be better than dieting through a lifetime of diet pills. There are side-effects in using drugs, some from long-term use, some from long-term use leading to habituation and either dependency or requiring higher dosages for effect, some merely from the fact that emotional flatness and the deadening of personality comes from deadening anxiety from a drug rather than from a philosophy of life. Drugs work best for very narrow

purposes, they do not create a personality as a whole. This of course has not stopped our engineering and programmed society from attempting to deal with life as if happiness is a drugged state rather than peace of mind.

Let's look at some history. It is not a big surprise, when you think about it, that more traditional, particularly tribal, societies, fared poorly in their competition with modern, bureaucratic ones, because it is we, not they, who are ruthless competitors. American Indians could have captured forts and stood guard perpetually at the confluence of rivers to gain control over a territory like the French and British did, but their warriors could not stand such mindless self-discipline. For that matter, the early Americans did poorly in the War of 1812 when they had to do anything other than defend their home territories. The mindlessness of perpetual warfare for strategic reasons that are oblivious to the soldiers doing the fighting was once something only mercenaries could put up with. But we learned. Likewise, colonial powers had to teach their colonized populations how to engage in mind-numbing labor in order to enrich the motherland, for plantation labor and working in mines did not come natural to these traditional peoples.

Of course in the modern world we have all already learned our lessons. We have learned to compartmentalize, to feel little for long periods of time, and then to recuperate, to feel emotions again in a rushing torrent. Unfortunately, this torrent is not a natural outgrowth of relating to the natural world, but is force-fed through some fantasy-inducing mechanisms, perhaps an entertainment, perhaps a drug.

In any case, the split between mind and body is perhaps wider than ever as the body becomes engaged, not for its original purposes, but to arouse emotions that no longer have a purpose, and so must be instigated out of the blue for no reason other than to feel something when otherwise nothing would be felt. It is no wonder that modern society is increasingly based on narcissistic attitudes, where pleasure is not earned, it is not the side-effect of some purpose that is fulfilled and instills pride, but it is bought and paid for like any other drug. The extremes of feeling nothing and feeling everything that are typical of such states of being that induce manic-depression and even sado-masochism are common enough in a society where the only conditions for arousing emotions are increasingly unnatural ones. As the existentialists say, the meaningless life produces inauthenticity as the resulting state of feeling, or even more likely the lack of it. One book

that very much emphasizes such existential dilemmas is *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* (Sass 1992).

For that matter, it is no surprise that traditional, particularly tribal, societies that lose their values and traditional ways of life often prove vulnerable to pleasures that were not part of their original culture, the bought pleasures that diminish self-control, that reduce self-respect, and that lead to psychological and often physical addiction. Native peoples often die out from disease and from vice, problems for which they have no cultural immunity, and for which their conquerors, concerned above all in finding cheap labor, often offer little in terms of practical advice.

Thomas Jefferson, that founder of the American democratic philosophy of government, and others of his generation, believed that government should be concerned with carrying out the goals, but not substituting for the goals, of community. It should be the enforcement arm of our civil society, our society unified by our values and our sense of civility, so that the governing classes should be judged for their honor, that is for their worthiness to lead, and the independence of what otherwise would be the dependent classes should be maintained and assured. The alternative is what they most feared and what to a certain extent has come to pass, a return to what they most feared about the aristocratic societies of Europe, a bread and circuses state which enforces the rule of figureheads and of a leisure class, all in addition to the bureaucrats who do the real work, and the servility of a working class who are offered vulgar pleasures, but not self-respect or pride.

Obviously, from the structure of a society, and the culture of that society, comes the potentials that society offers, the potentials for personal happiness in fact. Of course, if you don't believe there is such a thing as human nature, then that question, "What prospects for happiness does that society offer?" cannot be asked. All that can be claimed then is the ultimate in value relativism, that there are all kinds of personalities, and other than offering the answers for trivia contests, that is all that we can know. True, self-righteousness and rushing in to judgment are vices. But so is imbecilic stupidity. Some problems really *are* problems, if there is any kind of common human nature at all.

To give an example more relevant to psychiatry, at one time psychoanalysis had hoped to use verbal discussion to achieve direct access to the emotions, an access which would allow for changing these

emotions, both through “rational” (through education) and “irrational” (through use of instincts and defenses by access to the emotions) means. Now the fad is to deal with emotions chemically (whether this is a fine-tuned or scatter gun approach is a separate question), and psychoanalysis is increasingly used to access the personality “rationally,” that is through philosophical pontification.

But because people are not disembodied souls, and also are not computer input-output devices, there are limitations to this approach, especially when political and cultural ideologies and just plain naïveté hamper the quality of the therapist’s understanding of the problem as well as of the solution, and the “bag of chemicals” approach has its own problems with ideologies and naïveté. A healthy and realistic eclecticism in approaches is probably the best approach for psychiatry, one which overcomes the limitations of ideologies and naïveté. Psychoanalysis earned its own reputation for irrelevance by becoming a sounding-board for rich neurotics, the once a week for five years approach, but the chemical approach to therapy, which has its virtues, doesn’t change mental patterns, doesn’t end scapegoating, doesn’t produce realism or social skills or even the ability to recognize self-defeating habits for what they are. A combination of both approaches, however, might do the trick.

In fact one can wonder to what extent psychiatry has been able to keep up with changes in character structures since modernity seems to encourage the character traits of narcissism. Nowadays psychiatry less often gets to use Freud’s insights on neurosis as reflecting powerful repressions on instincts that still seek expression, since it reflects a Victorian world that is increasingly rare to find, though not nonexistent. Instead the polar opposite of neurosis for Freud, perversion, the free expression of instinct without regard to consequences, or even more commonly found, narcissism which is the expression not necessarily of raw instincts but certainly of their socialized forms, even when such expression results in dire social consequences because of their unnatural, impractical, and ultimately immoral consequences, is seen increasingly as the dilemma of modernity.

The modern world faces the dilemma of ensuring the rationality of the ego, that part of the personality which reflects the self as an independent, self-motivated entity, not only because of all the temptations placed in the modern world on the self, but because the basis for creating a stable self until the ego matures through experience is increasingly lacking. What Freud called the superego, the sense of self that

arises from identification with hopefully mature parents and other significant authority figures, is increasingly weak just because social solidarities which would otherwise naturally engage a child's loyalties have now become rather weak.

We have plenty of philosopher-types who pontificate how individuals in their existential aloneness can still "have it all." Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of "bad faith" is taken from psychoanalysis, and refers to the kind of self-protective seeking illusion as a defense common to neurosis. For Sartre "love-free-from purpose" is the only true freedom, obviously derived from Christian love, once based on a leap of faith and absolute trust in God, later inferred as being like the act of will characteristic of the Calvinist God, and now in modern times inferred as a characteristic of will found in the human being.

The Christian roots of this "freedom as individual will" can be seen by contrasting it to Martin Heidegger's "being-in-the-world" determined by care (*sorge*), where care is for things and for others (though the Germanic Heidegger often seems to have more faith in things than in people) so freedom of will becomes a negative concept, freedom that is not desired as much as given up through acts of achievement, while Sartre's freedom is more proud and imperious, enjoyed in contemplation rather than in work.

Both kinds of freedom negate the world by exalting the individual. Such existential philosophizing provides little basis for ethics since such philosophy offers little basis for judging achievement, be it Heidegger's active kind or Sartre's more passive kind. Even the more practical psychoanalysis serves more to re-tool the superego to diminish repetition compulsion by having the psychoanalyst function as a kind of "substitute parent" temporarily.

Yet not all pathology of character, primarily of the emotions but also of perception, cognition and will (which is a kind of combination of the modes of motivation acting in tandem) reflect an unhealthy reaction to one's parents. In fact in the modern world parents seem to have diminishing influence on the character-development of their children, who are increasingly influenced by both peers and the mass media who communicate with them, both bypassing the intermediaries known as their parents.

Increasingly psychiatry as the study of personality and character is becoming both more general and more specific than the Freudian paradigm, though not necessarily more practical for everyday life than the practice of manners, morals, and customs in community, including

the family. Psychiatry nowadays both emphasizes a broader range of motives, that can only be described as existential, leading to self-fulfillment, than did Freud who emphasized eros, secondarily anger (as in "death instinct"), but not more complex combinations of these primary instincts of anger, fear and joy. At the same time psychiatrists are exploring the mechanisms of brain function, and seeking to short-circuit repetitive-compulsive chains in various motivational systems by means of drugs. Such motivational systems as now understood are quite general, and can be described in such terms as high reward dependence as in social conformity and sensitivity leading to joy (low amounts of norepinephrine), harm avoidance or inhibition leading to fear (low amounts of serotonin), and low novelty seeking as in fastidiousness or inflexibility which when challenged leads to anger (low amounts of dopamine). These popular descriptions, which are no doubt inexact, are somewhat based on *Listening to Prozac: A Psychiatrist Explores Antidepressant Drugs and the Remaking of the Self* (Kramer 1993).

Yet the philosophical approaches to human will and the psychochemical approaches to the same thing both have an abstract quality to them. Both end up trying to produce pictures of will without the context provided ordinarily by meanings and personal relationships.

It is small wonder that the massacre at Columbine High School in 1999, a psychiatric event if there ever was one, and later massacres since then, have produced so few lessons for the future. The lesson I draw from this tragedy is that we are creating a society where psychological interdependence and economic interdependence no longer mesh, where people work together but much more rarely empathize with each other, and these activities of working together are in effect nowadays their close relationships. Their feelings for neighbors, even for relatives, are often even less. The two killers at Columbine High School hated their peers, which essentially meant they had none. The major source of contact seems to have originated in athletes bullying non-athletes, though this isn't the whole story since the final attacks were on schoolmates in general.

It is as if young people's hobbies have become their identities, and they can no longer bond on the basis of neighborliness and friendship, but essentially people with different hobbies at least in some cases hate and fear each other. Youth may be more sensitive about such attenuation of social bonds, though it is if anything even more common among adults, though adults are usually mature enough to ignore people different from them, not hate and bully them.

I went to a conference on "Youth and Violence" organized by a psychoanalytic institute. Psychoanalytic analysis of the problems of youth there used concepts such as narcissistic rage, but practitioners didn't claim what they wanted was to put teenagers on the couch. Their expectations were far less, relying mostly on discussion groups and the like in their own work to reach troubled youth. Yet while in their work there was increasing watering down of close, intimate one-on-one interactions as a mode of therapy, they had high hopes for increasing the number of service providers in the schools.

The implicit assumption of the helping professions is that unhappy people need their help, just as members of the helping professions need jobs, and that a society and a culture cannot meet these needs of individuals on its own. The conference occasionally touched on the fact that state institutions for rehabilitation are often snake pits, yet for people who tend to espouse expansion of government services, they tended not to ask why. Likewise there was an implicit assumption that the system for separating out serious and non-serious offenders in correctional facilities is breaking down, yet there wasn't much discussion of why this occurred either. The inefficiencies of such institutions is certainly one reason, another is the issue of the dangers which some young people pose to society. Is harshness ever justified to send a message to others, or is this indistinguishable from vindictiveness?

The propaganda side of the social service professions was present of course. That juvenile delinquents can grow out of it is certainly true. It is also true wealthy businessmen are often given a second chance after their crimes because their lawyers argue that their clients, being wealthy, won't steal, embezzle, or extort again. Why did they do it the first time, and does this mean all rich criminals get one free pass? Well, how dangerous are young offenders? Should there be zero tolerance because examples must be set? The seriousness of these excesses as dangers to society is constantly overestimated by the punitive, and those whose jobs it is to be punitive, and underestimated by the lenient, and those whose jobs it is to be lenient. And we wonder why our social institutions so often serve their functionaries first, and the public second.

Coming away from all the discussions of pop psychology and now pop psychiatry that now permeate our society, we begin to realize that while all the demands for social engineering by psychologists and psychiatrists themselves or their supporters have never been higher, the means for them to actually influence people are quite limited, even if you can't say have never been lower, particularly regarding what might

be called character disorders. Mostly this is because they are trying to influence strangers. For people to become more than strangers to each other, and to call in professionals only to supplement the actions of a real-life community, seems to be a more productive course of action. Too bad it's not yet supported in great numbers, by professionals in the helping professions that is.



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### THE LOWERING OF PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS IN AMERICA

To learn the state of professional standards in America is to learn much about the prospects for successful social reform here. Here I get to summarize some of the problems, particularly the tendencies toward foolish ritualism and image-management rather than competence that dogs all the major professions nowadays, and in many parts of the world. The dilemma of "Who shall guard the guardians?" is ever more critical in any society of increasing anonymity and bureaucratization where professionals increasingly are removed from being controlled by the people they serve. Of course this results in the problem that their own efforts at controlling themselves increasingly appear to the people they serve as being merely self-serving. Naturally America is not the only place where these kinds of problems occur, and these problems of the professional classes in some ways are emblematic of the kinds of problems that arise in all anonymous, bureaucratized societies.

During the period of the American Revolution the governmental bureaucracies of European monarchies which originally arose to control the depredations of the independent aristocracies (who themselves often had duties generations before but were now increasingly merely the avaricious idle rich) were themselves now the bulwarks of monarchies that were seen to be increasingly tyrannical. The American colonists, like the poor people of Europe, were content to let the British aristocracy rule the Empire as long as they were not taxed to any great extent. They then demanded no taxation without representation when this social contract was broken by the bureaucrats in London.

Likewise, there are people nowadays for whom their trust in our professional classes regulating themselves is wearing thin by what they see as their obvious increasing tendency toward being self-serving. No doubt this distrust of the professional classes by people, some of whom identify themselves as being right-wing politically but it is not limited to them, is balanced by those, some of whom identify themselves as being left-wing politically but it is not limited to them, who distrust big

business. It is the latter who recognize that big business increasingly sets the agenda for the professional classes, who lose their independence as small business also loses its independence and with it one source of income for professional services. When big business increases in size, so does big professional services, as witness the increasing influence of the big accounting firms and the big law firms.

But to get back to the professions, you would think that one way to test the practical effectiveness of affirmative action in academia is to determine if academic standards have been lowered in order to meet quotas. This is not to discount the possibility that certain losses in standards have been more than counterbalanced by gains in new perspectives and with them new knowledge. But the reality of the situation is that judgments of the quality of academic establishments are not easy to get under the stonewalling which they typically practice. Just ask graduate students how easy it is to get honest answers about what they will face when they want to enter a program.

It is this kind of ritualism which allows academic establishments to ever point out how they “rationally” have decided that student athletes really do meet the same academic standards as everyone else, that liberal arts students are really not overcharged in their tuitions to subsidize other parts of the university, and that tenure is not really granted to candidates according to the number of publications they have (which they don’t expect to be read anyway by too many people) rather than what’s in them. It is this kind of management that results in pre-professional programs that are hard because they require so much memorization to weed out people in order to make employers happy, and non-professional programs that are easy because to attract students to make money for the university they must be entertaining. That is also why the American university has become in many ways like the roach motel of ideas, theories may enter, but with too little real intellectual debate, they often do not leave.

Alan Wolfe of the Sociology Department at Boston University writes in “The New Class Comes Home” (Wolfe 1993) making the point that the administrators of American universities are members of “the new class” and much like management in general, they have gone from an emphasis on production to becoming specialists in organization itself, that is specialists in goal-setting in abstract. This of course fits in well with the kind of New Age utopianism which is so much a part of the modern universities’ agenda, a scheme to please all interest groups, usually by endless growth and inflation in salaries and prestige.

Some would say this patronizing tendency has gone further along at universities than in business. Indeed, the development of this kind of smarmy approach to culture among what was once called our cultural elite shows the increasing split between them and those that are involved in production of goods, though a bond remains. In fact what it reminds me of was that tendency in 18th century Britain where the descendants of the merchant classes who did well tried to marry into the landowning aristocracy. In the same way the descendants of our production elite (who unless they are good managers often inappropriately try to apply assembly-line techniques to everything) try, unless they are going into the family business, to rush off and join the cultural elite. There they try to introduce new production techniques, and to convince their partners that what is now needed is not good taste, but niche marketing. Not that snobbish elitism never posed as good taste in the past, but the cultural elite increasingly tries to appeal to the prejudices of their consumers in a way so that they will buy their products with little thought involved. At the upper echelons the military-industrial complex which is so important a big, or I should say gigantic, business, is matched by the cultural-academic-entertainment complex where too often not progress, but escapism, is their most important product.

As a matter of fact, like in a well-run monarchy, institutions such as academia, law, politics, even engineering have become quite ritualistic of late, and not very accountable. They've become particularly adept at image-mongering and salesmanship.

Thus though certain parts of ac academia are engaged in discovering new knowledge, much of academic learning consists of memorizing somebody's else's discoveries, and thus the anger by members of the public at the indoctrination aimed at them is quite real, and quite justified. Thus, though engineering is a kind of applied physics, most engineers do not think like scientists as much as like memorizers of scientists' work. Likewise, schools of social work, education, even divinity schools often involve students memorizing the work of social scientists rather than learning to think critically. Because of this the issue of professors using their positions for political indoctrination is a real issue. This is not a cause for critical debate to any great extent, however, because students are not exposed to critical debate to a great extent. What is more likely is that they will face subtle or not-so-subtle right-wing indoctrination in business and engineering schools and equally subtle or not so subtle left-wing indoctrination in the

humanities and to a lesser extent in the social sciences. Getting students to think critically is lost in the shuffle, and few students care what any kind of “critical theory” has to teach them.

In fact there is increasingly a kind of tabloidization of scholarship as the fame of scholars (and professionals) comes from how well-known they are as propagandists on the media circuit, not the depth of their scholarship for which the media usually couldn’t care less. Just as many students consider education to be memorizing facts, taking tests, then forgetting them, many professors memorize their specialties rather than understand them. This is in fact a problem which bedevils all the professions, the substitution of memorization for learning, so that the elites of the profession become ever more powerful. They appear impressive to their followers since they know more than them, but because they may memorize more does not mean that they understand more, not that their followers will understand this either.

Now let’s get to some major professions that have lowered their standards. Let’s start with the law, though it’s difficult to say if their standards ever were particularly high. Just settle back in your chair and think about all you know about the law, then ask yourself: How often do individuals and organizations settle out of court, not because they feel that law and justice is not on their side, but because they feel that, given our anonymous society and issues such as time and cost, in many cases the courts don’t know what they are doing? One sign of this is the increasing dependence of judges on burden of proof reasoning, which even though necessary at times is inherently tyrannical. It is the kind of reasoning used by a king who argues: “If you cannot prove you are loyal, I must assume you are disloyal!”

To go from problems with the judges to problems with the lawyers, the American legal profession seems to have changed its focus from ensuring fair trials to merely winning at all cost. Now to get to juries, countervailing pressures from juries have declined to the extent that overall cultural standards have declined. If jurors approach a trial as if it is a “reality-based” TV show and show the same level of credulity as they show to works of fiction and entertainment, then lawyers can make up all kinds of cock-and-bull stories and have a chance of being believed.

The problem with burden of proof reasoning is that it is essentially a guess, not a decision based on evidence, but based on lack of evidence. This is bad enough, but though some burden of proof reasoning may have a realistic basis in the way society works, such as when a landlord

usually gets a pass to kick out a tenant who doesn't pay the rent, burden of proof reasoning can also reflect nothing more than the prejudices of judges. We understand that judges are supposed to enforce the law, not make the law in opposition to the legislature. Luckily, in the American method of government all branches of government when they act tyrannically can be resisted through checks and balances. However, the mechanism for disciplining tyrannical judges, impeachment, is used sparingly for the same reason all the professions are poor at disciplining themselves. It is less embarrassing to not admit there are bad apples in the profession. In the case of the judiciary, many of them really are political hacks, and you wonder why their decisions do not always reflect the wisdom of philosopher-kings. As a matter of fact, in a comparative study of English and American law *Form and Substance in Anglo-American Law: A Comparative Study of Legal Reasoning, Legal Theory, and Legal Institutions*, they make the point: "While the best American judges stand comparison with the best English judges in regard to integrity, competence, fairness, and acumen (and outclass them in social and political awareness), we think it more than probable that the worst American judges are worse than the worst English judges, and it cannot be denied that there are relatively more of them" (Atiyah and Summers 1987: 357).

Burden of proof reasoning as argument-from-ignorance is in many ways the opposite of scientific reasoning, for while science refrains from considering a theory proven until all objections and alternative theories have been dealt with, burden of proof reasoning refrains from considering a theory disproven, and encourages action based on that theory, not until all the evidence is in, but in lieu of other evidence. If no new evidence is forthcoming *it will be assumed that the theory is true*, while in science if there is insufficient evidence there will be no theory period, a phenomenon will be considered unexplainable rather than encouraging a possibly false theory.

This bias for believing something rather than nothing explains the affinity between burden of proof reasoning in determining cultural norms, and ritualism in providing legitimacy for bureaucratic positions and processes. Just as monarchy originally depended on the capabilities and actions of the monarch, and thus Europe once had many "elective" monarchies, but eventually the symbolic function of the monarch became more important than the pragmatic function, having the monarch at all became more important than what the monarch did. And so absolute monarchy became the norm in every major

state of Western Europe except Britain. So does a similar development of ritualism endanger all bureaucratic and cultural institutions.

Of course distrust by the public is endemic to basically all the professions in America nowadays. With the increasing anonymity of society, professionals both fear their customers for not understanding their problems, and are alienated from their customers who increasingly appear to them as sheep to be shorn rather than as people for whom they have a fiduciary responsibility. In social terms, professionals are increasingly businesspeople whose source of respectability is no longer any sense of honor (not that their customers would automatically recognize this sense of honor), but merely the showing off of their wealth. This is similar to the reason why young people increasingly do not bond except among those sharing the same hobbies, and if anything feel that respect cannot be gotten by people knowing their characters (because that'll never happen), but literally only from showing-off. And we wonder why kids are so alienated. In fact adults often carry these childish attitudes, especially those people who find no real reason to grow up, into more serious social spaces.

