

A Secular Age

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Let's call this the Age of Authenticity. It appears that something has happened in the last half-century, perhaps even less, which has profoundly altered the conditions of belief in our societies.

I believe, along with many others, that our North Atlantic civilization has been undergoing a cultural revolution in recent decades. The 60s provide perhaps the hinge moment, at least symbolically. It is on one hand an individuating revolution, which may sound strange, because our modern age was already based on a certain individualism. But this has shifted on to a new axis, without deserting the others. As well as moral/spiritual and instrumental individualisms, we now have a widespread "expressive" individualism. This is, of course, not totally new. Expressivism was the invention of the Romantic period in the late eighteenth century. Intellectual and artistic élites have been searching for the authentic way of living or expressing themselves throughout the nineteenth century. What is new is that this kind of self-orientation seems to have become a mass phenomenon.

Everyone senses that something has changed. Often this is experienced as loss, break-up. A majority of Americans believe that communities are eroding, families, neighbourhoods, even the polity; they sense that people are less willing to participate, to do their bit; and they are less trusting of others.¹ Scholars don't necessarily agree with this assessment,² but the perception itself is an important fact about today's society. No doubt there are analogous perceptions widespread in other Western societies.

The causes cited for these changes are many: affluence and the continued extension of consumer life styles; social and geographic mobility; outsourcing and downsizing by corporations; new family patterns, particularly the growth of the two-income household, with the resulting overwork and burnout; suburban spread, whereby people often live, work, and shop in three separate areas; the rise of television, and others.³ But whatever the correct list of such precipitating factors, what

interests me here is the understandings of human life, agency, and the good which both encourage this new (at least seeming) individuation, and also make us morally uneasy about it