We see engineers who love to communicate in acronyms and engage in this obfuscation, even when there's no point other than to make sure non-engineers don't pick up too many engineering skills. Engineers of course are good at giving advice on how to build something, but not whether it should be built, since any opportunity to create jobs for themselves results in the answer, "Sure!" Meanwhile the courts in their profound removal from everyday life believe that ambulance chasing is bad, but commercials on TV that are just ambulance-chasing in another guise are good. Doctors of course hate H.M.O.'s but are caught to a large extent in a mess of their own making. Pharmaceutical firms believe that advertising prescription drugs and hoping doctors will be nagged by their patients into using them is the height of professional salesmanship.

You notice in all these cases professionals and the people they serve fear and distrust each other. Instead of communicating freely and honestly with each other, and resolving competitive interests in the spirit of compromise, especially when competition becomes exaggerated through misunderstandings and just lack of empathy, they instead prefer manipulation and trickery to compromise and cooperation. It is no surprise misunderstandings proliferate, even when intentions are good, and this is not to mention the many cases when intentions are bad.

The issue of ritualism rears its head because in a democracy we the consumers of professional services should be doing the monitoring, but if our society is evolving into an anonymous, bureaucratic something, but this something for which we have no name yet is not one of democratic consumer sovereignty, then such a society will be a breeding ground for both bureaucratization and inappropriate ritualism (unlike the healthy ritualism that truly unites a social group around appropriate values). As Prof. Richard Gaskins puts it in his book *Burdens of Proof in Modern Discourse*: "As courts gradually surrendered their claim to deal in timeless truths - a process spread over the past century - their legitimacy increasingly depended on expanding the scope of formal procedures" (Gaskins 1992: 75).

To reintroduce standards is to reintroduce a sense of community among both producers and buyers of culture, which is essentially the only way a market mechanism can work. If this proves impossible one must have either a community of producers of culture that maintain standards on their own or a community of buyers who have the independence to forgo being controlled by ineffectual or immoral bureaucrats when it is felt that these bureaucrats have become in most respects uncontrollable. This is the logic of limited government. The danger, of course, is that the professions who serve the public will out of self-defense try to put something over on the public, hiding their ignorance, relying on burden of proof reasoning instead of real empirical knowledge, and relying on simplistic formula if not outright dishonesty as a matter of course.

To look at policy issues, for example, such as in making environmental assessments of the sort used in pollution studies, meaningless averages, ambiguous results because the goals desired are often unclear, results that are difficult to interpret because there is no context to provide a frame of reference for interpreting them, all are problems that are too often ignored by professional "advocates" of various sorts. In fact acceptable risk must be based on realistic probabilities (while in fact data in this area is often of very poor quality), for example the effects of design changes.

In actuality cultural standards and institutional interests usually rule. We do not ban private vehicles and force everyone to take public transportation for cultural and personal reasons, not for anything to do with public safety. Thus "acceptable risk" can be used as a euphemism for not knowing what the risk is, and just going ahead to do one's job anyway. That is why professionals are supposed to be well-educated

in their fields, to recognize potentials and consequences, not merely to deal with symptoms with band-aid measures. Yet because of economic pressures there is a tendency for employers to de-emphasize professionalism, and to encourage their subordinates to go for the quick fix.

The emphasis on (simplistic) formula and image in American "management" can be easily seen if we compare the difference between the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) standard of quality and American television's standard of quality. The BBC was originally founded with the understanding that it would provide cultural uplift for the British population. This mandate allows room for formulaic programming of course, but the very fact that intellectual consequence is part of the formula allows for a certain amount of freedom to experiment or at least to use more complex formulas, while the formulas in American television programming were oriented from the beginning toward simplicity. Of course the situation is reversed between British tabloid newspapers and most American mass market newspapers, though presently they are the kind that are now failing and feel forced to become more tabloid-oriented themselves.

In general American culture lends itself toward anti-intellectualism and reliance on formula that it is hoped will work in a society which is anonymous and where people don't communicate with much depth. True, we have limited government and are not bound much by simplistic formulas of government control, as in so many authoritarian societies. Our managerial formulas are mostly limited to the private sector, like in the loss of distinction between "literary" magazines and fashion magazines, as they have turned into literary magazines for people who don't like to read. Likewise, American book publishers to a major extent once published books they liked, hoping the public would agree. Now increasingly they publish formulaic books by celebrities, and hope the public will follow along.

True, even complex intellectual formulas can be used inappropriately despite being complex, in the sense of amalgamating trivia, especially in societies that suffer from the rule of mediocre intellectuals. Fortunately, America is only starting to suffer from that problem.

In fact our professional class at this time in history have shown a profound lack of interest in working-class sensibilities and interests, for example showing utter concern for the sponsored mobility of a few working-class people into the professional and managerial classes, and an extreme lack of concern for the interests of the people who remain behind and lead working-class lives. They do not even understand why



working-class people, who compete every day of their lives, place so much emphasis on fair competition. As Prof. Wolfe writes in the *Partisan Review* article mentioned above: "A liberal college president of impeccable WASP background and a black militant advocating Afrocentrism have this much in common: both having gotten to where they are in some part due to circumstances of their birth, think that merit is not necessarily the most important criterion in making academic judgments. They are more likely to understand each other than either can understand the insistence of the traditionalists on standards and the importance of objectivity" (Wolfe 1993: 736). Similar criticisms of course can be made of business schools that orient their curricula not by the standards of good scholarship, but by the standards of showing the future employers of their students that their students will make no waves, but instead be concerned only with making for them a lot of money.

Perhaps an even more crucial problem is that the professional classes, even as they remain unconcerned for the working class but at best sponsor mobility for a small segment of them, sometimes do not even bother to maintain their own professional standards. They too often resort to ritualism to give the appearance of competence rather than the reality. This whole manner of public discourse, perfected in Washington, D.C., is a kind of sound-bite version of rhetoric, emphasizing glibness and image-mongering to an anonymous audience to the exclusion of depth, relevance, and even basic logic. Like the divine right of kings, our professional classes in their various formats claim the right to monitor themselves, and as customers, or perhaps as subjects, we give in too easily.

For those who think the professional classes are the sole savior of our liberties, let them remember, for example, the elitism of judges reading into the Constitution their own private prejudices and engaging in terrible constitutional scholarship in the process. All this occurred at the time of the Dred Scott decision that held that slavery could never be interfered with, despite the fact that slavery had been banned in the Northwest Territories by the same generation that wrote the Constitution, at the time of the striking down of the Civil Rights Act of 1875, when unelected judges and racist officials interfered with Reconstruction, at the time of striking down countless laws that benefited labor, and of course now.

Our professional classes in general often wallow in self-righteousness as well as self-pity, assuaging whatever guilt they feel about the poor in

ways that make them feel better more than it helps the poor. To really help the poor, not through ritualism that helps not the poor but the neurotic guilt of the rich, we must all become better customers of the professional classes. Just because in this rich land lots of people seek professional advancement, then look for customers of the intellectual fads that they have learned in their training (which somehow makes sense in a relatively anti-intellectual culture), doesn't mean the rest of us can't practice more effectively buyer beware. As for the lawyers, one book that might help is *The Last Lawyer: Failing Ideals of the Legal Profession* (Kronman 1993). Because of the way the law and many other professions are now practiced, it is the misuse of burden of proof reasoning which endangers our democratic form of government, and which is a sign of a broader problem as well, the manipulative sophistries of our professional classes who too often think of themselves as our aristocracy.

The privileging of formal methods of reasoning over the informal methods of social discussion among the masses, and the privileging of self-policing rather than monitoring by the users of the professional classes, together form a recipe for insipid ritualism, for professionals maintaining their places in society by their social roles (like aristocrats) rather than by the quality of what they do. Some of this is no doubt necessary, for the mediocrities of mass culture are well-known, but this doesn't mean that the opinions of the mass of people, and especially their complaints, never have any merit. It takes a shoemaker to make a shoe, but a user to know if it fits. By failing to deal with the issue that burden of proof reasoning is inherently tyrannical because it is a guess, not a proof, by privileging the formal decision-making methods of social science over the informal methods of politics without regard for appropriateness (which is like abolishing elections and setting up a panel of social scientists to pick our leaders), by not monitoring our professionals of all types be they professors, judges, or bureaucrats of all sorts, we do not strengthen government of the people, by the people, and for the people. We weaken it.

### PART III

#### THE GOALS OF SOCIETY: JUSTICE AND FREEDOM



## CHAPTER TWENTY

### LIBERAL AND AUTHORITARIAN VERSIONS OF DEMOCRACY

While authoritarian political movements dream of utopias, often as if they are big, extended families written large, we in America continue to tell the world a modern society can't make the mass of people happy, only rich, which is the Protestant Ethic in a nutshell. No doubt some foreigners think that American produce is like American smiles, tasteless and artificial. They think both are made for mass consumption, and sold to strangers. What they don't understand is that the American smile is sometimes manipulative, and sometimes reflects merely cultural inertia, a way of resting the mind.

The same kind of inertia takes place in the common distinction in much of the world between insiders and outsiders. This sometimes means, in poor societies, guests are treated well, and, in somewhat richer societies, insiders are treated well and outsiders are treated, inevitably, badly. The latter is what happens when societies become so class-ridden that simple courtesy to strangers becomes considered an ostentation. This is one of the grievances that nomads, who are often fighting with their neighbors, have against townspeople who may have their virtues, but graciousness and hospitality to strangers is often not one of them, though they may be hospitable to their own neighbors.

While many radical and authoritarian political movements of the 20th and now 21st century have tried to bring this half-remembered world of camaraderie found only in small communities back to modern society, America, true to its puritanical roots, counsels don't even try, at last on a mass scale. Instead, we honor individuals taking care of themselves, being independent, and making money, and then hopefully we can buy our own happiness. We of course don't hope for fine-tuning our lives. That would require the cooperation of others, for to do that you need an intimate community that not only knows each other well, but cares.

It is no surprise that the cultural ideal we have of what a strong, central government can do reflects the cultural ideal of individualism,

enforced by the cultural value of now often an extreme liberalism that allows much freedom but expects in terms of social duties little in return. At one time our code of liberalism was more of a puritanical code of honor which emphasized duties as well as rights, but this is now increasingly considered an anachronism.

True, many other societies still retain their authoritarian traditions, and expect the state to produce and enforce meaning through social engineering enforced by religious or quasi-religious values (thus reflecting collectivistic traditions enforced by their cultural ideal of authoritarianism). Yet these authoritarian ideals only became perceived as terribly harsh in the modern era when the closeness of family and communal life has been drained away and with it the content to duties and ideals. At least we are willing to admit that.

For that matter, even in the US we are faced with the question: Freedom for what? Is it to compete, to spend, to have strangers swirl around us and then move away as the metaphor for American life seems to be two ships passing in the night?

These are old issues in the social sciences, and there are even German words which have entered the sociological vocabulary from the late 19th century when Sociology became romantic and pedantic and mournful, all under Germanic inspiration - *gemeinschaft* for community, and *gesellschaft* for association. Another good German word is *weltschmerz*, the sorrow which one accepts as one's lot in life.

In reality, *gesellschaft* politics tends to be highly ideological or greedy or both as the winner-take-all attitudes of economic competition combine with the kinds of grandiose schemes for social betterment that can only come from the idle rich who quite often are too self-important to mix with the poor, but not to tell them what to do. Fine-tuning the practice of values, and making qualitative judgments in general, are more easily done in *gemeinschaft* situations; let's take three family members who are neutral about what movie they want to see who agree to see the one the fourth member really likes. Such attempts at making qualitative distinctions often backfire in the spaces of modern, anonymous society. The reasons are to a large extent psychological; "rationality" between quibbling intimates is different from the "rationality" of socially distant strangers. The art of the possible may be the definition of politics, but it is also the common ground of morality, religion, psychology, and friendship. If common sense were more accessible, it would be more common.

It behooves us, therefore, to understand our ideological competitors as well as ourselves better. For example, much of the world sees American society as a rich one, not a just one, or even a particularly orderly one. This society, in its youth, was once more authoritarian and tried to induce individual responsibility, not mere individual narcissism. For that matter, many authoritarian societies once were orderly the way well-run families and communities are orderly, the way communities filled with people who care about each other are orderly. However, attempts to get the state to produce for them one big happy family have always proven to be a pipe dream. It may not be as hard as we Americans typically think it to be, but it is certainly not as easy as various authoritarian cranks think. Even the old kingdoms of medieval Europe, conceived of as happy families with the king as father as well as being the representative of God, knew better than to push this position to absurd lengths. Their ideological heirs among various authoritarian movements haven't been so lucky. Our own country was conceived in the knowledge that we were a society of strangers, not one big family, and that was why local government and family life was considered to be so important. Much of this lesson was forgotten too, as our governments treat materialism as almost a new religion. They promise us more wealth, better entertainment, more therapy, everything other than a more fulfilling sense of community.

Perhaps a little table will make clear where we came from and where we are going. If we have a  $2 \times 2$  table putting the values of Individualism and Collectivism on one axis and the enforcement mechanisms of Liberalism and Authoritarianism on the other axis we have:

Table 1 - Values and Their Enforcement Mechanisms

Values	Enforcement Mechanisms	
	Liberalism	Authoritarianism
Individualism	Free-market, often resulting in attitudes of materialism and narcissism	Individual Responsibility (self-control)
Collectivism	Sentimental Religiosity	Heavy control from the state (other-control)

Obviously there are in-between situations between a guilt-ridden sense of individual responsibility (America's past?) and a guilt-free but very sad sense that commodity consumption is all there is to enjoy life (America's present?). The same is true between the sentimental religiosity of many traditional societies which often resulted in hypocrisy, the compliment vice traditionally pays to virtue, and the heavy-handed attempt to produce utopian societies that have so often been tried and miserably failed in the last 100 years because of hypocritical leaders and because the task was just too great, overwhelming the bureaucratic capacities of the state.

It is these in-between situations which are most likely to achieve success, but only if we know what we are doing. This doesn't seem to be the case in the way the US has advised Russia after the fall of Communism, to little avail and the shame of both.

We in the US are not in the shape of the former Soviet Union. In fact social order in relation to the economy is still enforced here better than in Russia with its traditions of people trusting only insiders unless the state intervenes, and we told them it's not necessary, that markets are self-correcting, just like we assumed, delusionally, that we're so law abiding, so they would be too. As for us, we're economically efficient, just not in relation to other values such as the equitable distribution of all the junk we produce. One important aspect of our system is that social order in the US comes from a two-party political system which is somewhat fairer than the old Soviet Union's one-party system (and anthropologists will like this, is somewhat like dividing a village into two moieties for exchange of marriage partners to produce social solidarity) which ensures social stability, routinized competition, and compromise, because there are always two choices, but in practical terms no more. This is also why we like team sports that have two teams on the field at any time, but no more. It is not like Japanese baseball where supposedly the best score is a tie where nobody loses face.

The US political system ensures choice but not excessive choice, which guarantees stability, but prevents minority ideological views from having impact except through their lobbying efforts. This political system also gives economic growth a kind of sacred quality, making it the touchstone of political compromise, and discourages the kinds of holistic approaches to problems, dealing with many issues simultaneously as well as with the side-effects of proposed solutions, typical of small-scale, *gemeinschaft*-like societies. In such societies the simplistic solutions proposed by ideological rightists and leftists do not occur,



any more than organized political parties exist in families. In the modern, bureaucratic, behemoth-like state, however, let's take the US for example, compromise occurs in the formation of the "teams" which are political parties, and they in turn compete in the legislature. This often occurs in winner-take-all fashion over economic issues, and in more compromise fashion in areas governed by values.

In fact *gemeinschaft* (community-based) societies often function through direct government, not representative government, so there is no need to set up teams (political parties) at all. The original ideal after the American Revolution was an in-between situation where representation would be by the notables of the community, and political parties would be unnecessary. Now we have elections, then representatives who do the actual lawmaking. In a *gemeinschaft* these stages are handled much more informally, and certainly less bureaucratically. This was the case in the original model for all democratic states, the ancient city-state of Athens, which eventually failed partly because of the imperialistic ambitions of its citizens, but that's another story. Authoritarian societies, of which Athens was one, act as if *gemeinschaft* decision-making processes are feasible (sometimes this just means they put elites on a pedestal as if they are the voice of the community), and free (liberal) societies which are not anarchistic act as if every bureaucratic institution involved in representative government will do its job so that full communication will occur, and the community at large will be represented.

In reality neither *gemeinschaft*-like political ideals nor *gesellschaft*-like political ideals work perfectly in the modern world. The first, by trying to do it all, leads to cultural tyranny, the second leads to economic tyranny that may be somewhat efficient, but neglects other values including distribution of the economic product. Because of such limitations, we in the US hedge our bets and have a mixed polity, as they called it in the 18th century, by having limited government. We have local government that we hope will be more *gemeinschaft*-like in character, closer to the people, central government which is more *gesellschaft*-like in character, having bureaucratic expertise, but far from being close to the people, and having many areas of life where government is not involved in at all.

Of course our mixed polity is not exactly the same as other people's mixed polities, and there is still room to learn from each other's experiments. Authoritarian societies, like families, worry about such things as the spiritual life of the next generation, and hope they learn to share with younger siblings as well as having a modicum of good manners.

We don't think they'll succeed, but they don't think more cable TV channels will make us happier either. I lean toward a freer society, but societies can still learn from each other, from each other's mistakes, and from their own almost-forgotten ideals, rejected by the fashionable, but then they are always looking for something new.

The famous German sociologist, Max Weber, who was in his prime before and during World War I, was particularly famous because he dealt with the problems of rationality in the modern age. Particularly, he distinguished between instrumental rationality which is so relevant to the workplace, and which is so irrelevant to the questions of a meaningful or virtuous life, which are almost never asked in the workplace, and substantive rationality which is responsible for the enforcement of values and is appropriate to situations taken as a whole, if there are intimate communities which encourage people to think in terms of situations as a whole in the first place. Authoritarian political philosophies usually underlie movements to enforce substantive rationality at the national level, enforcing values but often refusing to admit when the sense of community that makes such values meaningful is no longer functioning. Liberal social philosophies underlie movements to enforce freedom, but tend to refuse to ask the question: Freedom for what? By default, they agree usually on the lowest common denominator as the basis for social values, that is on simple materialism and consumerism as something everybody can agree on, though nowadays people don't particularly feel they have much of a choice, since little else is discussed.

Of course things are a little more complicated than this simple analysis, mainly because intimate communities allow for free and open communication just because people are so much alike, and modern societies are societies of extreme differentiation that inhibit all but the most basic communication between diverse social groups. True, ethnic and religious rivalries have been around for a long, long time, but as long as people lived in their own communities, they pretty much didn't care what happened in the next county. Even now it takes a good deal of propaganda from the mass media or the state to get them to care.

It is because people in the modern era are increasingly interconnected and decreasingly empathetic to each other that authoritarian political movements have sought to decrease the amount of social variability, and liberal political movements have sought to decrease the number of moral issues dealt with by the state, which makes social variability irrelevant. You will notice that the great amount of

activist liberalism of the last few generations that actively calls for state intervention often makes them quite collectivistic in practice, more so than the liberals of earlier eras.

At least in the modern US, authoritarians have wanted conformity to be to the norms of the local community, and not something to be enforced by distant government, while liberals have conceived of the world in quite materialistic, utilitarian terms, and have thought that getting the economy right, and ignoring non-economic moral issues, is something the government can get involved in without too much trouble.

To a certain extent this is the reverse of authoritarian and liberal positions that existed even in the US 200 years ago, and existed far longer in other places. Yet some things do not change, and even now in the US authoritarians expect rule by notables in the local arena and complain about interest group lobbying interfering with the even-handedness of government, especially when it interferes with the local arena and unless they use it themselves. Meanwhile liberals complain that among people who do not know each other very well, how else can issues be put on the agenda except through interest group lobbying?

Of course these liberals can over time easily begin to think of themselves as a new elite, at which point they will no longer consider what they do to be lobbying, but merely rule by notables. In the era of Thomas Jefferson they would have preferred to express their liberalism in the local arena and not primarily in economic terms, but now both the bureaucratization of all levels of government and the all-importance of economic issues as defining who we are works hand in hand to encourage elites, who when push comes to shove always define themselves as economic elites above all, to lobby at higher and higher levels of government.

Of course the primacy of local communities and government, what in India has been referred to as "village republics," does not work miracles. Intimate social settings have their own trials, particularly antagonisms and fears, but the social skills necessary to work out problems are often self-evident. Of course people comfortable in such settings are not necessarily comfortable with the abstract kinds of reasonings necessary to understand people they do not have everyday dealings with, and for the bureaucrats who increasingly run the state without much input from the mass of citizens they serve the reverse is true. One of the reasons formal democracy does not necessarily follow upon the growth of informal village democracy is that village democracy

among relative intimates that know something about each other often does not prepare people to have a healthy skepticism regarding the promises of politicians whom they don't know.

In the real world *gemeinschaft* (community) tends to breed emotional expressiveness and thus quarrels but the possibility for compromise is there, and growth of *gesellschaft* (association) tends to reduce that possibility. Instead, methods of formal legal and bureaucratic control reduce the need for personal confrontation to deal with conflict, but whether such mechanisms are sufficient in and of themselves to eliminate social conflict is an empirical question. Often they are not.

The quarrelsomeness of village notables whom politics have thrust on the national stage often makes them unfit to rule, but the same is true of jaded aristocrats, and bureaucrats, who have the finest educations in theories but not in practices. It is also true *gesellschaft* authority often has more knowledge of the outside world than *gemeinschaft* authority, but in general their motives tend to be more self-serving, as they are driven by ambition and not pride in their community that results in a sense of honor based on personal reputation.

True, personal weaknesses and character flaws arise easily enough in the emotional cauldron of *gemeinschaft* community, but the sheer impersonality of *gesellschaft* community are even more likely to produce personal unhappiness at the very least, and the character flaws that have so often come with it. Thus the bureaucrats of the British Raj in India were efficient enough, but surrounded by a sea of Indians, they commonly avoided developing a sense of identity diffusion by becoming rather strong snobs, and ignoring in a rather basic way the humanity of the mass of people they ruled over. It is no wonder colonialism tends to sap the dignity of both the rulers and the ruled.

In general "rational" democracy as a kind of agglomeration of individual interests and wants is a complex social institution that is difficult to achieve, much more difficult in some ways than the democracy of mass social conformity or the democracy of social groups perpetually feuding with each other, both so common in authoritarian societies, or the democracy of simple economic gamesmanship common to liberal societies. America has succeeded partly in weakening the effects of ignoble passions in politics, of vanity, jealousy, hatred and egotism, and not to forget arrogance and petulance, but perhaps partly at the price of weakening the possibility of feeling any passion at all, except perhaps for the cold logic of greed that is so conducive to business.

This instrumental rationality, so conducive to business rationality, in the 18th century was considered a great improvement as a goal for politics as compared to the petty jealousies, vanities, and egotisms that had driven politics in more aristocratic ages. Yet there can be too much of a good thing, and America's infatuation with materialism may be reaching a point of diminishing returns, for ecological reasons, and ultimately for psychological reasons as well.

In theory our *gesellschaft*-style of impersonal rationality and decision-making in the US is for the good, in addition of ourselves, of the *gemeinschaft* communities we are loyal to, except that these communities are beginning to evaporate. In their place are all the acquaintances that fill up our lives, the people we compete with, the people we play with, but less likely the people we commiserate with, and even less likely the people we feel an emotional bond to. European societies have similar ideals, except that there *gesellschaft* deference to authority is stronger in an authoritarian way than even ours, and their private loyalties to *gemeinschaft* communities is also stronger than ours, resulting in a kind of split personality.

In a sense many practice universalistic values there because they have to, not necessarily because they want to, and historically under stress many regress to seeking oblivion by drowning their personal identities in some social group and scapegoating outsiders. We under stress, on the other hand, tend to increase our tendencies toward rootless individualism, and often in a winner-take-all fashion letting the market decide.

Of course this American ideal holds true only as long as Americans think they can succeed on their own, in a sense as long as there remains an economic frontier, and if anything as the frontier recedes into history, the mass of Americans may start thinking of themselves as petty bureaucrats, much as the mass of Europeans, stuck in their social positions for life, do. Even if we avoid the ethnic conflicts of Europe, without perpetual economic growth, and not just in the stock market, at the very least a British-style class consciousness may await us in the future.

In some ways Britain is one of the most, if not the most, class-conscious nation in Europe, because ambition and success is so admired, and yet social mobility is not higher there than the rest of Western Europe, so the people who benefit from the cult of celebrity are the rich. It is this cult of success that reinforces the snobbishness of British society, not to as great a degree looking down on social outsiders as in

authoritarian societies, but making up for this in accepting upper-class standards of social success, particularly of achievement, as the norm for society.

Of course here too in the US the cult of celebrity, the cult of fantasy, and the cult of ambition are mutually reinforcing, probably even more than in Britain. Unlike places like Germany, where traditionally the masses look forward to little more than loyalty to their social position (so that social change is a quite scary social position to be in) and working for progress is the domain of elites, in the US and somewhat so in Britain we admire and look forward to social change. Here elites lead too, but once the masses benefited and identified with this social change, at least economically. In any case here and in Britain the working class self-consciously does more than just take orders from the elite, they identify with what the elite is trying to accomplish, not merely for the security of taking orders, but for something greater. Once this something greater was more than nationalism, more than materialism, more than idealism, but a combination of all of this and more, and having something in common with religion as well.

But we in the US are losing faith in this ideal as it increasingly turns vague and indistinct. Once there were dragons to slay in a sense, certainly in the US, no state church, no monarch, no rule by a leisure class. But now new elites have arisen, and many of them have hereditary components to them, and in any case society is getting so complex and so impersonal at the same time that we are unclear about what we want, and elites are happy to try to sell the cures to what ails us, even if it is just a matter of letting them do the driving.

Europe never lost its paternalistic elites, but at least they had ideals of something more complex than endless economic competition and endless consumption of commodities, though their ideals were dangerous in their own way. The kinds of questions a family can ask, the kinds of feelings a family can feel, are not easily transferred to a nation treated as if it is a family written large, though authoritarian societies often try, particularly in the modern era, since their predecessors were often less arrogant in practice.

Likewise, in the US we at an early age decided that government could never produce for us the warmth and understanding of a giant, extended family, and should limit itself for the most part to trying to make us rich. Yet even they in this quest knew there had to be limits, and resigned themselves to having limited government. Their successors have not always been so modest.

Now our leaders here push for, not so much dreams of community which is more the European style, but dreams of consumption, dreams of more fantasies through more recreational outlets, and of course dreams of more commodities to buy. All of this substitutes for a feeling of fitness in life, that fitting into a *gemeinschaft* community which they have no hope for.

It seems we can learn from the ideals of more authoritarian societies, which we once shared, and not from their idiotic mistakes, and they can learn from us, to learn to limit their desires to the pragmatic and the feasible as defined by the mass of people (and not just arrogant, fantasy-driven leaders). Yet communicating with the mass of people is not the same thing as being patronizing and just communicating on the level of the lowest common denominator, something we once knew. We once feared that America would go the way of the ancient Romans, as a concerned population became an unconcerned, bread-and-circuses satiated proletariat, where according to W.E.H. Lecky's *History of European Morals: From Augustine to Charlemagne* (Lecky 1955), a 19th century classic published in London in 1869, an individual out of ambition might seek a life of extraordinary virtue, but the average person thought even elementary character, by more uplifted standards, was an impractical affectation.

Given its wealth, America should have a per capita crime rate comparable to Scandinavia, not to Third World countries. Third World countries which often have traditions of live and let live at the local level should have low levels of ethnic conflict, but instead often have high levels that America has not seen in a hundred years. Modernization in America has seen individualism degenerating into the atomization of society, and modernization in more collectivistic societies has raised the levels of social tensions there with disastrous effects, as arguments escalate (and there is now more to argue about), as people bring in their allies and turn individual arguments into communal conflicts. Instigators of conflicts certainly hope this will happen, often for political reasons.

There seems to be a lesson in all of this, some golden mean, but here we're still inching our way toward understanding the ramifications of our own way of life, let alone learning from anyone else's. I don't think the lesson is let's forget about the production side of life, distasteful though it is to some elites to be reminded there is one, but concentrate on celebrating the consumption side of life, the bread and circuses approach to government, though that argument is continuing to be



made. Instead both liberal and authoritarian societies and combinations of the two, can learn from their pasts and from each other so as not to press the principles of their governments and of their cultures to levels of absurdity. Also though liberal societies tend to be individualistic, conceivably a collectivistic society can also inculcate the virtues of tolerance, while though authoritarian societies tend to be collectivistic conceivably an individualistic society can also inculcate the virtues of moralistic striving and cooperation as individual aspirations. That is why what were called in the past mixed polities, not pure democracy, but not control by elites either, has had such great appeal over the years.

At one time America's version of a mixed polity was a far-from-the-average citizen, *gesellschaft*-based central government, and a much more *gemeinschaft*-based local community. Now increasingly all our social experiences are *gesellschaft*-based all the way down. In fact though Europe also has *gesellschaft*-based central governments, the goal of these governments has been self-consciously paternalistic. Though they have little hope for direct democracy, except that Switzerland has a lot of referenda and Albania has a lot of feuds, or even for limited government by our standards, they hope that elites can speak for the common people.

We have been moving away from the strength of our citizen-led limited government, based on citizens who don't need an intrusive central government, partly because we have lost the frontier conditions which gave the common people so many second and third chances to achieve economic success on their own, and to start new communities when old communities had become too elite-driven. Instead in recent years to a large extent we have merely been developing inefficient paternalistic government. Western European countries have good mass transportation, good low-cost medicine for the masses, good higher education for those who can most benefit, good urban planning, and we have many opportunities to compete through higher education, though for a great many of the students this merely means relearning what they learned in high school.

True, we don't need to enforce basic economic rationality from the top down, as our culture takes care of that, though obviously Russia still has problems in that area. In fact we in America have developed the kind of culturally-induced rationality useful for preventing high levels of anxiety from developing, but not useful for dealing with anxiety that is unavoidable. Authoritarian societies with their emphasis on



loyalty can deal with ongoing anxiety, and if the overall social machine of which people are the components works, then all will benefit, and of course the reverse is also true. Even if that society succeeds, however, the people, or many of them, may feel more secure than happy. We in the US in our loosely integrated society on the other hand often have many individual successes, and many individual failures, and never the twain shall meet.

Loyalty here is rather weak, and successes will pass off their failed relatives, friends, neighbors onto strangers who will counsel them. It's easier on the nerves. Just like so often we don't pick up our own trash, loyalties often don't extend much more than reinforcing each other's narcissism. We have a dynamic society, no doubt about that, with more evolutionary potential than static, authoritarian ones. It's just not one where people give a damn anymore - unless it makes themselves feel good, and our supply of "activists," some of whom are saints, some of whom are busybodies, some of whom are bored, rich people, is not enough to give us a sense of community once again. If we ever learn it's not possible to buy happiness, maybe we'll try again to seek to work together and form such a sense of community once again.

The danger America faces in the coming years is that the atomization of society, that intersection of a growing population resulting in a communal life of people who cannot be other than strangers to each other, and a division of labor in all areas of life as the identities fostered in the workplace preempt all other identities, will result in the consumption of commodities, that fruit of the workplace, being the only way we can emotionally engage the world. The result will be that and telling our problems to strangers (which provides the economic basis for the counseling profession) because that is all that life will hold.

Work less intense, division of labor less extreme, greed for artificially-induced "highs" less avid because everyday life is less alienating, turning to intimates rather than strangers for emotional comfort, all of this seems an anachronism in American life, and will be once we consider ourselves too good to learn from other cultures. In any case, we no longer know how to produce such social order, as opposed to merely buying happiness through commodities that substitute for relationships to the world, and to each other.

Meanwhile, other cultures who sometimes seek the opposite extreme from us, authoritarian societies that cannot reproduce at the societal level what can only exist at the local level, yet keep on trying, by refusing to learn from us, fail to learn from both our successes and our

failures. The liberal societies of the world of which we are one, and the authoritarian societies of the world are like a couple ready to divorce, who have stopped communicating with each other. The children will suffer, no matter who gets custody.

Our original idea, of having the national community being rather *gesellschaft* in character, but with strong local communities and families being rather *gemeinschaft* in character, is not such a bad idea after all. But with so much local government being just as bureaucratic and removed from the people as the Federal government, just on a smaller scale, we're still trying to figure out how to do that, in government, and in our private lives as well.

It is debatable if our class of political theorists is that much more advanced than its equivalents in 18th century America. They have taken an increasingly rhetorical turn of late, so that while the writers of the American constitution knew full well they were founding a mixed polity that was not democratic in the sense ancient Athens was, was not republican in the sense the Roman Republic was, and though it has some of the characteristics of a monarchy with the President as elected monarch it isn't a monarchy either, our modern writers on politics aren't very specific on what modern American society, that mixed polity, is or should be like.

Unlike traditional democracies where literally there is equality of social conditions like among the tribes of Central Asia which were a model of democracy for the 18th century, unlike traditional republics where patriotism and virtue were in the 18th century supposed to be their requirements for success, we have a society which is based on extreme social differentiation and competition for achievement. Ambition by traditional standards is the hallmark of an aristocratic society where people are not satisfied with the quality of life of the average person which is available to everyone as a birthright, but where the life of the elite is considered the most admired and the ideal. All of this of course is a sad commentary on how satisfactory we consider the average person's life to be.

In fact by defining our social system as a meritocracy, one where there is sponsored social mobility for a few into the ranks of the elite, we are increasingly defining our society, at least structurally, as an aristocratic one. True, culturally our elites compared to many other societies seem to be lacking many of the attributes of an aristocratic sense of honor, though they still seek an aristocratic sense of control. Of course if not ambition but mere bureaucratic competence (or perhaps just

job seniority) becomes the method for attaining career advancement in a relatively unchanging social order, then we will be much like a monarchy once again, with an unchanging pattern of life defined from the top down.

In fact ever since the period of America's founding there has been discussion about whether finally this is the generation that will see the reconstituting of an European-style class system here. For now our major elites do not have the cultural arrogance, or sense of responsibility, of a traditional elite, but merely the graspingness of middle-class materialism for the most part, often carried to an extreme degree. But in many ways this diminishes the competence of our elites to serve and do what they are increasingly trying to do, structure the society from the top down. It also means that democracy is ever more important in a society such as ours just because our elites are often poor at having a sense of noblesse oblige, partly for cultural reasons, partly because they have such a poor sense of overall social order for which to have a sense of noblesse oblige about.

That is why unlike Western Europe we do not have good urban planning, good mass health care, good mass transportation. Instead we have lots and lots of band-aid measures that provide jobs for their providers, but often do a poor job of solving problems. Our leaders instead of providing mass transportation from the slums to where the jobs are, as well as encouraging an entrepreneurial class to provide jobs where these people live, give them lots and lots of government programs that change little about their lives. Even welfare reform is better at getting people out of welfare than out of poverty.

There is a certain danger of nihilism developing in an individualistic society such as America's just because the weakness of social ties prevents people from developing values other than very simplistic ones that require very little social coordination. Authoritarian societies can survive figurehead rulers, such as kings, just because in theory everyone knows their duties and the standards expected, so it doesn't really matter very much who fulfills particular social roles just so long as they are fulfilled. A society like America places quite a big emphasis on leaders proving their worthiness to rule just because there is so little expectation that leaders will merely enforce established custom, like a traditional monarch often does, but will literally be a leader who will take the lead in establishing standards. Of course the hypocrisy of traditional monarchy is where the monarch does not enforce traditional custom for the benefit of the people but merely engages in

self-aggrandizement, and the hypocrisy of a modern meritocratic society such as ours is the same.

There is also another way of looking at the difference between competitive, liberal, individualistic societies and non-competitive, authoritarian, collectivistic societies. In collectivistic societies the goals of society are typically those which groups of people can enjoy, while in individualistic societies the goods of society are typically those which individuals enjoy alone. Thus *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies* (Lane 2000) makes the point that happiness is more a function of feelings of competence and achievement that comes from autonomy, and feelings of emotional display that requires conviviality with others, much more than feelings of competitiveness which may induce production of many goods for the market, but by a tension-filled way of doing so.

Thus though authoritarian societies can grow quite stale so that bureaucratic functions become more ritualistic than effective, and in the process dampen the entrepreneurial potentials of the population, competition in liberal societies may not be the competition of equals so beloved of classical economic theory. In fact happiness is much more than merely having more and more commodities to consume. This is especially true when the means to get these commodities are very stressful.

I should add that a strict conscience is a common development in relatively new individualistic societies, as when subordinates react against the hypocrisies of past and present leaders, but this occurs more often than not in cultures which were once more authoritarian and now individual self-assertion is creeping in. As the cohesiveness of such societies continues to decline what is commonly found is individualism as a kind of frivolous self-assertion, expressing a balance of ambition and hedonism more than a sense of responsibility to others, especially as social connections in general decline in importance. Of course authoritarian societies can end up going in the opposite direction, becoming so authoritarian that this generates its own hypocrisies as mindless conformity takes the place of responsible effort on behalf of the common good.

Right now a great deal of the political and social theory coming out of Europe's modernizing, somewhat-authoritarian societies are extremely strong in rhetorical impact, but less so in terms of pragmatic effects. Again to refer to Alain Touraine's *What is Democracy?* (Touraine 1997), it is quite good in its own way, discussing in effect democratic

society as being a requirement for democratic politics, though it doesn't really give many examples of either. By stipulation it defines such a society as one composed of the State which guarantees the structure of the polity, political society which is the world of democratic competition structured through elections of political parties and then through legislative debate and their voting, and civil society which is society bound together by values and institutions principally concerned with values. If this reminds the reader of the medieval estates of the monarch who structured the political system through executive power, the commons who tended to be concerned with economic interests, and the nobility and the church who enforced honor and values respectively, it should be no surprise, though Prof. Touraine does not draw this analogy. I do, because this description of political society, which is also mirrored by the executive, legislative, and judicial functions (and branches) of government, tells us little about the concrete issues typically faced by any real-life government.

Though this book doesn't do a bad job of describing modern democratic society, in general this tendency toward rhetorical vagueness and all-inclusiveness is what happens when elites comment upon society, essentially upon other people's lives, without knowing much about them. That is why political theory is almost always the political theory of observers, and so rarely the political theory of practitioners. It is also why so much "rights" talk, by not being explicit about who, what, where, when, and how these rights will take effect, have so much of a rhetorical and utopian air about them.

It is little wonder that much discussion about democracy in the last hundred years starts by assuming there is no community to enunciate goals and standards, once called the common good, and postulates that democracy is all about finding substitutes through nationalism, through an elite vanguard, or both, the authoritarian solution, or through putting individual autonomy on a pedestal so that there is little need for community, and little need for democracy either, the liberal solution. Even when Alain Touraine tells us that a democratic society composed of the State, political society based upon democratic politics, and civil society enforces the values respectively of liberty, fraternity, and equality, he doesn't tell us how. All these issues, so critical in producing a democracy that works rather than just a democracy that is merely talked about, remains to be faced.

I should add that one reason middle-class Americans spoil their children compared to middle-class Europeans, aside from the fact that

the need to do so is constantly drummed into them by commercials and other forms of advertising, is that we in America idealize the period of youth. Without good urban planning, without good mass transportation, with many people going to bed early because of their long commutes to work the next day, there can be no café society, no pub society in America, and thus compared to Europe there is less socializing and enjoyment during the week. Thus children are indulged, because we offer them so much less as adults; certainly not European four week vacations. As Robert E. Lane is trying to tell us in his book *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies* (Lane 2000), just because increasingly we're a rich society, though the rate of economic growth has slowed down recently, we're not a happy one.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### CULTURE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Continental European culture, and French culture is certainly a strong example, tends toward strong aristocratic influences, particularly toward accentuating certain small details of life such as social etiquette and esthetic appreciation. This brings a certain fitness and joy to everyday life, such as through tasty cooking or a sense of beauty in the house such as produced by fresh flowers, but weakens concern in the public sphere and in politics which is left to elites. It produces a kind of pettiness in attitudes, often a kind of self-centered vanity which is reinforced by social gatherings of the like-minded, a concern for the immediate and an unconcern for the governing principles of society which are left to the elites.

British culture in a sense revolted against much of this, though the British upper class is closest to Continental Europeans in attitudes. Perhaps that is why at professional dinners you often find the professional classes eating in effect French cooking, since they know better than to use their native cooking for such special occasions, or perhaps at all if they can afford a chef.

In effect the British middle and working classes have become adapted, perhaps even interested, in maintaining a certain drabness in the aesthetic sphere of everyday life, compensating by certain attitudes that might be described by outsiders as feelings of grandiosity. Ambition to a large extent is what drives everyday life which is therefore not enjoyed, but endured as a stepping stone to great heights of achievement, or if this fails a kind of stoic living for the future becomes a permanent character trait. Work is enhanced in importance because it can lead to great social and personal success, eventually.

As for the consumption side of life, it is here where a sense of excess becomes evident, the reward for the lack of joy in so many small details of life. The British once were known for eating meat three times a day, with the invention of the English breakfast of bacon and eggs, and their love for eating juicy steaks, and many still do, which is a great achievement if you're not too concerned with subtle flavorings. Sport is also very important, as relaxing is put off to some indefinite future, as well as emotional expressiveness, and in its stead achievement, even of a

symbolic kind, must substitute. No wonder such traditions, once strongly influenced by puritanical traditions as well, influence people to have great temptations toward addictions, alcoholic and otherwise, as well as extreme resistance to such temptations, as if only big emotional satisfactions, paid for and then consumed, are available, not many small, aesthetic, and socially-colored ones. All these achievements are pale imitations and substitutes for ones that really brings pleasure to the British stoic's soul, pleasure that would fulfill a feeling of self-righteousness and social superiority, that is to say moral crusades. These unify the more commonly found amorphous mass of fellow citizens much better than mere pleasure-seeking does.

Of course such moral crusades are usually in reaction to the actions of villains, and this is what distinguishes British culture from similar cultures such as those of northern Europe and particularly Germany, where a sense of brooding, as opposed to the British expecting little out of life other than work and consumption, leads to metaphysical and theoretical speculation of a rather dramatic sort. This dramatic and histrionic sense often leads to messianic (when it's not just paranoid) tendencies that start out culturally but often become political also. This is especially true among self-defined intellectuals, and Britain produces relatively few self-defined intellectuals compared to the rest of Europe.

For these people for whom feelings of ineffectuality and theorizing often goes hand in hand, since they often have little faith in market forces and tend to feel either all of society changes or nothing changes, this all or nothing school of politics is why the British so often reject such attitudes. Though the failures of authoritarian culture and society has opened up the rest of Europe to British-style "liberalism" in much of the rest of Europe, and Germany is a classic case, theorizing serves as a way to put their emotional longings into practice, not as practices, but only as longings. As long as the British feel constrained not to act out or even to elaborate intellectually their fantasies, they will be safe from such tendencies.

Instead the British have a tendency to like to go on moralistic, as opposed to metaphysical, crusades, and as a substitute for everyday intimacies and aesthetic pleasures like to bond with their fellow citizens doing good works, politically-oriented, or just charitably-based such as organizations to prevent cruelty to animals or to end slavery. Even when they don't participate, they sympathize with those do-gooders that do. Of course they won't work for or even dream of a society where such acts of kindness are commonplace, because ever



since the attempts to reform society during the period of the English Civil War in the 17th century failed, they have expected little from society as a whole, or even much from a sense of community except of a rather basic sort. They expect mostly economic advancement and to benefit from what markets can provide, and react angrily against moral outrages, often caused by foreigners, better than they can to any call for creating a moralistic society where such outrages would not occur in the first place.

American society takes all these British attitudes to even greater extremes with more drabness in everyday life through shopping malls and aesthetically unappealing communities, more ambition and workaholicism, more grandiose fantasies and self-righteousness present among many individuals who wish to work for social justice, but with the mass of people only coordinating their actions for economic purposes there are few means available to produce virtue in society at large.

Though this is less true of certain sub-cultures, for the overall middle class there is a certain concentration on a few big satisfactions achieved and struggled for which are supposed to make it all worthwhile, such as bigger and bigger houses achieved as one's career progresses in farther and farther out suburbs. These are substitute satisfactions in some ways, for whatever intrinsic satisfactions they offer, they must in addition substitute for lack of feelings of joy in everyday life, lack of everyday emotional expressiveness in a beloved community, and hopefully a beloved family, in fact that which is really desired is something everyone knows often cannot be achieved. That is why love stories are often savored when they have somewhat of a tragic quality to them, as if they are too good to last.

Still, there is at least some hope, small that it is, since there is one price that has not been paid. The strength of the small, intimate community and of the pleasures of everyday life, that have been weakened for other reasons, have not been purchased at the price of elites not sticking their noses in the common people's business so long as the common people do not stick their noses in the elites' business. The common people have sufficient virtue and self-control, historically at least, that they feel justified in judging their rulers. In many other societies, whatever pleasures the common people have in their private affairs, they feel befuddled by public affairs, and give their elites a free rein. The ambitious and the self-righteous people so commonly found in areas of Anglo-American culture, up to now anyway, will just not allow this to happen.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society is a formal way of describing all those institutions and social relationships that maintain values in society, like religion, like charity groups, even in some very important aspects the family. We in the US are self-conscious about such things, unlike most societies, just because in the anonymous spaces of our modern society it is noticeably harder to maintain the social relationships that make values meaningful, as opposed to intellectualizing about values while being alone in one's room, which comes easy.

Democratic society must also concern itself with values even though much of government regulates social order in a technical sense, like the way the executive branch of government is the traffic cop of society, or the way the legislative branch regulates the zero-sum games of society through its own games which produce winners and losers. Values which do not clearly produce winners and losers, but which are thought to be incumbent upon everyone because they are of value to everyone are the birthright of all societies, yet noticeably recede in importance in societies such as ours, so lavishly endowed with the potential for economic growth, and only minutely endowed with opportunities for exercising even basic human sympathy.

Thus the institutions of civil society remind society, and especially government, of what it means to be humane. The judiciary which is that organ of government most concerned with enforcing values once more clearly derived these values from the manners, morals, and customs of the mass of people, but now are somewhat less self-conscious about doing this. This is because certain values evolved and took on official status long ago, and were no longer discussed after they became traditional, while other values are excessively discussed because elites, including the judiciary, have become so far removed from the circumstances of the mass of people that there is little to remind them what these values are for. Instead they get to pontificate on things irrelevant to their own elite lives.

Therefore, civil society, the source of values, does have an intimate connection to democracy, the expression of the will of the people.

Oddly enough, social democracy and political democracy do not necessarily reinforce each other. Social democracy in the sense literally of equality of condition, may be expressed in political democracy, equality of access to political influence, but it can also result in a mass of people so self-satisfied that they ignore politics and leave it to specialists, the administrative elite. Such an elite may also rule by force against the will of the mass of people, and be the outcome of a lack of social democracy. Political democracy however may also be the outcome of social democracy and reflect the mass of people being concerned citizens and showing concern for their similarly-placed neighbors.

Political democracy may also be a method for defusing tension when there is lack of social democracy, when in fact conflict between citizens is very great, and rather than let it have no outlet, the outlet becomes the equal right to vote. The democracy of ancient Sparta was not a political democracy, it was a monarchy, but there was an equality of social condition among the non-serf class. The democracy of ancient Athens was not a social democracy, for there were extreme tensions between the rich and the poor in a growing economy, but it eventually did develop and become famous for its political democracy.

On the other hand, democracy as reflecting input from the mass of people, and not just voting on initiatives arising elsewhere in society, is in modern societies the weakest method of influencing government, unlike ancient Athens. Much of the modern world is dominated by paternalistic elites, though they tend to be bureaucrats working with their lobbyist allies rather than feudal landlords nowadays. These are the kinds of people who show initiative in setting political agendas, and the mass of people merely get to approve initiatives set by others.

Another way of producing political initiatives is very common in the US, the tradition of limited government, which means many issues are not dealt with by government, and by default individuals are free to try to buy happiness in the marketplace through consumption of commodities. The third way of setting social agendas is not through governmental bureaucracy as is so common in Europe, it is not through individuals merely making purchases in the marketplace as is relatively common in the US, but through communal decision-making. This was once somewhat stronger in the US, particularly through the mechanisms of local government, but is weakening here as it is in all modern societies. It is in fact the basis for democratic control of society and of government, because culturally it results in a desire to want more from life than merely buying more and more junk. It wants to produce the

kind of meaningful life that requires coordination between people, and not merely on assembly lines or in offices. Such democracy, originating in the social sense of communal feeling and then expressed politically, results in a situation where the mass of people set standards for their leaders, and then enforce them upon their leaders.

Why is this important, this underused method of producing democratic initiative in society? It is because bureaucracies by their nature are composed of specialists who must serve the generalist who sets the agenda for them, who becomes in effect their ruler. Communal decision-making on the other hand is by generalists who reach a consensus because of the full and complete communication between them. Modern societies are obviously becoming more bureaucratic and less communal, and this certainly includes the United States. Though there are many, many books out on the nature of community, one written by a well-known sociologist that may be especially of interest is Philip Selznick, *The Moral Commonwealth: Social Theory and the Promise of Community* (Selznick 1992).

Now as modern society becomes more and more a society of specialists, then the values which would serve to integrate them for common endeavors become harder and harder to conceptualize because of a lack of common experiences. The result is a kind of nihilism of modernity. Thus the checks and balances of communal life based on people who have common knowledge and common values are not the checks and balances of bureaucracies composed of specialists who do not have common knowledge, and because of this often do not even have common values. Instead the enforcement of values becomes the prerogative of leaders, or people who claim to specialize in values, often specialists in pettifoggery and self-righteousness. In fact the increasing development of bureaucracies at the expense of communities may produce economic interdependence, but probably not psychological or even moral interdependence. As a matter of fact the increasing importance of the virtue of tolerance, and a virtue it is but it is far from being the only or even the most important virtue, in many cases reflects not concern, but the opposite, lack of concern for the lives of strangers.

The transformation of values into something initiated by bureaucratic specialists rather than community-based generalists, either that or abstract intellectualizing by ivory tower intellectuals that can be the foundation of intellectual fads but still only take effect through bureaucratic enforcement, all this leads to what may be called the nihilism

of modernity. This is a core theme that has been expressed throughout this book. This is certainly an important issue regarding the decay of democratic community in modern societies.

As a matter of fact the US was once almost unique to the extent that it had a self-conscious and aggressive middle class that because elements of which communicated with both the rich and the poor had values that easily served as a compromise between the interests of the rich and the interests of the poor. That is why Americans have always believed that an influential middle class facilitates political democracy. Many other societies in contrast have sectors of society composed of people of middling wealth, but they tend to be very passive, identifying with the rich, or on occasion, such as during revolutionary outbreaks, with the poor. The result is that social change in these societies is often initiated by intellectuals, quite often derived from the upper classes though not exclusively, whose approach to the world around them is often very theoretical, and quite often not very pragmatic.

Western Europe thus has the kinds of social order which most everyone wants, but initiated through state bureaucracies and their allies among intellectuals, such as a good mass transportation system and universal health care, and things which probably reflect more the faddishness of elites. An example is the Swedish "anti-spanking law" which is great for members of the Swedish aristocracy who teach their children to earn or perhaps to be just worthy of their later elite status in society by never acting out, and hardly ever showing their feelings either. This is a bargain working-class children would rarely agree to for almost certainly there will be no reward of elite status for not showing their emotions, something that fits into the life of bureaucrats, but not of plain workers for whom sublimating their emotions into later achievements is not a viable option. Of course elites also have a tendency to create jobs for themselves, which is another reason for the increasing bureaucratization of these societies.

The US has less social order than Western Europe, for good and for ill. It has more freedom from government, whose practical effect is that people tend to have more money left over after taxes, but without as much security offered by government, they have more need to spend it to provide their own security. Yet the marketplace which is used to purchase this security is best suited as a source of simple commodities. Ways of life based on compassion, wisdom, and mutual help, the kind that does something about worsening working conditions under the pressures of rampant competition, requires something more than the

image mongering and simple-minded goals of American-style big business and big government, giant bureaucracies all, who use their bureaucratic expertise more to supplement the market than to provide oversight or even standards for its functioning.

This something more is a method for setting standards for society, standards of some complexity but having at its command the information necessary to put this complexity into effect. This method can truly be called democratic communal politics in the furtherance of democratic communal values.

If anything such democratic communal decision-making in the social and political sense has been declining in recent generations in the US. Local government which was once a bulwark for local community is increasingly just like a local version of the Federal government. If anything, Western Europe is in general even more bureaucratically run, and less influenced by democratic communal politics as opposed to elite initiatives, though there are also exceptions to this generalization be it works councils to provide worker input to their firms in Germany, or the use of referenda in Switzerland. Regarding learning about works councils, I recommend *Works Councils: Consultation, Representation, and Cooperation in Industrial Relations* (Rogers and Streeck 1995).

In summary, the increase of what I call the nihilism of modernity reflects both the decline of frontier-type opportunities for social mobility, and the increasing bureaucratization of society. This bureaucratization is weakening both direct communal influence (in the sense of direct democracy) on government, even at the level of local government, as well as the influence of middle-class values and standards as being the balance point of society, admittedly more an American tradition than a universal democratic tradition, that allows for mutual understanding and mutual compromise between the rich and the poor, and the leaders and the led.

American-style democracy is good at preventing tyranny, and is less efficient at producing ongoing social order. It is possible to reinforce social order through bureaucratic means, which is a species of paternalism and is elite-drive, and this is common in Europe. It is also possible to ignore most issues not relevant to economic growth, and this is a very common American means for defusing cultural conflicts. Though Europe may accuse America of suffering from "inefficient" paternalism, and though America may accuse Europe of not being sufficiently concerned with maintaining a sense of liberty, a sense which

is expressed mostly by buying things, both Europe and America tend to rely on democratic input from the mass of people as a last resort. Though this is probably more likely in America because of the facilitating presence of an active middle class, even this doesn't appear for the most part except when other options have failed, such as during times of crisis.

Thus Europe idealizes community, and practices bureaucratic rule of society even more than we in the US do, often attempting to control markets. The US idealizes community and practices economic growth as the supreme value and often the substitute for other values, using bureaucracies, both public and private, to manage market conditions, but less often to substitute for them. Democratic control of society which is more than legitimating paternalism and more than allowing individuals to buy products through markets, but which in fact relies on communal promulgation and then enforcement of values, particularly on leaders, has a long way to go to regain its influence on the modern world.

Instead what one finds is a loss of a sense of community, and communal decision-making, and its replacement by bureaucratization in America and in other modern societies. In fact America needs democratic control of elites even more than some other societies because the cultural tradition of aristocratic honor among our elites is so weak. They often aren't complete snobs for which we should be grateful, but that doesn't make them any less self-serving.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### THE ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Just as a forest is not created, it is given certain necessities and then it creates itself, so also is the relationship between politicians and a community. Their ability to create communities is quite limited, though undoubtedly many end up using the power of the state to destroy communities, which is where wars start. The very fact that the feelings that come from having a sense of community or even many overlapping senses of community, are decaying shows that our American society, as well as many other societies are out of order, and are not functioning well at all. Just an example of this is that politicians so often engage in public relations stunts to appease the masses, their constituents, but serve the interests of special interest groups even more (it is their monetary contributions that gives them an access above and beyond that of the average citizen). This shows that the democratic society, the modern American ideal, which is supposed to underlay our political society has weakened, and with it the possibility for politics to serve the *res publica*, common good.

Let's look at the possibility for politics to end poverty, and the various social problems associated with poverty. It is obvious, and has been for a few generations now, that in the large metropolitan areas the mass of jobs available to working-class people are not in the inner city where so many of their poor members live. But do we have mass transit to take them in a convenient manner to where the jobs are? No. Do we have zoning laws to make working-class housing accessible to where the jobs are? No. Instead our leaders have produced under their oversight circumstances that guarantee that many working-class people will have one and a half and even two hour commutes to work each way. The long commutes, longer than is common even in the big cities of Europe, is one important reason why Americans typically have little or no social life during the work week. They have to get up early to go to work.

There is also the need to reintroduce working-class jobs into the inner city. Is there an attempt to reintroduce local banks and support local entrepreneurs who will reintroduce factories and warehouses to

where they once existed two and three generations ago? No. Instead politicians and the Fortune 500 push for tokenism, hiring a few often middle-class members of minorities into their ranks, but are not encouraging these leaders of their communities to set up businesses of their own, creating hundreds of jobs in their own communities, and perhaps competing with their Fortune 500 benefactors.

How about education? Are children in inner city communities getting the education necessary to get jobs in the world at large. Barely. More likely they'll be encouraged to get jobs in the service industries of the inner cities, not the military - industrial complex but the government - welfare - social services complex that will provide a minimum of support for the poor, but will most likely never end their poverty, or even give them a means to get out of their poverty on their own. While people in the inner cities desperately need jobs, they for the most part neither have the means to acquire the proper skills, the encouragement to do so, nor even in many cases the means to get to work. So while politicians graciously allow them to stagnate in slums, they encourage the importation from other countries of a substitute labor force who it is thought do have the skills, attitudes, and motivations that their employers want, the gift of their foreign cultures and foreign educational systems. So in America while the very poor fester in despair, and are criticized for their lack of a good work ethic (a criticism only partially justified since in reality opportunities really are limited), the immigrants in some ways set work standards absurdly high since they have to put up with so many hassles, unnecessary hassles if one believes in decent working conditions, and a decent working-class quality of life.

Both market competition and democratic resort to politics are ways for the mass of people to express their preferences for the kind of life they would like to lead. Markets work well for simply delineated commodities that lend themselves to comparison shopping, but not for products that are in reality the result of complex bureaucratic structures that cannot be differentiated for various publics, like the way police departments serve as natural monopolies for the geographical areas they serve.

There are ways to mesh the two, of course. For example, once most hoity toidy suburbs really were small towns, that felt responsible to provide certain opportunities for all the social classes that were their residents. Certain benefits were typically provided by governments there for all people, like sidewalks (which are not always provided by

present-day suburbs), while competition among many real estate developers and contractors ensured a large number of consumer choices. Now, real estate developers have gotten so large that for their own convenience they often create on large swaths of land a sameness in terms of the social class they appeal to that ensures an extreme sterility in terms of social environment, and not to forget a sameness in architectural design. Meanwhile the mediocre politicians who take for granted this sameness and sterility, they often don't even bother to put in sidewalks since they don't expect very many people to do anything so mundane as to go out to take a walk. It is no wonder these suburbs, compared to the original small towns of 100 years ago so often have extreme social segregation, extreme class differentiation (and segregation), and public conveniences only for those who can pay for it.

Communally, of course, the sense of fellow-feeling among neighbors is weak, and structurally the very layout of the communities is often there more to provide customers for shopping centers than to encourage camaraderie among neighbors. In a sense many communities are created with the shopping centers first and the communities built around them as captive markets to ensure shopping, not social interaction, with neighbors.

Of course our kind of society is something we have adapted to, though not necessarily adapted to well. Other cultures may adapt to things far worse, or far better. We in the US still have the remnants of a British tradition of emotional understatement, which means in practical terms we are raised in general to constantly maintain emotional self-control (except for those raised in distinctive non-British-influenced subcultures) so as not to argue, or even to get particularly emotionally-involved with our neighbors, who are essentially treated as strangers. In many other societies the tendencies are for emotional overstatement, a kind of background noise of low-level hysteria which produces many status-rivalries, many arguments, but as long as there is constant social interaction, hopefully, rationality will prevail over this.

If they develop social anonymity on our scale, these methods of social remediation will probably disappear, and the level of irrationality in society will probably increase, like a steam engine where the governor controlling pressure no longer works. Such societies often have so much tension as background noise to relationships that it is a kind of feudal loyalty, hereditary loyalties of the familial sort originally but now transferred to class and ethnic and even cultural and political

groupings, that become the basis for many, sometimes most, social relationships.

This is so if for no other reason that there isn't enough trust between people who are even moderately different from each other to form friendships or often even acquaintanceships, as well as political and cultural pressures for the kinds of blind loyalty that hierarchical social structures depend on. There is just too much tension, too much emphasis on inherited social identities, for people to easily relate to strangers, or to acquaintances, or even often to anybody who do not inhabit the same social boxes they do. For them, as in the family, though family members know each other better than is found in the anonymous social spaces outside the family, their most important technique to resolve arguments is to be loyal. It works in the family. It just doesn't work so well in the anonymous or the bureaucratic social world outside the family. Of course in these societies they leave it up to the social elite to structure their loyalties into a cohesive whole. It is no wonder elites in these societies so often engage in social engineering, producing social structures to which the rest of society must be loyal.

With us, however, here in the US, market forces are given much more freedom of play, and our emotional lives are much more dependant on consumption of commodities; if nothing else we have become dependent on the entertainment industries to in a sense feel alive, or at least to feel emotionally alive. We are adapted to an atomized society, and being with acquaintances, since sharing transient fantasies with acquaintances substitutes for the quasi-familial relationships, even between neighbors, that characterize traditional societies. However, it's just not very emotionally satisfying, this never-ending world of emotional understatement, and it is no wonder that so many people in America resort to various physical and psychological drugs and the addictions that ensue to provide the emotional feeling of being part of a meaningful whole that neither work nor community any longer provides. This is true at least for a great many people here.

That is why we need a way to create communities in America as much as ever, and this is also true for modern societies in general. This is not only to produce social cooperation, such as to produce the basic social sympathy needed to end poverty, but to produce the social sympathy necessary to end the emotional poverty that afflicts the rest of society as well. We need it for our own peace of mind. That is why Shalom - peace, that Biblical word, still has resonance for us today.

As for a book that describes many of the aspects of a healthy social ecology, especially in urban settings, I recommend a book by a very well-known writer on this and similar topics. It is a book by Jane Jacobs, *Dark Age Ahead* (Jacobs 2004). A book with a similar perspective but using a broader, historical point of view is John Ralston Saul, *Voltaire's Bastards: The Dictatorship of Reason in the West* (Saul 1992).

There are all kinds of books dealing with issues of social ecology of course, some of them partaking of "New Age" reveries, some of them reading into the environment an excuse for having a disdain for society that becomes a breeding ground for extreme left-wing or right-wing politics, as if a love for animals and nature should excuse a hatred for people, and especially for one's political rivals. A desire to be part of something bigger than oneself, and seeing its fulfillment in a rather amoral nature, easily reads into nature all kinds of personal fantasies, as if getting out of society excuses all kinds of maladaptions that arose in that society. Mystical longings for union with nature can easily become an excuse for sacrificing people, not to nature as understood by science, and not to society as understood by moral tradition, but to a combination that can easily result in the worst aspects of mystic reveries, the kind that can't tell the difference between paranoia and a spiritual experience.

To find the basis for human existence in nature is not an easy thing to do, for it requires science for its means, and morality that arises in society as well as in nature for its ends, for a human being is different from a satisfied dog or a cat, though there is an overlap in interests. A human being also doesn't automatically need to become a slave to a charismatic leader, as if that is "natural," for nature is about everything, sickness as well as health, failure as well as success. Nature sets the limits to success and failure, but interpreting what is meant by success and what is meant by failure sometimes must go beyond nature to purely human characteristics such as found in human culture. Yet these same cultural characteristics have their own limits and often must be judged by limits set by our physical as well as by our moral natures. It's a juggling act all right, but sometimes that is what being a human being is all about.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### PLUTOCRACY AND THE LABOR MOVEMENT

And now we get to working-class life. What once made America unique, and to a certain extent still does, was the fact that as a frontier society (in an economic and social sense) America offered working class people many opportunities for social advancement that were lacking in more stagnant, and often more bureaucratized, societies. True, this advancement often took the form of a giant pyramiding scheme as new immigrants took the jobs the natives no longer wanted and by expanding the size of the overall economy pushed the natives up. Then for the immigrants to advance they often had to wait for even newer immigrants to arrive. This always meant that there was a danger of economic cycles ending in a crash, and then eventually recovering to repeat the cycle, perhaps by taking advantage of a newly discovered source of cheap labor, cheap energy, or technological advancement to boost productivity and jump start consumer confidence.

There has always been a dilemma in American history over whether America should be a consumers democracy or a workers democracy. This was usually resolved in favor of the former. When the geographical reach of markets was smaller, as in the early 19th century, consumers were often just neighbors under another guise, which meant that the public realized that they had the option to try to balance their gains or losses as workers (their pay and working conditions) against their gains or losses as consumers. Eventually sheer technological efficiency lifted all boats and produced our modern technological society and our modern standard of living.

Nevertheless, the issue remains how does society balance the interests of workers (usually lacking cross-firm solidarity) and their interests as consumers? One reason that the era that saw the founding of America has a certain fame is that this was really the last period in American history where there really was the physical possibility of direct communication between the leaders and the led, and between bosses and workers.

Regional rivalries soon broke out after independence from Britain. Interestingly enough, the merchant elite of New England who

self-consciously favored trickle-down economics were often rather moralistic (e.g., Alexander Hamilton, their most important political spokesman, was a leading anti-slavery advocate), while the independent farmers of the South led by Thomas Jefferson (the true intellectual father of American democracy as opposed to American republicanism), though they favored autonomy for people just like them (not for slaves, an inconsistency put off for the future) were so antagonistic to bureaucracy of any sort that they had few ideas for how to improve the pay and working conditions of non-farmers.

By the time of the Progressive Era at the beginning of the 20th century far less was expected from bosses in terms of paternalism and even moralism than in the early days of the Republic. Increasingly all our eggs were put into one basket, the basket of trickle-down economics. One effect was to raise the question how much should be expected from a now extremely wealthy plutocracy at the top of our business class (far wealthier in absolute terms than the elites of 18th century America), and how should they be judged?

This was made more difficult as communities grew larger and more anonymous so that the rich became less vulnerable to communal norms and to communal shaming. Increasingly they did not work to earn a reputation in the community, but literally to make as much money as possible. Even today those of our wealthy classes who are obsessed with charitable activities often do so because they do not know what else to do with their time and their money when they have reached or inherited a pinnacle of wealth. The one thing they cannot provide for the poor of course is protection against the marketplace which gave the rich their wealth.

This is where the labor movement comes in. Once workers as individuals could deal with bosses somewhat as equals or at least face to face, sometimes with rough parity as economic adversaries, sometimes as social equals simply because the community could instill sufficient morality and sympathy in both of them so as to appreciate each others' worth. This was the 18th century ideal, even when it worked better as an ideal than as a practice.

By the beginning of the 20th century the expectation that moral ideals incumbent on both the rich and the poor would make up for inequalities in economic power had become greatly weakened. The result was two alternatives. Union activists often believed all Society's problems would be solved once the entire workforce had become unionized. The anti-union groups (derived to a large extent from



management circles) believed all Society's problems would be solved once a rampant consumerism could substitute for a mute and powerless labor force.

As both ways of organizing society proved unattainable, and were certainly not desired by the mass of workers, more bureaucratic and elitist methods of organizing interest groups in society were suggested. So now it comes down to how do the goals of the early 20th century in America, the Progressive Era, compare to those of our own era, 100 years later?

The Progressive Era was one where rule by disinterested, objective, scientifically-minded professions, and the professionals who made up them, was often touted as the way to return morality and community to an increasingly anonymous society. A rather interesting book that reveals much about this trend that was originally published in 1912 is Walter E. Weyl, *The New Democracy: An Essay on Certain Political and Economic Tendencies in the United States* (Weyl 2005). This rather impressionistic account of American history up to his time by one of the founding editors of the magazine *The New Republic* reveals the spirit of the frontier that still loomed large in popular consciousness: "Ignorant, dirty, often drunken, frequently brutal, as some of these 'solitaires' were, they nevertheless possessed a certain dignity not unlike that of the Hebrew shepherds." (Weyl 2005: 39) The book came out the same year that Theodore Roosevelt was running for a third term as President on the Bull Moose ticket under the platform of "The New Nationalism" whose ideas were close to Weyl's "The New Democracy." Walter Lippmann called him "the best trained economist of the progressive movement" which he was, having a Ph.D from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

For him America, the greatest democracy in the world in 1831, spent the next 70 or so years not deepening its democracy, but extending its geographical reach to exploring and conquering a continent. As he puts it: "Today we cannot tear down a slum, regulate a corporation, or establish a national educational system, we cannot attack either industrial oligarchy or political corruption, without coming into contact with the economic, political, and psychological after effects of the conquest." (Weyl 2005: 24-25)

You might say in America the state follows the policy of subsidizing, but not regulating, business, certainly not anywhere to the same extent that is common practice in Europe. Europe puts on a pedestal social order which is enforced by elites, the kind of order that everyone

appreciates like a good mass transit system, cheap healthcare, and cheap higher education, and the order that only elites want like jobs for themselves. America privileges lack of centralized control, producing the freedom which everyone wants, and the freedom which elites want for themselves, like the ability to make lots of money by filling in the gaps in the social order by making up for what government doesn't provide. We claim having larger per capita numbers of doctors, lawyers, psychologists, and real estate agents than almost anywhere else in the world shows how efficient we are. Others might say it shows how lacking in basic order we are in the first place, and how we must fill in the gaps in rather haphazard fashion. This can produce a great deal of adaptation to individual needs, but other times merely provides stop-gap solutions.

Weyl very much emphasizes leverage, such as the managers and financiers who do not officially own their corporations, but who nevertheless get the ignorant owners, the stockholders, to do their bidding. It is the very same power elite who appeal to the cupidity, the status-consciousness, and the ignorance of politicians to get them to serve their interests, and not the public's, a public they represent but whom they often disdain or at least know very little about except by information provided to them from lobbyists.

He wrote at a time when the solution for Society's economic problems was assumed to be more regulation, that the growth of monopolies and oligopolies was doing part of the job of Progressives for them, and that ultimately government would have to step in and finish the job. This doesn't mean that he believed that total government control was advisable, but he did believe that more social order was necessary, not the result of the public's direct input, but as the result of very indirect public control of their own destiny. He wrote:

In certain industries socialization may mean a government monopoly. In others, it may mean government operation in competition with private businesses; or government ownership with private management; or a division of the profits of private industries. Or it may involve a thoroughgoing regulation of an industry... Or socialization may mean a lesser regulation; or mere publicity; or encouragement; or subsidies; or legal recognition; or simply the prescribing of a minimum capital or of a preliminary training (Weyl 2005: 279).

So how have circumstances changed regarding the representation of the public's interests against those of the plutocracy? Governmental control or at least influence is rather firmly in place. The Great

Depression of the 1930's saw to that. The worst of the slum conditions and miserable working conditions of the beginning of the 20th century have at least been publicly recognized and for the most part dealt with, partly through improved technology. Yet the same kinds of market pressures that caused workers to often fare badly when competing against their employers, and against millions of competing workers here and abroad, still exists, particularly under the impact of Globalization. Now the masses of underdeveloped countries serve to pull down American wages and working conditions just as immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe did during the Progressive Era. Because of immense increases in productivity the standard of living of even unskilled workers has shot up, but the moral and psychological effects of consumerism (a sense of identity based on endless purchases) is of concern in a way that was not the case 100 years ago.

Of course all the problems of social anonymity and weak community life have partly been improved by mass communication and mass transportation and partly been made worse by increased population densities and by a weakening of traditional social loyalties, particularly to family, community, and religion. Ideologies that celebrate these changes and ideologies that promote backlash and deplore these changes are rampant, at least among intellectuals. Many of the mass of people are just confused and don't know what they want. Partly this is because of ideologies promoted by intellectuals that so often encourage more or less government nevertheless seem so highly theoretical and rather irrelevant to workers' lives. They need a fine-tuning of the relation of government to their everyday lives, not merely an ideology about it.

Before I discuss a book by one of these intellectuals, let's look at how the influence of the union movement on this state of affairs has come and gone. Especially after the Great Depression they tried to claim the mantle as "Representative of the Working Class" but since they never represented all the working class they ended up as just another interest group, one which has lost great power nowadays, to a large extent because of the competitive, now worldwide, pressures of the marketplace.

What once weakened the informal social solidarities of community, and led to the rise of the union movement as a substitute, now threatens the union movement as a formal means of representing the interests of workers as workers. In fact both union leaders and politicians once claimed to offer to workers some control over their working lives, and

to a large extent it is only politicians now that are left. Can the union movement be revitalized? Who knows? Can workers through the introduction of new social institutions, a kind of industrial democracy perhaps, get through politics the kinds of influence on their working lives that they once got through simple communal influence, and that some of them later tried to get through unions? Perhaps.

It is even possible that unions can work hand in hand with government and represent the interests of workers, not just in the strictly bread and butter areas of bargaining over wages and working conditions in particular industries, but as advisors to government in broad areas of health, safety, insurance, medical care, and job training, and even public aid (the kind produced by the welfare state) where someone must represent America's working class, and politicians alone don't seem to be doing a good enough job of it. Or perhaps the politicians just haven't got the hang of democracy yet.

We've had lots of books in the last generation that discuss the plight of the poor in a general way, often in a way to relieve the guilt of the rich who are more likely to be reading such books than the poor themselves. This paradox that the people who are faced by social problems are not those who try to solve them, a rather undemocratic state of affairs most people would admit, is reflected in politics. In politics, unlike decision-making in families, problem-solving usually is not holistic, as if a student who has the tuition money would be advised to go to college without worrying about also having money for room and board. No, in politics quite often one interest group is appeased while the problems of another interest group, problems tied directly to the interests of the first group, are ignored. And so a law is passed and when the side-effects become obvious, then the political opponents of the first group of politicians come into power and the process repeats itself.

True, societies often worry about economic growth until either it collapses or large numbers of people grow bored with it, in which case they turn to advisors on how to redistribute the wealth. Now is one of those transitional eras when there is increasing resentment against an increasing maldistribution of wealth both within the United States and between the United States and other countries.

Now is the time to discuss a book which, though it proposes no solution about whether America is already too rich, or should be even richer, tries to deal with the general values that could provide an orientation to discussing this problem. It is written by someone with

elite credentials who nevertheless is quite concerned about the common experience, that is to say working-class issues. He doesn't seem to be a Walter Weyl for our era, but people do listen to him. The book is *Politics and Passion: Toward a More Egalitarian Liberalism* by Michael Walzer (Walzer 2004). He has written on a wide range of topics, including just and unjust wars, nationalism, ethnicity, economic justice, criticism, radicalism, tolerance, and political obligation. He in general is known for articulating the position that social goods must be understood against the background of the social complexity that they are part of and which they sustain. He thus can be considered an opponent of excessive individualism (the kind that develops in an atomized society which is after all the American tendency), as well as excessive authoritarianism. He also doesn't like winner-take-all economics which is what happens in the real world of oligopolies and of consumers with insufficient information, as opposed to the world of economic models.

So, is this paperback book a book for the masses? The answer is maybe, but not until the mass of people start thinking like professors. His strongest argument is against a procedural democracy, as if he is writing for an audience of judges who must be reminded that there is a place for politics in a democracy, not merely lawsuits and judges having the last word.

This book gets pretty philosophical, and of course there are limitations to philosophy. There is a saying that all philosophy follows from the tradition of Plato (quibbling over values, the true, the good, and the beautiful) or Aristotle (who for all his mistakes believed in inductive reasoning from which modern science derives). In a sense Prof. Walzer's critique is 2/3 Platonic and 1/3 Aristotelian. He gives examples to illustrate his reasoning, but he is more interested in reaffirming the old saw, "Can't we just get along?" so that there are few unexpected insights derived from studies of historical and moral causality. Ernest Gellner, a British polymath who abandoned the study of philosophy at Cambridge because the influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein there had turned it into belaboring the obvious, and turned instead to the study of sociology and anthropology at the London School of Economics, would probably have approved of that 1/3 that explores social dynamics and would think less of that 2/3 that merely shows that social institutions do exist in the first place. I would not be so harsh, but Walzer's interests do reveal something about intellectual life in the US. Given the academic tendency for missing the obvious when in pursuit of the

esoteric and the obscure, undoubtedly Prof. Walzer has a worthwhile goal in trying to convince his philosophical colleagues of the importance of practical distinctions, the kind that Wittgenstein spent his life trying to prove existed, which is why some claim he was just belaboring the obvious.

Prof. Walzer starts by showing that familial, cultural, political, and moral bases for associations do have weight in the existential scheme of things. He also makes the distinction that there are customs that people would not choose if they knew before what they know now. He assumes of course that such people think just like him. In any case the comfortableness of custom is enough to keep these associations going. Prof. Walzer seems to be conflicted about whether utopian desires of the intellectual class (such as desire for a classless society) should be put aside as a temporary setback, or as something to be set aside permanently now that we know that intellectuals can come up with some really bad plans. While he claims: "Can we really imagine individuals without any voluntary ties at all, unbound by class, ethnicity, religion, race, or gender, unidentified, utterly free?" (Walzer 2004: 14) the question arises is he criticizing a purely hypothetical alternative, or has much social reasoning in America become so unrealistic that bringing it down to earth is now a necessity?

The points he makes are quite good, but the reader may think that it is a pity that they need to be made at all. A point which he hints at but does not elaborate is that society depends on rules that allow bargaining to proceed at all, for example that people will keep their word. Actually, basic value elements of culture cannot be created merely by bargaining any more than law and order will result merely when criminals grow tired.

Much of his analysis seems to have a kind of dialectical spiral, as in Chapter One "Involuntary Association" where he mentions that the noble intentions of activists cannot be used to create society anew but only to work within the present social order based on particular social loyalties (he thus supports unionism as a goal rather than the goal of a classless society) while Chapter Two "The Collectivism of Powerlessness" mentions modern society is a plutocracy and reformers should keep their ideals in hand so that the reformist drive will never die. Then in the same chapter he later states that reform will not come from abstract aspirations alone, but through concrete communal identities. He gives the example of those Algerians who supported independence for Algeria because they didn't believe they could ever

become equal French citizens without being forced to give up their Algerian Arab identities. In general he believes stigmatized groups should be helped to get ahead in society, not merely by helping individuals compete, but also the group so that the group of individuals as a whole can rise in society.

The rest of the book follows the same path. He makes clear in the chapter "Cultural Rights" that the simple multicultural argument about the state offering tokens of respect toward ethnic and religious minorities is the easy part, the hard part is deciding to what extent the state should support these minorities in what is really important to them, such as indoctrinating the young, or perhaps enforcing a status hierarchy within their group that grates against typical liberal notions of equality. These are the hard questions involving coordination of conflicting values, and so it is good that Prof. Walzer raises them.

The rest of the book follows the same path. A chapter on deliberation makes crystal clear that though jurors owe a loyalty to set standards, and shouldn't take bribes, and that politicians likewise serve an interest higher than their own, voters are expected to vote according to their self-interest, and shouldn't take bribes because it interferes with a more thoughtful approach to self-interest. For Prof. Walzer passion is as natural a goal for politics as self-interest and no emotionless decision-machine could serve as a model for the kind of character necessary among thoughtful voters. It's just not the way human nature functions. He believes there are standards to be used to push individuals in the direction of "self-interest well understood" as Tocqueville puts it in his classic *Democracy in America*, but morality and human rights, though they can be used to test human psychology to keep it reasonable, can never replace it. So much for criticizing the artificiality of academic reason in order to remind it of common sense notions of the constraints of the human condition.

The proof of his emphasis on common sense philosophy, which is pretty much American middle-class morality somewhat systematized, is that states run by intellectuals, the Soviet Union was a prime example, easily degenerated not only into authoritarianism, but unrealistic authoritarianism. Not that the masses can't be unrealistic, but this occurs when their escapism is encouraged, the classic bread and circuses of the Roman Empire, as much of a danger as when it is the escapism of their leaders that is encouraged, though the latter is more likely.



There are all kinds of issues he could have covered, but didn't. It is the nuts and bolts of everyday oppression, not just the vague generalities of academic discourse, that is a good place to start. But he recognizes the needs of his core audience, which are not workers and are probably not managers either.

It is true society at large, at least in America and probably in other places too, is increasingly distrustful of their political representatives, both because these rulers over bureaucrats often act in an untrustworthy, manipulative way, and because the communications media who cover and in effect endorse them love to either gossip about celebrities, often turning politicians into celebrities, or to find new groups of victims to exploit their suffering for entertainment purposes. The end result is that they tend to simplify political debate, as if they are reporting news to an audience of 12 year olds. For that matter law has become sucked into this political - academic - communications - entertainment complex, and the result is the growth of law as, among other things, public relations stunts. At least certain politicians are comfortable with pushing this tendency. It is an elementary principle of law in all legal systems that law can't do everything, it can't guarantee that all children will get good grades in school, nor that all food will taste good at all times. Nevertheless some politicians love to promise more than they can deliver, and some lawyers love to facilitate this.

Society of course has changed. Once many communities lived in constant fear of war with their neighbors because there was no bureaucratic mechanism, including the rule of law, to prevent this. Now this is much less of a problem, but the solidarity that comes from true communal feeling is increasingly weak and that is now instead the major problem of social life. No wonder Prof. Walzer has an Appendix called "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism" where he shows that communities are important, and not just isolated individuals. Now to do something about it, more than the public relations stunts which so many politicians and their academic and media advisors offer, that takes a truer sense of communication and solidarity, of communal feeling in fact. That is something no book can provide, only at best to comment upon.

I started with discussion of plutocracy and the labor movement, and then showed how Prof. Walzer in good liberal fashion discussed in general terms the need for people to reason together for the public good. Perhaps regarding that old, old problem in America, working-class



life and what to do about it, perhaps some day we will! For more than 200 years we have relied on representative government, certainly not direct democracy, to represent the interests and deal with the problems of the mass of citizens in America. It seems we're still fiddling with the details.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

### INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The whole concept of “Industrial Democracy” remains of importance because of debate over what really constitutes democracy: Is it based on social equality or political equality or both? For example there are tribal societies where there is so little economic growth that what is valued is equality in social and economic conditions of all members of the society. Yet this is mainly an equality of poverty. The pie becomes bigger when competition and division of labor dramatically increases so that social inequality increases along with the increase in the standard of living. Political democracy in many societies is a reaction to social inequality. Then the equalities that government produce by offering things of value to everyone, or perhaps taking away things of value from everyone, are limited and demarcated in comparison to all the inequalities in society that remain.

Even political democracy has its evolutionary history. In early America, leaders were expected to represent their, usually poorer, neighbors and thus out of a sense of honor to represent the interests of people quite different from themselves. However nowadays increasingly politicians in our anonymous society do not know their constituents very well. One way to deal with this problem, which is basically the weakness of communal democracy, is to use Industrial Democracy to allow the vast working class to have immediate input on their working lives. Of course this can lead to political input as well.

Therefore Industrial Democracy is an alternative to the belief that lack of input on wages and working conditions can be compensated for by the gains workers will get as consumers. This often doesn't work because the people who initially benefit from gains in productivity because of lowered wages and working conditions, the middle class, white-collar workers, farmers, and workers in particular industries whose time has not yet come for deterioration in wages and working conditions (by reason of speed-up, outsourcing or just increases in competitive pressures), are often not the same people who through their hard work and low wages keep prices low for everyone else. You might say particular groups of workers are played off against each other

because there is no overall social solidarity among all workers, or for that matter among society at large.

There isn't overall social solidarity among managers either. Yet it is still easier as a rule for managers as a class to coordinate their interests, especially when their interests are to pay their workers no more than necessary, than for an unorganized mass of workers to coordinate their interests.

Being an unskilled laborer is not all that bad. Once many, many jobs could be learned fairly easily so that being an unskilled laborer was the one safety net available for anyone who needed a job for whatever reason. Now the bureaucratization of society, and of the hiring process, has become so extreme that even jobs that can be learned rather easily are not available to just anyone, but there is extreme pigeon-holing of job applicants. One cannot be too young or too old, or even too fat or too skinny in many cases. Ultimately, job applicants are often judged by not whether they can do the job, but whether the totality of their previous life meets job requirements as shown by their resumes.

The solutions offered for the problem of de-skilling of jobs which produce downward pressure on wages, which oddly enough doesn't interfere with pigeon-holing workers based on their job histories, so that they are rarely allowed to do anything different from what they have done already, often have a *reductio ad absurdum* quality to them. One solution is that everyone should join a union so that the interests of workers and consumers would not conflict. Another is that no one should join a union so that in this way the interests of workers and consumers would not conflict. In actuality some groups of workers do well in the marketplace, and some groups of consumers (usually the richer ones) do well in the marketplace, and they are often not the same groups. Even in society at large whatever gains achieved by the mass of consumers through improved technology for mass production, which does increase the standard of living, doesn't automatically compensate for lack of dignity and general unhappiness from the job itself.

So the question remains, can Industrial Democracy substitute for Communal Democracy? Probably not, because organized labor, whether unionized or just involving non-union-based consultation committees in the workplace can never become synonymous with society at large. The hope that the problems of workers can be solved by everyone becoming unionized or no one becoming unionized has proven to be unrealistic because both are based on unrealistic hopes for functioning markets.

In fact politics must step in as part of the checks and balances of society because markets work best for communicating information about simple commodities that can be judged at a glance. Markets are less useful for judging largely unknown factors, like the wages and working conditions of people who provide the products we buy. For this very reason, when a small-scale society where everyone knows each other is no longer available, a more structured societal mechanism becomes necessary, not a market mechanism that is shallow and superficial.

So what can Industrial Democracy offer, both as self-organized in particular firms or as imposed by government on firms? To start with, in the political realm Industrial Democracy because it provides a forum for workers to think about their wages and working conditions can cause them to have the solidarity to impinge on the political process, to have a voice and not just be the echo-chamber for the initiatives of non-worker "intellectuals." To the extent that society will learn from "non-intellectuals" (which is what democracy is all about), it allows for the proponents of a pure social democracy with its emphasis on providing immediate social equality to ponder the effects of lack of economic growth, and for the proponents of a pure political democracy to ponder a commonly held economic bias that all that matters is economic growth and cheap commodities, as if working conditions and dignity at work don't count.

In ordinary social conditions, like the family, it is natural to deal with problems holistically, facing the issue of solutions to problems and the side-effects they cause simultaneously. It is in the politics of anonymous societies run by bureaucracies that politics as superficial analysis runs rampant, where a superficial solution is offered to certain interest groups, the issue of side-effects is not faced, and then when this issue of the side-effects finally comes to the fore a new group of politicians come into office promising to deal with this issue and then the process repeats itself. Undoubtedly modern, anonymous societies are not families written large, which is one reason politics is unavoidable, but this doesn't mean the process of anonymous groupings who don't know each other very well trying to get along shouldn't be faced realistically.

But to get back to the core issue of Industrial Democracy, quality of life on the job, the development of consultation and coordination institutions, either voluntarily or through government fiat, allows workers and management to consciously plan together, as opposed to simple-minded management schemes to play off workers against each other in

a race toward the bottom of wages and working conditions. Yes, workers and managers may gang up on consumers, producing inferior, expensive products but that's not likely as long as consumers are not stuck with out and out monopolies.

More likely is the common problem, common nowadays anyway, where consumers want cheap products but without realizing this backfires by producing bad wages and working conditions for themselves and other workers. True, conscious decision-making is not always a substitute for the convenience of unconscious submission to the messages of the marketplace to make products as cheap as possible without concern for consequences. But to self-consciously try to make wages and working conditions tolerable is often better for society than nothing which is often the alternative, the alternative of managers just ordering around workers without getting input from them, and letting society, which is mostly composed of the working class in general, pay the price.

As to what in particular Industrial Democracy can do, just to give an example, in Germany under the Works Constitution Act, works councils have co-determination rights in the areas of hours, piecework rates and bonuses, performance monitoring, working conditions where employers have violated accepted principles of job design, regarding hiring, firing, transfer, and assignment to pay groupings or job classifications, and training and retraining. At the very least works councils could be an independent source of monitoring on health and safety conditions, better than relying on overburdened government inspectors. As Joel Rogers points out in *Works Councils: Consultation, Representation, and Cooperation in Industrial Relations*: "U.S. reliance on state inspectors to enforce health and safety standards contrasts to Japanese and European (and, increasingly, Canadian) reliance on mandated worker health and safety committees within plants to supplement direct state regulatory efforts" (Rogers 1995: 388).

One of the major benefits of Industrial Democracy is that it helps society to self-regulate itself without being dependent only on the initiatives of politicians to do so. Politicians, because they so often get voted for simply because of their promises, and sometimes because of their appeals to voters' vanities and fears, have a strong tendency to produce effects with unexpected (because not thought of or discussed to begin with) side-effects. Then their opponents will likely come into office on the promise of dealing with these side-effects, then producing ones of their own, and so the cycle continues. Thus there is

the possibility for fluctuation between extreme political positions when politics is not holistic (not devoted to the common good as it was called in 18th century America) but is merely an appeal to the selfish desires of particular interest groups.

Can Industrial Democracy produce a closer approximation to communal politics of an holistic sort? Perhaps. It is no guarantee. Groups of workers can be as selfish as anyone else. So can management. But at the very least they have the opportunity to communicate with each other, and thus can learn from each other. Without Industrial Democracy office politics at its worst can more easily flourish, as when certain middle managers cut wages and the quality of the product, temporarily impress consumers with lower prices, temporarily impress top management with increased profits, and in the long run after these tricksters are long gone, let consumers and top management learn what the workers knew all along, that the best workers are leaving and that the product is now much worse in quality and therefore losing its customers. So the consumers and top management weren't getting such a bargain after all.

"Pure" competition never did exist in the real world, based on complete and unbiased information, especially regarding knowledge of those areas of life that are not immediately evident but requires some thought. One reason the overall economy has so much instability is that we have forgotten how to produce an economic equilibrium, but instead much economic growth is mere "churning" based on wishful thinking and spikes and bubbles of mass psychology, investments that by the mere fact of investment create economic growth in the short run but may fail to succeed in the long run, which is the classic explanation for economic cycles. Of course expansion of government programs, and increases in taxation, sometimes done thoughtfully and sometimes done to seek short-term political gains, produce their own pressures for "churning" and for inflation. Population growth also produces its own version of "churning," as population growth induces a certain amount of social spending just to keep up with this growth in the short run, but may or may not produce enough jobs to provide for this ever increasing population in the long run. Another reason for "churning" as well as for inflation of prices, that may produce pressures on workers to restrain or lower their wages as they bear the brunt of the war on inflation, is the fact that many social services are no longer provided for free as an act of charity by the wealthy classes serving the community, but are now produced by professionals of all sorts, usually from

these same wealthy classes, who now wish to be paid for serving the community. Increased professionalism has its benefits, but it does cost.

In general the weakening of relatively demarcated social roles has its benefits, less snobbery in some cases, more snobbery in others, but again it does have its costs. As individuals less often define their place in society by how they add to the social whole, we increasingly have a society where everyone merely wants more, usually defined in monetary terms. Bosses want more, workers want more, even husbands, wives and children seem to decreasingly cooperate with each other, and merely compete with each other to benefit themselves at all cost.

One effect is those areas of life where people relate to each other in a cooperative manner, sometimes involving gracious cooperation and no money at all, seem to be declining in importance. Instead everybody but everybody wants to sell their services and to make ever more money. An economy based on everybody having their hands out and hustling for economic advantage, and rarely showing concern or giving advice for free, may be feasible, but it is debatable whether it would be enjoyable.

At the very least Industrial Democracy can enable people in the workplace to once again cooperate and learn from each other, even be sympathetic to each other, without always having their hand out and always asking to be paid to be cooperative. It will also enable workers and managers to possibly have a common front and have a message to send to the public at large when they the public also have their hands out and ask, always ask, for more.

The very fact that government pays for lots and lots of consultants to advise them on how to end poverty, but rarely figures out ways how to get money into the pockets of poor people (by improving the functioning of labor markets, such as by reducing the power of oligopolies which in many cases will increase consumer demand and increase the number of jobs) is one reason the overall economy suffers from inflation, but not from the ending of poverty. It is one more example of band-aid measures by government that create jobs for all kinds of people other than those they are trying to help in the first place.

For that matter, the growth of oligopolies pushes markets in the direction of winner-take-all economics (see *The Winner-Take-All Society: Why the Few at the Top Get So Much More Than the Rest of Us* (Frank and Cook 1996)) as people compete to reach top positions in oligopolies at which point they benefit disproportionate to their effort,



and disproportionate to their advantage in ability over their competitors. Their economic success comes less from their ability, and more because they work for organizations that dominate their markets.

It is also too bad that working-class people lose opportunities for advancement when top management follows the principle that there should be no appearance of impropriety, which in their case means workers so-obviously appear and sound working class that this keeps them from advancing, for snobbish reasons if for no other. Metaphorically speaking, you practically need dynamite to blast the rich and powerful out of their positions of power, since for many of them there is a constant appearance, and sometimes the reality, of impropriety, but without a “smoking-gun” it is never considered enough evidence to keep them from using their power to their own advantage.

Industrial Democracy offers the potential not only for informing top management what the workers think, but informing government and society at large about all these little kinks in the marketplace. These reflect all those tendencies for something less than pure and complete competition, and all those tendencies for oligopolies to reward the few at the expense of the many, that makes not only industrial democracy suffer, but communal democracy as well.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

### THE GREAT WEAKNESS OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

One reason there is so little understanding between what Americans mean by democracy and what many traditional societies, such as those of the Islamic world, mean by just society, or virtuous society, or even the will of the people, is that these traditional societies are in some ways more like America, and Britain, of the 18th century than the America and Britain of today. Once all these societies believed that government should overlay an organic, natural community or communities, and though this was not always the case in places and times such as the last days of the Roman Empire which was more like a complete tyranny, it was the case in Britain and America in the 18th century when it was hoped that the notables of the community would be chosen by acclamation to represent them in government.

In some ways this is still the ideal in many traditional societies, though there is in fact constant conflict between the ideal of “charismatic” leaders chosen for their virtue and “charismatic” leaders chosen for their ability to get things done, often in a crass, manipulative sense. Even the paragons of Communist leadership spoke the language of morality which they enforced on others but not on themselves, an old problem in the bureaucratized states of Europe and the Americas. In fact the Islamic world, though in a secular sense having cultures rather similar to those of the Catholic countries of southern Europe, in a religious sense are rather puritanical, much like American-style (and originally British in origin to a large extent) Protestantism. They like Americans believe morality can best be preserved in the local community because distant leaders, especially politicians, can’t be trusted to do so.

Unfortunately, though this is indeed also the American ideal, the loss of communal solidarity and its replacement by anonymity is so great in America that there is little hope for selecting notables to be communal leaders, so that patronage schemes as the mother’s milk of politics often serves to unify society to provide politics at all, as a substitute for what might be called a communal basis for politics. The effects in America are obvious to this day, this sense of patronage

politics and professional politicians substituting for the notables of the community, and producing a weakness in communal morality because of the lack of such leaders.

Let's look at this historically. Most modern nations have renounced their feudal heritages, though not exactly in the same way and to the same degree. Once Britain and America were much alike in the way they did so, and Continental Europe was different. Thus both France and Japan sought to distance themselves from their pasts when aristocratic ancestors was grounds for government employment. In both cases the standards used to judge candidates became technocratic ones, such as specialized knowledge in law or engineering. In France and Japan to this day technical competence is a hallmark of governmental administration, and this is true of most of Western Europe as well. This is obvious to anyone who has seen the benefits of French and German mass transit systems and of urban planning there which has a point other than to facilitate urban sprawl and the careers of real estate developers. It is also true that historically in France and Germany a rather apolitical civil servant class uses their technical competence to support the political class above them. These civil servants facilitate the political class's schemes just as they did for the monarchies that preceded them, and then as now these bureaucrats often develop a reputation for arrogance. It is no wonder 18th century France right before the Revolution in a sense had two aristocracies for the middle class to support, the traditional aristocracy which had lost most of their social functions, unlike Britain, and were now a leisure class, and the government bureaucracy which had developed its own tendencies toward arrogance.

Japan is somewhat different in that culturally it remains somewhat feudal much like the Europe of the Middle Ages when the local aristocrats often sought to bend the central government to their will, more so than Europe as it exists now where there is loyalty to positions of authority more than to the people who hold those positions, and because of this impersonality there are clear chains of command. Also, in the West culture has the responsibility for providing remedial measures to help overcome the obvious discomfort caused by all this impersonality in everyday life, including creating charisma for leaders out of whole cloth simply through the propaganda of the mass media. After World War II Japan learned to catch up with these remedial efforts so that escapism is now a well-developed industry in Japan. Nevertheless it remains the case in Japan that feudal loyalties retains its existence in

a rather pure form, so that in a sense government bureaucracies and the industries they both regulate and protect together try to strongly influence the central government, or at least must be cajoled into following its directions. With this tradition of bureaucratic independence, some will call it aristocratic arrogance, it is no surprise in the 1930's elements of the army sought to control the central government rather than the other way around, and dragged Japan into war.

Thus, both Continental Europe (particularly Western Europe) and Japan have technically proficient government bureaucrats who try to make their societies run like clockwork. They, however, do not resist well those who are not apolitical but grasp for power. It is these political activists, particularly the politicians themselves, who use these bureaucrats' expertise for their own ends.

In Britain and America things are somewhat different. The generalized perspective gained from a liberal arts education was and to a certain extent is the British tradition for future civil servants, especially for the higher ranks. To a lesser extent, and especially in the early days, this was the American tradition as well. OK, so Britain's tradition is different, or was. Let's forget about the changes of the Thatcher years for a moment where they tried to incorporate the American tradition of economic competition as the solution to all society's problems, and talk about the tradition. It is one of high civil servants who are selected in many cases for their generalist knowledge, because, among other things, it is thought to make them more trustworthy, better able to communicate with the public they serve, and more moral. Even when the weakening of the British monarchy in the 18th century made control from the central government dependent on not ordering people around but on political patronage, still getting a job under such circumstances did not mean that one could be a lout. It was still understood that a person of influence had to socially fit in with the upper-class leaders of society. Ideally these were the same people who had natural authority in their communities but who would lose their status as "gentlemen" if they abused this authority.

By the 19th century patronage schemes to shore up political loyalties in Britain, and before the Revolution by Americans to Britain, were increasingly attacked for the hypocrisies they produced. Americans early on had noticed that the British political class may have shown some concern for their immediate constituents, but still could not be trusted to show the same concern for their colonists. In Britain later a reform movement set in and their civil servants began to be chosen

even more so for their liberal arts educations, qualities which had been admired in the 18th century even though birth and breeding counted for more then. While in Continental Europe technical competence was often considered enough, and it was the ideological politicians whose job it was to represent the will of the people, in Britain less was expected of politicians, part of the tradition of limited government, and more was expected of the leaders of society. These included the high civil servants who were expected to share a common culture with the great professions as well as the local notables.

Not surprisingly, the British tradition had once been America's as well. In the 18th century it had been hoped after the Revolution that the notables of the community would be sent by popular acclamation to serve the public in politics and in high positions in government. This was also to be the American tradition, for a while anyway, our alternative to choosing our leaders based on party politics. With increasing political tensions, and with increases in population and in their physical dispersion, this American ideal didn't last very long. What was lost was the ideal of the British political opposition in the 18th century that American leaders after the Revolution shared, what they called in those days the Whig position, that hoped for government and politics that didn't bypass constituents but instead was to be somewhat closer to its constituents than was commonly the case in Britain, and certainly more than in Continental Europe. Instead soon political parties flourished and eventually patronage schemes developed to produce loyalty to these parties, not patronage that maintained standards for technical competence as in Continental Europe, not patronage that expected certain standards of character and decorum as in Britain, but just patronage whose whole purpose was to allow political parties to survive and to permeate American society, to create politics in a society that was otherwise very loosely integrated.

You might say there is a tendency in America to create social order by causing people to spend money to buy their way out of their problems; not that it is unknown also in Britain and in other places. To the extent social disorder is what is creating these problems, such as lack of jobs and high rates of crime, the solution is not to create order directly, but merely to get people to patch up their lives by spending money. Also you might say we have become very good at muddling through, also a very good and old British tradition which we have extended and enhanced.

Unlike Europe where immigrants tend to take the lower level jobs the natives do not want, immigrants to America tend to take both the lower level jobs and the higher level technical jobs which natives no longer have the educational ethic to attain. The question of whether we still value or know how to achieve the levels of educational attainment we need is thus bypassed, not dealt with, which I guess shows that markets do work. Likewise, regarding our attempts to remedy poverty in the slums, our political class tends not to have the technical competence or interest to come up with engineering-type solutions such as producing European-style mass transit to get slum dwellers access to where the jobs are in the suburbs. Nor is there a great will to produce British-style moral leadership (admittedly this was most effective and most common during the Victorian era in the 19th century) where leaders would actively listen to what slum dwellers say they want, such as effective job training and support for an entrepreneurial class from among their ranks, and to the extent it is feasible, a desire for moral and, when chosen willingly, religious revival.

Instead America is known for its short-term solutions, for good and for ill. We don't create a social order, and then have to tear it down and rebuild it, as happened with the Soviet Union. Instead in some ways we throw money at problems, as if the purpose for spending the money is a secondary issue. What occurs is to create jobs, any old jobs. In the slums there is creation of many social welfare and social work-type jobs, as if this has become their main industry. There are attempts to end their cycle of dependency, in the technical sense of creating tools for letting them partake in the broader society, but there are no great breakthroughs. It is no surprise during the Great Depression of the 1930's job creation efforts were hampered by politicians fearing to upset anybody who actually held jobs, so that government-sponsored job creation efforts were often limited to needs that were trivial and sometimes inane.

Instead we have come up with other ways of creating massive numbers of jobs. These have the added benefit of not requiring much government competency in overseeing the process. We have learned that lack of social order creates jobs. It is the very inefficiency of our educational systems that causes people to spend so many years in educational institutions and creates so many jobs for teachers, even though many people after they leave higher education hardly ever open up a book. It is the very inefficiency of mass transit that produces the

conditions for a robust auto industry, even though many of these companies are now foreign-owned. It is so many poorly written laws, and so many frivolous lawsuits, that produces a great demand for lawyers. This is Europe and Japan's typical complaint about America, that we are not an orderly society. Even Britain makes these complaints about us. No doubt we have our complaints about all of them.

This is not to say that Europe and Japan don't too often put all their eggs in one basket, that of creating social order through government fiat, or that Britain's elites don't sometimes practice hypocrisy and exhibit that cant its enemies have always complained about, that self-righteousness where they look at everybody else's sins but their own. Lucky for them, with the loss of the Empire the world is not interested enough in Britain to lambaste them with either praise or criticism, unlike America who with the fall of Communism now gets to be the chief scapegoat for the world's problems.

Yet how much longer will we in the US be able to muddle through to success by providing lots and lots of patches for our problems, and lots and lots of jobs? No wonder we have so many more lawyers per capita, and psychologists, than other societies. This method for dealing with social problems does work, somewhat. But we are not a frontier society anymore, with lots and lots of opportunities to start over, lots and lots of chances to correct our mistakes, and lots and lots of places to throw away our junk. Europe with its steady-state or even declining populations doesn't need endless economic growth to diffuse its social tensions of more and more people competing for the pie. We do. It is not Europe that faces the threat of ecological disaster because of endless population growth, which we have become dependent on to produce endless economic growth. We do. And we need it because with so much less security than many European societies provide, we as individuals need all that extra money to provide for our own security. Except for our underclass of course. They create jobs, just not for themselves. Ironical isn't it? They create whole industries to serve them without being able to get out of poverty themselves.

This is not to say there are not benefits for America being the engine for economic growth that it often is. But all societies must ask themselves how to handle the side-effects of economic growth, particularly in those areas of life where happiness cannot be bought.

Patronage schemes as the source of political culture is certainly one reason around the world for politics being crass and self-serving, a source for just throwing money at problems. America because of the



anonymity of its society in a sense became unified by the patronage schemes of its two major political parties, as well as by whatever reform movements and ideals that do exist that do not interfere with the basic premise that, unlike in the 18th century, political leaders are not community notables who run for office, make their point, and get out. Instead for the most part they are people who forever feed at the public trough.

Before the American Revolution, Britain the mother country had been criticized for its subversion of the ideal of self-governing communities through royally-led patronage schemes which allowed the King to control Parliament. American government nowadays is not so centralized but is now in many ways just as patronage-ridden, if not more so. The theory of American politics is that local government should be the most competent because it is the closest to the people, and the Federal government should be the least competent because it is the farthest. Instead the Federal government is the most competent, partly because it is the branch most filled with people from elite families offering themselves for public service, particularly at the upper ranks, while local government is that branch most filled with those who enter government service not for the service but for the money. It is the most filled with patronage hacks in fact. No doubt there is much variation by time and place, and reform does exist sometimes at the local level.

The American ideal, which was once also the British ideal even when not well-practiced in the 18th century, has become an ideal not well-practiced now either. That ideal then was for amateur politicians, but for professional civil servants, amateur politicians, who like George Washington who was the greatest example who achieved public acclaim for being self-sacrificing, who are not most concerned about serving themselves. Those were the days when the most respected politicians really were amateurs, who did their job, then got out, rather than seek to spend a lifetime living and getting rich at public expense. The replacement of communal solidarity by anonymity, and the great strain it places on us in finding notables to represent us in government, is the great weakness of American government, and of almost all modern governments for that matter. Of course we have the additional problem that we don't admit it is a weakness, or at least our politicians don't. In addition to spreading democracy abroad, perhaps we should place more care in spreading it at home.



PART IV

CONCLUSION



## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

### MODERN AND POSTMODERN VIEWS OF DEMOCRACY

Those generals who followed Alexander the Great to rule the empire he created became tyrants of an unabashed sort, absolute monarchs with little pretense at submitting to checks and balances. So much for the Greek ideal of the examined life, and for saving the Greek world from Persian tyranny. Many went so far as to call themselves gods, as if declining faith in the traditional gods, at least in certain intellectual circles, did not interfere with increasing appeals to the superstition and credulity of the masses. It would seem Communism and Fascism's "cult of personality" had plenty of predecessors.

Though the ancient world had plenty of belief in the importance of virtue for regulating society, they had much less faith in how to achieve it. These tendencies of the ancient world have reappeared in the modern world. Thus the increasing anonymity and bureaucratization of modern life have produced increasingly relativistic ethics in our private lives but absolutist ethics (in the form of high expectations even when they are unrealistic ones) for our leaders to create social order for us, even in America, but even more so in Europe.

There is just after generation after generation of technical progress much less faith that the average person can achieve much, and so must defer to bureaucratic specialists to take the lead. In fact the average citizen increasingly does not know how to evaluate leaders and so must defer to their expertise, something that modern leaders, just like their ancient predecessors, know how to take advantage of for their own benefit.

Something known ever since ancient times, that the benefits of an increased standard of living must be balanced by the costs, the loss of emotional satisfaction in those areas of life that cannot be bought, is true now as always. Also we don't really know what to do about it except by muddling through, now as always.

The American ideal, dating back to frontier days, is one of personal independence mixed with communal loyalty but not being a cog in a bureaucratic machine. This is unlike Europe which has accepted bureaucratization of society for many generations now and even has cultural ideals of how "aristocratic" leaders should behave.

We in America are in some ways without cultural guidance on how to react to this bureaucratization and anonymity that are the hallmarks of the modern world. In fact we are in many ways living off the intellectual capital of our ancestors, either supporting or rebelling against middle-class values which arose in conditions now lost in the mists of time, and thus whose purposes many of us have forgotten. Whether the cultural ideals of personal independence or the social realities of a bureaucratized society will predominate in America is difficult to predict. This is because the ideal and the reality are in many ways working at cross purposes.

In the kind of advice we get nowadays it is not unusual for writers to either focus on the (instrumental) rationality so favored by modern economics, modern technology, and modern science, or to call for a return to the emotional uplift, often of a rather mystical sort, that came much more naturally to more traditional societies than ours. That we haven't gone far enough in either direction are themes people outside America use to criticize us.

Meanwhile there are plenty of American writers who criticize fundamentalist religious movements outside America as if the natives of these areas if they had a choice would turn to American-style liberal individualism. In reality these people often so hunger for emotional as well as economic security that the conflict there is often between secular authoritarianism and religious authoritarianism.

Americans idealize freedom, a freedom that is partly the result of unique economic circumstances so that people can buy their way out of their problems, circumstances that may be changing in America itself, while Europeans idealize social order (sometimes they call it justice, but obviously sometimes it is not justice, but just order), so that order produced by bureaucracy sometimes undermines that order produced by community. America takes for granted that the order produced by community precedes that order produced by bureaucracy. When that sense of community declines, Americans are sometimes at a loss on how to rebuild it, sometimes using means such as campaigns of religious revival which sell well in the Third World because as Europeans say American culture is in some ways distinctly old-fashioned, almost like a survival politically of Tudor England rather than modern England.

The major difference between America and the Third World is that America is an individualistic land where individual hysterias may coalesce, but rarely mass hysteria. This is however a distinct danger in the

Third World with their desires for community at all cost, something which also occurs in Europe from time to time.

In reality the increasing bureaucratization and anonymity of society outside the US does not necessarily increase the level of individualism and people minding their own business (in the common pursuit of material consumption) which is the American way. It merely weakens the non-Orthodox, often relatively superstitious and eclectic folk cultures that had once bound together so many, primarily peasant, communities, and in its place produces elites who seek to impose order on the increasing bureaucratization of society in their own image, order always having been the supreme value in these societies because they consider American-style materialism to be a poor substitute. This is also typically the European way of nation-building.

For that matter, Americans in theory though less so in practice think that materialism is a poor substitute for a just social order, but that's another story. You might wish to check out the writings of Ernest Gellner (especially Gellner 1994 and Gellner 1995) on nationalism and on civil society for more details on the changes which produce contemporary social evolution for which the term "postmodernity" serves more as a place-keeper and a slogan, than as a detailed mode of analysis.

To refer once again to a common theme in my writings, one book that tries to tell the story of what eventually became the modern American tradition of social order is Ralph Ketcham, *The Idea of Democracy in the Modern Era* (Ketcham 2004). He mentions the loss of the natural law foundations for just government that once formed the basis for American philosophies of government, and its replacement by theories based on the bureaucratic foundations for efficient government that have come to underlie government in the modern world. He also mentions that in more recent times there has developed intellectual opposition to liberal, bureaucratic government by the ideologists of East Asian societies who come from rather communitarian traditions, yet not particularly democratic ones since they take for granted rule from the top down by elites, in theory in pursuit of the common good though that practice is not always so certain.

He also discusses postmodernists who do not so much critique the liberal, bureaucratic state as much as bypass it and go directly to preparing arguments for socializing the means of consumption, if not the means of production. The result would be if put into effect a welfare state that subsidizes all lifestyles, as the ultimate evolution of

materialism and hedonism for our time, as if the ultimate evolution of materialism and hedonism is to support all lifestyles except for those that cannot refrain from standing for something and thus being inherently judgmental of other lifestyles.

You might say postmodernism essentially turns existentialism on its head, like Marxism did to Hegelianism. See *Continental Philosophy Since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self* (Solomon 1988) for the constant switches of philosophical assumptions that lead to schools of thought, and fads, in philosophy. Instead of developing a philosophy of being (a complicated way of saying a philosophy of life) out of basic emotions, mostly centered around feelings of angst and dread, undoubtedly related to more elementary feelings of loneliness, anger at unfairness in society, confusion when life plans don't work out, etc., postmodernism is like a return to something akin to Marxism, which existentialism with its claims for absolute freedom as the source for absolute responsibility sought to supersede.

Postmodernism like the existentialism that preceded it, and the Marxism that preceded existentialism, so that it is like an existentialism turned on its head just like existentialism turned Marxism on its head and Marxism turned Hegelianism on its head, the kinds of alternations between idealism and realism that has been common ever since Aristotle turned Platonism on its head, takes for granted moral relativism for the world as it exists now. However its solutions tend to be the fulfillment of various utopias which somehow the welfare state will pay for.

Whether such "postmodern" philosophies will have better practical consequences than the philosophies of life of previous eras is harder to answer. At the very least, during the era which led to the American Revolution and the writing of the American Constitution there was some real communication between the leaders and the led that provided an informal basis for the formal democracy which developed later. Whether this informal basis for democracy still exists, based on a vibrant sense of community and on interest in working for the common good from both the leaders and the led, what in the 18th century they referred to as "virtue," seems to be a political dilemma of our time. This is not necessarily discussed well in the postmodernist political literature which acts as if this issue has been superseded by concerns over how to support lifestyles based on economic consumption pure and simple, but it is a dilemma nevertheless.



Alexander Hamilton was the intellectual leader in the 18th century of America's first real political party after the Revolution, the Federalists, who emphasized a relatively activist state to foster economic growth but also to foster public morality as the wellspring of national community. Now the Republicans who are in many ways the heirs to the Federalists no longer seek the kind of state activism the Federalists sought, and the Democrats do want the kind of state activism that Thomas Jefferson repudiated, he believed in a national community where the mass of people were expected to be both virtuous and financially independent (most would be farmers) and so they wouldn't need to be monitored by the state, nor would they particularly need its help which would justify this monitoring, though their leaders would. Now the financial elite of the nation, unlike their 18th century predecessors, mostly want to enjoy their wealth in peace and by no means to the same degree as their predecessors consider themselves to be moral leaders, while the Democrats consider the working class (who are no longer farmers) to be in a state of dependency requiring perpetual government intervention in their lives.

The change in social conditions from those of the 18th century for good and for ill, the increased wealth of both the nation and individuals, but the weakening of feelings of social solidarity (based on actual social interaction in the community, not on feelings of "nationalism") is stark. Max Weber at the beginning of the twentieth century became noted for building upon the simplicities of Marxist analysis in order to fill in what they left out. Perhaps "postmodern" analyses of the modern era will need the same.

Max Weber's approach to social science looked with equanimity at the world of personal community with all its personal rivalries as well as solidarities and kindnesses that was starting to disappear, and the world of impersonal associations where bureaucracies could maximize output but whether the output should be produced is a distinctly other question. In his own time Max Weber tried to avoid the extremes of "rational choice" theorizing as exemplified in the then developing schools of mathematical economics and the aesthetically-based schools of social critique, often tinged with Marxist sympathies.

Given the way modern social science is so often still pulled in both of these directions, one of the reasons Max's Weber's approach to social science is still relevant is the old saying "the more things change, the more they remain the same." Even in his time cynicism over the way

the world was run was beginning to excuse extreme nihilism and even amoral attitudes in the present to be balanced by dreams of utopia in the future, without a clear idea of how to get there or what would be found upon arrival. The social scientist as entertainer was well-adapted to such a world, then as now, both for market and for bureaucratic reasons, as Max Weber well knew. He also knew such pressures could be resisted, then as now.

In a sense Max Weber raised the kinds of questions, existential questions before the term existential was much used, which allows one to ask: Will the participants in a democratic society want it to survive? In the case of Weber's Germany, with the rise of Hitler about 10 years after Weber died, obviously they didn't. Also, Weber never did have the influence to impede Hitler's rise to power, partly because his work was so analytical and contextual that he never did become a good preacher of morality.

In a nutshell, Hitler rose to power because he was given open-ended power to deal with a claimed Communist revolt, then he used this power in an open-ended way to deal with issues, such as murdering members of his own party, that had nothing to do with putting down the supposed Communist revolt. America's experience with ruling under martial law, such as Abraham Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus during the Civil War, is that even under such extreme circumstances we do not give to our leaders open-ended grants of power. All this seems obvious to us, but seems to be buried within the corpus of Max Weber's work. So much for the value of disinterested scholarship, and scholarly objectivity. Nevertheless the scholarly objectivity which he espoused can still come in handy. Here are some examples of why.

A major issue in the study of justice is the extent to which justice can be enforced by government, and of course which branch of government, the executive, the judicial or the legislative branch will take the lead in doing so, as well as to what extent "the will of the people" is part of this process. Alain Touraine in *What Is Democracy?* (Touraine 1997) takes a rather French and also a rather rhetorical perspective on this. Thus what he is writing about is democratic society, not merely democratic government. He adds to the Anglo-American political tradition of writing about the evolution of liberty, of political rights enforced by limited government, a discussion of what the various sectors of society owe to each other that goes beyond market conditions to an idealization of community. If this reminds the reader of the medieval estates,

of the king who structured the political system through executive power, the commoners who tended to be concerned with economic interests, and the nobility and the church who enforced honor and values respectively, it should be no surprise, through Prof. Touraine does not draw this analogy.

His dividing up of democratic society between the state, political society, and civil society also parallels the traditional division of functions in government between the executive, legislative and judicial branches, each having its appropriate effect on society. What is missing from Touraine's analysis is recognition of when and where society is free from government, though he does respect individual freedom as a goal for society. No doubt that part of his analysis falls under "rights" but by not being explicit about when and where these rights take effect, it is possible to come away with the conclusion that he sees society as being inherently politicized. This political attitude is actually quite typical of Continental Europe.

Civil society moderates extremes by practicing values that are not explicitly part of the constitution that governs the State. Sometimes these values become politically relevant and part of the law code, and sometimes these values are both so basic and so situation-bound that they are in a sense prior to the law, and are used in interpreting law.

If for nationalistic reasons alone, one can assume that Europeans think that parliamentary democracy is closer to the people than presidential democracy. At the very least the multi-party systems of Continental Europe produce parties that mirror ethnic, class, religious, and regional cleavages so that voting is often an experience of social loyalty, with compromises being done by elites in Parliament, not in elections which are often highly ideological. Yet they probably think the two-party systems which Britain and the US share are somewhat better than a one-party system, though they probably differ on by how much.

We in the US however take for granted that two parties like two legs produce immense social stability, and these two parties are in fact vast coalitions that voters legitimize in their votes for particular candidates. Then again even Britain has relatively more ideological parties and party discipline, as well as class conflict, than the US. In America politicians are more likely to represent their own as well as their constituents' interests at the expense of party loyalty. Therefore the historical tendency toward ideological political parties in Europe who tend to favor, compared to the US, rather authoritarian solutions to social

problems, just different kinds of authoritarian solutions, needs the kind of objective analysis that Max Weber sought to provide.

America has a slightly different tradition, and therefore a different political problem. Here lack of social order of the sort derived from government regulation is put on a pedestal, and this includes the liberties which the mass of people want, and the liberties which elites benefit from most of all, partly because they benefit from lack of alternatives to their own powers and initiatives. Oddly enough, the US Supreme Court is one of those organizations that benefits from lack of countervailing powers to their initiatives. Obviously the executive branch is the branch which inherently takes initiative, but it is supposed to take initiative for goals regulated by previously determined laws, mostly arising from the legislature. The legislature is supposed to be that branch of government closest to the people, but in the modern, bureaucratized world no branch of government is exceptionally close to the people. That leaves the judicial branch freedom to act.

The judicial branch is that branch of government which is supposed to literally not take much initiative, certainly not to the degree the executive branch does, but is that branch of government which is supposed to enforce the values of society, not the values of the members of the judicial branch. However in fact the historical relation between the judicial branch in America and labor unions has been one of distrust just because of their clear-cut upper-class prejudices in favor of their own version of social order.

In effect the 18th century Supreme Court was hemmed in by the restrictions of custom, just as the 18th century British monarch was. You might say since medieval European monarchs were basically judges and war leaders, the Supreme Court in our mixed polity is the monarchical aspect of our government, sharing approximately half the powers of monarchical sovereignty with the President (who gets the war powers part, plus some powers related to foreign affairs), except that the President is not elected for life, Supreme Court judges are. Like monarchs who are not hemmed in very effectively by legal limitations on their powers, but primarily by customary limitations, when judges like monarchs violate traditional standards of reasonableness the social reaction to this is unpredictable because there is no constitutionally defined method for dealing with such violations of custom. By the same logic, in most nations revolutions are justified by arguments of natural law because governments and constitutions almost never have legal rules for their own demise.

Referring to a government as reflecting “the will of the people” no matter how removed it is from the people in practice, for example between elections, is an important source of legitimacy in our anonymous time. It is the only source of legitimacy, unlike the more cozy times of the 18th century which took for granted the importance of a natural sense of community as the source for legitimacy in government, and a model for its proper functioning, even though in certain respects it was decaying even then and becoming replaced, particularly in government, by bureaucracy. By the standard of “claiming to reflect the will of the people” modern monarchies, fascist dictatorships, and communist dictatorships are all democracies, unlike only those few governments, if any remain, whose leaders force themselves on the people because they claim this reflects the will of the gods.

Unfortunately, neither the work of the profound scholar Max Weber (see Weber 1978, Weber 1994, Weber 2001, and Weber 2003, as well as Kalberg 2005, Mills and Gerth 1958, and Sica 2004), who lacked the common touch and couldn’t relate to immediate crises in a way to come up with practical solutions, nor the mass of modern scholars in political sociology who spend so much time trying to achieve influence (usually indirectly) as political advisors that many just don’t step back to look at phenomena in a broad historical (and holistic) context, are sufficient to inform us how to create a democratic society, let alone a democratic government. The paradoxes of history, of social democracies like many tribal societies that are democratic in their poverty, then the growth of division of labor that increases economic productivity at the cost of decreasing social solidarity, then the growth of political democracies that seek to remedy this problem, but never do succeed except in a hit or miss manner, still remain.

Here are some books that might be useful regarding the social science study of Democracy. They are *Controlling the State: Constitutionalism from Ancient Athens to Today* (Gordon 1999), *The Handbook of Political Sociology* (Janoski and others 2005), and *Democracy: History, Theory, Practice* (Lakoff 1996). Regarding the growth of character in differing societies, which has implications for the seriousness in which citizens take their civic duties, you might want to look at *Moralizing Cultures* (Kavolis 1993), *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (Sennett 1998), and as a useful comparison to learn why high culture in Germany at least in the past did not often encourage a democratic civic consciousness see *The Seduction of Culture in German History*. (Lepenies 2006).

To learn what we can and cannot learn from each other, by an attempt to be objective (while recognizing that too much objectivity can be inhumane) rather than succumbing to the subjective joys of nihilism and defining politics as merely grasping for power, as some postmodernists want to do, is still a major task for social theory. Some want to update Marxism without leaving behind its authoritarian tendencies, its emphasis on intellectuals engaging in social engineering and telling everyone else what to do. Some intellectuals have mostly given up on the attempt to learn the “objective” laws of history and now merely grasp for power by trying to maintain a “subjective” critique of history. That there is a place for both the objective facts of history and the subjective lessons of history is something too few scholars have learned yet.

In a sense there has been a progressive loss in the idea of universalism based on common values as opposed to the political community being thought of as the somewhat arbitrary combination of its parts at the time of any particular election. The ideal of all elements of society subordinating themselves to the common good, the key ideal of 18th century America, has in some ways become the lost ideal of postmodern 21st century America, and in much of the rest of the world as well.

Unfortunately, neither the work of the profound scholar Max Weber, who lacked the common touch and couldn’t relate to immediate crises in a way to come up with practical solutions, nor the mass of modern scholars in political sociology who spend so much time trying to achieve influence (usually indirectly) as political advisors that many just don’t step back to look at phenomena in a broad historical (and holistic) context, are sufficient to inform us how to create a democratic society, let alone a democratic government. The paradoxes of history, of social democracies like many tribal societies that are democratic in their poverty, then the growth of division of labor that increases economic productivity at the cost of decreasing social solidarity, then the growth of political democracies that seek to remedy this problem, but never do succeed except in a hit or miss manner, still remain.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

### NATION-BUILDING AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

Much of what we know about “nation-building” derives from the historical experiences of Europe and America. For example, when the United States became a republic at the end of the 18th century it combined at least some of the institutions of modern communication, in particular the press and eventually political parties, with communal representation in government by the notables of the community, in some ways the best of both modern and traditional communal politics. However at this moment in history such scholars as Colin Crouch, particularly in his book *Post-Democracy* (Crouch 2004) complain that excessive corporate influence and its effect on globalization, the weakening of political parties, and excessive bureaucratization and/or excessive outsourcing of government functions all weaken communal representation in government and what replaces it is too often the “virtual reality” of the mass media producing glib entertainment posing as political discussion. Whether things are as bad as Prof. Crouch makes them out to be, the reader will have to decide.

To return to a comparison of America and Europe, Europe has government producing social order in areas which the mass of people want, and in areas which only elites want, reflecting their self-serving interests, paternalism, and intellectual fads. America is also somewhat class-ridden and elitist, though not yet at the European level, and because of the bias of its cultural inheritance government is less likely to intrude to produce social order, even of the kind the mass of people if given a choice would want. Instead the mass of people, and elites, are given more leeway to produce social order on their own, and if this social order (including cultural and moral values) disappears, it is not easy to replace it except through an accumulation of individual decisions, or through communal revival processes that do occur but slowly and in a hit or miss fashion.

In a manner of speaking, a relative lack of social order in the US compared to more authoritarian societies increases the opportunity for individual as well as local and communal decision-making (a traditional rationale for political freedom), and creates jobs and profits for

economic elites in those areas of life where the mass of people would prefer economies of scale, but they won't get it. They also won't get through government monitoring control of the free rider problem that complicates issues of public morality. Instead economic elites prefer to be paid to fill in all these gaps. American cultural values facilitate this taking to an extreme what are traditional American values of acting on individual self-interest, and a relatively weak tradition of aristocratic paternalism by elites, all of which are taken for granted as part of present-day American culture.

As a matter of fact, the pursuit of honor, and public morality in general, is increasingly not easily enforced in all modern societies, since this requires enforcing general attitudes and motivations toward the community. Instead what is increasingly enforced are bureaucratic roles and their relevant rules, including the role of law-abiding citizen with its relevant rules. The enforcement of bureaucratic rules can be more efficient for producing social order or even social morality than reliance on public spirited feelings by individuals or organizations, but not always.

Especially in America, it is thought nowadays that public morality can be a side-effect of both the pride that comes from individual accomplishment and the desire by individuals for a meaningful life, but this is different from the original religious source of morality in American culture, still strong at the time of the American Revolution, where communal conformity was actively impressed on the population. *The Myth of American Individualism: The Protestant Origins of American Political Thought* (Shain 1996) writes about the early origins of American political morality.

To now discuss some of the prerequisites for political democracy from a historical standpoint, first of all it should be remembered that political democracy does not automatically require social democracy and vice versa, though it is of course possible to have both. Many societies that are social democracies in terms of equality of wealth and social status being rather widespread have very little formal government to begin with. This situation is commonly found among tribal societies. Sometimes such societies develop hereditary leadership not so much because government is so important to them, but because it isn't and hereditary leadership, as long as the leaders accept advice from community elders and don't themselves become tyrannical, is considered preferable to the complexities of politics and competition for positions of leadership.



Obviously such societies rely on informal checks and balances to prevent the growth of tyranny, and such methods obviously sometimes fail, which is why the modern world relies more on bureaucratic methods, especially the use of elections. This doesn't mean the informal methods of communal leadership have no place in a modern society for excessively bureaucratized societies have their own problems. In particular there is the danger that leaders will not communicate with their constituents other than at election time.

Other societies develop political democracy to a large extent because politics develops to deal with the tensions produced by inequalities of wealth and status, sometimes by directly influencing the economy, sometimes by focusing on other issues, such as direct imposition of moral standards that I should add also impinge on the economy. This is very much the case in the modern world. Obviously politics buffers the effects of the economic marketplace but except in command economies, of which communist economies are the prime example, it does not have the power to control the economy, and the inequalities of power that it produces.

Of course there are more immediate historical factors in the production of political democracy. For example, a number of European countries affected by the Napoleonic wars ended up well on their way toward democracy (democracy here means political democracy) by the middle of the 19th century. Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, and the Scandinavian countries fell in this category, even though officially they were monarchies, the Netherlands being a rather recent addition. To this group can be added Switzerland which was a republic. Other countries like Germany, Italy, and Russia took much, much longer to become democracies. The factors which enabled the above relatively small European countries (and Britain) to democratize were just not strong enough to ensure democratization of the big European countries (outside of Britain).

The factors in question seem to me (1) there was an informal sense of communication between elites and the masses in pre-democratic days which carried over or at least enhanced the acceptability of democracy to both the leaders and the led later on which was lacking in the autocracies and (2) in general economic independence among small farmers and tradespeople was such that there was less pressure placed on early democratic-leaning societies during economic recessions, which led to a tradition of not asking more from government than it could deliver. Even in America, the financial panics of pre-Civil

War days did not threaten to produce rebellion because the availability of opportunities for subsistence farming, relatively low economic expectations, and in general relatively little reliance on government as an engine for economic growth, also relatively few jobs created either directly or indirectly by government bureaucracies, meant that the financial panics of the pre-Civil War era led to less social disorder than the financial panics of the post-Civil War era in the 19th century. In any case, during both periods there was no threat to the US of revolution as the result of these financial panics. This was also true of American financial panics in the 20th century, though the level of social disorder seemed to increase for each succeeding financial panic, that of the 1930's being the worst. In Germany and in the Eastern European states (other than Czechoslovakia) the Depression of the 1930's did destroy democracy, partly because so much more was demanded of government for producing social order, including jobs.

Even in the 19th century the large states of Germany, Italy and Russia had a greater need to create jobs than the small states of northern Europe (and Switzerland). This is partly because the critical mass of underemployed and unemployed there was higher because population numbers were higher, and because the large states were less likely to develop economies based on unique market niches based on unique economic resources less affected by competitive pressures, simply because they had more people to take care of. The large states of Europe also had recent traditions of aristocratic arrogance and militarism lacking in the small states of northern Europe (and Switzerland). Even Britain had this tradition, but it also had unique cultural traditions which made the middle class and even the lower class relatively aggressive politically to counterbalance it.

The large states also had traditions of imperialism (both intellectually in terms of elites forcing their ideas on others and economically in relying on subservience to elites as a prerequisite for economic growth), as well as the opposite effect, rebellions and countercultures. All of this made the demands upon government greater in the large states than in the small states, and the resources to meet these demands in a per capita sense less. Britain was somewhat of an exception because of its unique cultural traditions of limited government, and its much greater rate of economic growth than its rivals which diminished the need for governmental intervention.

Now let's return to the present. Here when I refer to democracy I will be referring to political democracy. There is a growth of figurehead

leaders as the increasing bureaucratization of society at large in all modern countries proceeds (in bureaucracies some leaders really are competent, and some merely produce the image of competence, something hidden by the competence of the rest of the bureaucracy). This is a greater strain on countries that never had a tradition of communication and respect between the leaders and the led. This is especially true of nations with a traditional lack of geographical cohesion with resulting lack of local understanding of what occurs at the level of the central government, as well as lack of interest by the central government in understanding local affairs. In Third World countries the presence of endemic poverty also offers temptations for political corruption.

In addition to all of this, there seems to be a historical trend that economic growth does not create democracy, but does sustain it because it reduces tensions and once there are few ongoing conflicts it helps keep them from arising. Such tensions tend to overwhelm the possibility of producing social order either through effective control by the leaders or effective (indirect) control by the led. In a sense if America ever becomes a poor country again, it would likely be accompanied by the rise of severe ideological, ethnic, and religious tensions until expectations for improvement diminished sufficiently to end all hope.

This is separate from the issue of the effectiveness of government. In a sense as long as there are economic good times, people will ordinarily overlook the ineffectiveness of government since they depend less on it. Ineffective here means something different from tyrannical or persecutory, where government becomes a direct threat to segments of the population. Nevertheless ineffective government produces dissatisfaction which can eventually reach a critical mass, particularly when economic growth is no longer available to buffer the effects of ineffective government.

One reason for ineffective government is when the leaders of democracies are no longer the notables of the communities they represent, but are merely people who run for office as their way of making a living, or occasionally out of boredom or ideological fervor. To the extent there develops a tradition of figurehead leaders, not all that different than what happens in monarchies where the originators of dynasties were competent but not their descendants, they tend to become dependent on advice from think tanks, universities, lobbyists, and public relations consultants, which they may or may not know how to evaluate. Here I will be repeating some of my analysis from my essay "Figurehead Politicians and Democracy" but it bears repeating.

In a sense the problems of nation-building exist in all nations, rich and poor alike. Only the severity of the problems, the costs of failure particularly, differ. One way to look at the standards for government, including democratic government, is to look at the following functions of government:

1. Representativeness of government (representing the will of the people, and understanding their problems)
2. Efficacy of government (interest and energy in doing a good job)
3. Accountability of government (can the people control or at least influence them after they gain power?)
4. Relevance of government (for problem-solving but also in terms of personal identity; in many societies local communities are more relevant than distant central government)
5. Relevance of political parties (especially whether there is a spirit of compromise and cooperation between political rivals)
6. The social and cultural qualities of the overall national community (is there constant communication between the leaders and the led, are there cultural standards for evaluating intellectual competence and moral character, and is there a tradition of distrust and manipulation between the leaders and the led?)

One of the reasons Max Weber, that great German sociologist of the early part of the 20th century, who in effect helped create that field out of techniques derived from law, history and economics, became famous was for his ambition to develop a detailed explanation of social change (and implicitly social evolution), not for his success. In fact he was not successful, though he came closer than almost anyone else. Max Weber aimed to provide explanations of causality of the sort common to both law and economics, where judgments of the fit between means and ends assumes that all the options can be known beforehand, by the observing scholar, and presumably by the actor. Emotional sources of motivation were to a large extent treated by him as residual factors, that cannot be predicted beforehand, and so must be used for ad hoc explanations, using the method of *verstehen* (empathetic understanding). Such emotionally-involved motivations as duty, fear, custom, and self-interest both can be understood as standardized for cultures and individuals, and also can be understood as leaving room for idiosyncratic manifestations at various times and places.

Taking into account such complexities allows “scientific” social science to get away from “one size fits all” explanations of social change. Thus regarding revolutions, there are differences between revolutions strongly influenced by previous attacks on traditional culture (the Islamic Revolution in Iran), by weakening of economic opportunities often caused by increases in population (common to many revolutions), by the need to protect middle-class wealth from excessive or unfair taxation (US and French Revolutions), by the desire of upper-middle-class people to have the economic opportunities now hogged by a hereditary upper class (French Revolution), by the desire to have a say in government (American Revolution and the British Revolution of 1688), by the desire to bypass a period of middle-class economic growth because there is little middle class to begin with (Russian and Chinese Communist Revolutions), and revolutions that combine protection of traditional values, desire for increased economic opportunities, particularly for the middle class, and a desire to partake in government (American Revolution).

As a matter of fact the individualism which is so striking in American social mores encourages faith in individual decisions in a market fashion, including voting in elections, and less faith in the ability for communal pressure to be brought to bear on politicians between elections. This is one reason more communitarian societies place elections less on a pedestal, and place more emphasis on ongoing social pressure between elections, and so place more emphasis on “legitimate” and “illegitimate” influence-peddling between elections than is common in America, even when this is true more in theory than in practice.

So what have we learned about the relation between social solidarity and nation-building? Besides the existence of economic factors that either stress or comfort people in their everyday lives, there are ways of organizing the structure of a society that also have effects, and cultural values that have their own influences in producing goals to aim for. To separate out economic from structural from cultural effects is often not easy, since they so often exist simultaneously.

Thus America has a middle class that lends itself to producing compromises between the rich and the poor. Europe instead has intellectuals to produce compromises between the interests of the rich and the poor. European governments in general are rather paternalistic, while America has limited government so as not to stress our democracy by expecting too much from it. America relies on social order at the local level, and if it is lost American society is hard-pressed to know how to

restore it. Likewise America idealizes the small business sectors of the economy, and if they are replaced by oligopolies, again we aren't very good at intervening to change this state of affairs.

At times in recent history many people in European states have exhibited romantic nationalism, fantasizing that the state can become like a small, convivial community with state elites functioning like the local aristocracy. Followers of traditional American political philosophy consider this a delusion, and instead hope for an activist citizenry who are themselves virtuous even when their leaders (who in the American context tend to be businessmen rather than paternalistic aristocrats) aren't.

The practical result of the growth of nihilism in modern society in general is what Stjepan Mestrovic calls, and this is also the title of his book, "postemotional society" (Mestrovic 1997). Traditional societies take for granted scarcity, but at the same time the pleasures of life are emotional. Providing the proper context to enable the healthy expression of emotion is probably the major goal of life, and certainly in traditional societies where "ambition" of the modern sort based on a complex economy has little meaning. The acting-out of emotions is seen in the multitude of social, and especially religious, rituals.

In more modern societies, such as commonly found in Anglo-American culture areas though now spreading to the rest of the world, both social anonymity through the expansion of larger and larger communities, and the bureaucratization and division of labor of the work environment, encourage a need for extreme self-control. You might call it the production of successfully "neurotic" personalities. Everyday life in an emotional sense is increasingly one where people hold their feelings in, and then, finally, eventually, release them through some sort of consumption of commodities, even if it is just the artificially-induced emotions that come about through the recreation industries.

The ability to plan ahead, and defer gratification, is obviously greatly developed in such societies. The price is a kind of alienation from one's feelings, somewhat similar to muscles getting flabby through lack of use. Irrationality still occurs, but it is less likely the irrationality of individual or mass hysteria. It is more likely to be the irrationality of no longer relating to "natural" relationships and the emotions that would flow from them, but instead becoming dependent upon the only emotions that a bureaucratized, anonymous society allows.

Thus while we in the modern world now live in a cornucopia of material goods, we increasingly live in a desert of personal relationships. In fact increasingly people relate “rationally” to the vast majority of people they meet as if they are mere instrumentalities for achieving more and more material goods. The effect is usually one of great confusion, and many of the social philosophies of our time reflect this confusion between means and ends, and between the sacred and the profane.

Increasingly over time in the modern era starting in the 18th century in Western Europe and their colonies, people have begun to believe that our own natural ability to return the institutions serving our human nature to their roots are quite limited. There are many of course who assume that since they never see “natural” human nature or just emotionality of the sort once more obviously seen in simpler societies, that it doesn’t exist, or at least we can act as if it doesn’t. The postmodernists in general seem to believe so. Thus many of them assume that almost all aspects of human nature are equally artificial and socially constructed, and being the creations of politics can be changed easily by politics. Meanwhile the fundamentalists (especially the religious fundamentalists) hunger to serve natural law, and have themselves so often forgotten the wisdom and the conditions of their ancestors that they no longer know how to do so.

No doubt relatively individualistic societies (e.g., America) and relatively communitarian societies (e.g., much of the rest of the world) can learn from each other because after all their ideal, the golden mean between extremes, is often the same. It is just their starting points, and their senses of what is feasible and what isn’t, and what kinds of hypocrisies to tolerate and what not to, are what differ.





## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

### REASON AND MORALITY IN COMMUNITY: SOME CONCLUSIONS

What can we learn about alienation in modern society that increases with social change even as claims to achieve rational control bureaucratically over the processes of social order also increases? In fact the Age of Reason which typified European culture in the 18th century was a watershed in human history. For the first time in millennia, at least in the US, and to a lesser extent in Western Europe, society was not considered to be composed of the leadership classes, who were supposed to exercise leadership in the service of the common good, and the mass of people, who to use a present-day idiom, were in many cases only interested in getting high.

In other words, the mass of people were considered to be capable of, if not always being, rational. Of course by rational they meant moral also, and the results of the Reformation were finally starting to pay dividends in the British colonies, producing people who were self-consciously moral, autonomous of unjust authority since their ultimate allegiance in the moral sense was God, and capable of and interested in moral debate. This latter capacity in America was particularly exercised in the relatively autonomous churches and then spilled over into the community at large, for this was a time when religiosity spilled over into community life, even when it was a matter of secularists trying to show they were just as virtuous as the religious, and not merely as in so many previous ages, the hypocrisies of secular life and secular authority among elites spilling over and corrupting private religious life. Their stern standards for moral leadership weakened respect for authority unless it was deserved, thus having democratic and even egalitarian consequences.

In fact in Europe as well as in America such tendencies had by the 18th century lost a good deal of their vestiges of religious parochialism. Reason alone, aside from whatever purposes it was supposed to be used, was now increasingly admired throughout Europe, as non-Protestant areas sought to catch up in governmental efficiency with their Protestant rivals.

Yet over time the motivation for such rationality, once intensely religious and communal, now increasingly instrumental and economic, was starting to wane even at the height of its success. Economic motives, once tinged with religious moralism, became increasingly autonomous. Then a still further reaction set in. Increasingly as time passed a wave of romanticism developed to question the purposes of rationality, in this case economic rationality, as its purposes increasingly appeared dim and blurry as the sense of community that this economic engine was meant to serve weakened.

By the time the modern era arose with it arose a question, has the initial impulse for rationality, a kind of self-conscious moralism, spent itself, and are we only left with a narcissistic residue? Already in the 18th century the original belief in “natural” sympathy and virtue was weakening and being replaced by a cultural relativism that made virtue in the sense of reason natural, but its manifestation quite arbitrary, or so David Hume, the Scottish philosopher, seemed to believe. Then soon afterward the Kantian school of ethics once again made rationality natural, but its manifestation made it depend more on intellectual than on emotional virtues, adherence to such virtues requiring a kind of Protestant leap of faith or as later scholars in that tradition put it, the result of an act of will, while soon after that Hegel made loyalty to the state the effective spur for moral action, as if state and community cannot conflict.

Thus the original template for character development was disintegrating under the effects of modernity. That is to say increasing bureaucracy and anonymity in society made the place of character in conjunction with social relationships less meaningful.

The further back you go in social evolution, the more social relationships seem to have a central position in human consciousness. Just as the spiritual world was anthropomorphized then, interpreted as if it involved human-like relationships, so individual character was molded in society to be fit for cooperating with valued others. In a sense innate human nature was less tampered with (or at least differently tampered with) than in our time, and passion and dignity was a great part of the human experience, often controlled by ritual in order to be channeled in nondestructive directions.

A feeling of alienation in the midst of people, of not feeling a suitable environment for one's emotional needs so that they become buried and in effect disappear, perhaps forever, perhaps lying latent in the subconscious, is just less of a problem in primitive societies. Of course the

problem of emotionally seeking “irrational” outlets remains, the problem of hysterical people with strong fears, strong angers, strong hates, and strong loves, though perhaps not the aestheticized feelings, in a sense artificially strengthened, of more refined and complex cultures such as our own. In the modern era people can afford to create a specialized institution out of a complex of feelings, such as the art of love once a specialty of courtesans, now democratized and sold to the masses through the movies. Thus do primitive societies know little about the literary conventions of love. This doesn’t mean they don’t love their mates out of unconscious feelings and needs that seek expression, though admittedly without institutionalization such feelings may weaken or under poor conditions fail to arise at all.

However, the problem of modern societies is one of overly complex and refined institutions, producing cultural ideals that coordinate poorly with each other, such as Hollywood’s fantasies of romance and real life marriage. People who spend their lives being “rational” in the sense of meeting bureaucratic requirements truly become alienated from their feelings, and endlessly resort to artificial substitutes, not rituals that channel already present “pure” emotions, but a kind of substitute emotionality taken out of any kind of normal ecological context, unhealthy rituals if you will.

Living through identifications with the fantasies portrayed in the recreational media until these emotions seem almost more real than one’s own is one example. Another is the mean-spirited acting out of attention-seeking or even sadism common among “decadent” teenagers for whom happiness is not having a match between feelings and reality, that is having a meaningful life, but their reality is merely having a temporary escape from reality. Not an expression of competence in the real world, but an expression of escape from that world, is their goal, an exercise not in competence but in fantasy.

In general the modern working class is offered bread and circuses but not respect, not with the strict social attention paid by elite groups to mobility out of their ranks but not to the quality of their lives while in them. It is no wonder their youth so often develop hedonistic and sadistic countercultures, carrying the bread and circuses offered to them to absurd extremes.

True, the Age of Reason was a time when many people admired economic rationality, but they also admired much more, communal feeling, sympathy, self-control, republican simplicity (at least in the early US) rather than image-mongering bureaucracies. Now increasingly

what we have is economic selfishness and kindergarten-like narcissism among the powerful, and sensuality and servility among the powerless, and endless escapism among all.

The golden mean of character, once achievable among a kind of middle-class population that were middle just because they were able to avoid such extremes, once an American ideal, is increasingly disappearing even in America. The ideal has survived in certain immigrant and inner-city neighborhoods, proud of their self-reliance and of their street-wise smarts that keep them from being fooled or bought, and in certain far outposts of suburbia where the American Dream is increasingly as every year passes something not to be worked for, but just dreamt.

Let us look at European civilization as a whole for a moment, the primeval unity which existed about 500 years ago, and which became differentiated into the honor-ridden cultures of Southern Europe, the bureaucratic but often socially distant cultures of Central and Eastern Europe, and the mercantile and somewhat individualistic cultures of Northwestern Europe, especially those identified with "The Protestant Ethic." Will they once again merge culturally, and this time be joined by the rest of the world, in a culture of modernity characterized by social anonymity (so not honor-bound), bureaucratization (but without the cultural pretensions so typical of Central and Eastern Europe), and materialism, but without the saving grace of individualism with a slightly moralistic tinge (once typical of America)? In other words, will a tasteless consumerism, a kind of hedonism for people without much culture or taste be the universal culture of the future, or will we draw back from the abyss? I assume we will, eventually.

Up to now, however, in general what we have seen, at least in America, is a reversal of positions of the political left and right. The right, once favoring an activist government they could lead in order to secure public order, public decorum, and especially public morality, now do not lead as much as try to enjoy their wealth in peace even if it leads to vulgar hedonism, while the left, once favoring limited government because they assumed the poor, who paid little in taxes and liked it that way (leaving the details of government to the rich who paid for it) could take care of themselves if allowed to since they were virtuous even if the elite didn't believe it. Now the left favors government subsidies for lifestyles but now without hardly any moral judgment since materialistic consumption and hedonism in general has become for many immune from criticism. In other words they both seek a state

(both a state of being and a country) where it is not necessary to be good, where it is not necessary to have the self-criticism and self-control of personal morality, something sought by so many of this century's ideological movements (many of them "isms") who tend to conceive of society as a machine which produces happiness without thought, since happiness is no longer a matter of mind and self-respect, but is in large part for them merely the result of material consumption.

Of course the decline from "primitive" democracy began early, and societies where influence over people is the natural result of social differentiation are probably more common than the modern development, in some ways still unique to Anglo-American culture, that the autonomy fostered by material abundance fosters a concern with things, either job skills or skills at commodity consumption as being more important, for many people, than social relationship skills. Still, we may be reaching a point of diminishing returns even for this, and if anything, a concern with machismo and social power is probably on the rise in Anglo-American culture areas, now that "celebrities" and not businessmen are the culture heroes of today and for the foreseeable future.

I should add, as an aside, that the golden mean of morality in practice, that is to say a socially institutionalized morality, is the avoidance of the two extremes of inappropriate ritualism (where means are indulged in with disregard for ends), and letting the intentions of good ends become an excuse for disregarding appropriate means (that is letting the ends justify the means) which is the marker often of ideological fanatics who try to use people as tools for their causes. The moral society is somewhere in the middle, it is the prudent society, the compassionate society, it is the society which defines itself by the relation between means and ends, and not by an imbalanced or inappropriate emphasis on either one of them.

To summarize some of the points made in this book, critical theory is social science that is relatively complex and sophisticated, that aims for moral exhortation, and is concerned with holistic analyses of society. This book aims to illustrate some of the ramifications of a pragmatic critical theory, particularly regarding two social developments in America, which makes America less of an exceptional society and less of a model for the rest of the world as America is becoming more like the rest of the world, particularly in its class system. America seems to be redeveloping a European-style class system, and America's

moralistic middle class, is reducing its function as the balance wheel of society, and as has been traditional in Europe is becoming more passive and more concerned with its own economic security rather than with how its place in society at large can be coordinated with other groups so that everyone can fit into a holistic ideal of the common good. Partly this is occurring because among all social classes moralistic individualism is more and more evolving into narcissistic individualism.

This book can be thought of as building on the insights of Max Weber but going beyond him, providing a meditation on the relation between social cohesiveness, cultural values, and prospects for political democracy (and social democracy as well which reflects social equality which may or may not coexist with political equality). American-style democracy is good at preventing tyranny, and is less efficient at producing ongoing social order. Once a sense of virtue declines among its middle class, and in other social classes as well, the state has few means for reinvigorating it. The paradox of democracy is that democracy relies on a broadly held sense of virtue among the citizens at large, and though the forms of political democracy encourage individual responsibility even in anonymous societies, political democracy rarely can create such virtue if it doesn't exist for other social and cultural reasons already. The paradox of authoritarianism is that the extreme desire for social order induces deference to elites unless such leaders cannot produce, almost "guarantee" social order, in which case new leaders are sought for that purpose. Communal decision-making, the true source of the democratic will of the people, is weak in all modern societies.

One core issue that I discuss in this book is that there is a difference between management and image-management, and that it is no surprise that experts in image-management get to rise to be figurehead leaders of organizations, and through politics of societies. This obviously also relates to the difficulties for maintaining professional standards in modern society. In fact a problem concerning the enforcement of morality in modern society through law is that though social morality is enforced by government bureaucracies through enforcing the law, it often finds it difficult to do so since it has to rely on a rather weak sense of interpersonal morality in society which gives it both more work to do, and diminishes the professional standards of those government bureaucrats whose job it is to enforce morality on others, which

they may not enforce on themselves. Thus the ultimate justification for political democracy is the old quandry: "Who will guard the guardians?"

In fact the great weakness of American government, and of all modern governments, is that rule tends to come from professional politicians, who are bureaucrats who specialize in politics, rather than from community notables who because of a strong sense of honor represent their neighbors whom they actually understand and communicate with, rather than themselves. Again, communal decision-making, the true source of the democratic will of the people, is weak in all modern societies, as it had been in most pre-modern societies as well once they achieve a basic degree of bureaucratization. The growth of political democracy, which sometimes substitutes for the lack of social democracy, has its work cut out for it. This lesson of history, unfortunately, reflects the fact that too often we do not learn the lessons of history.





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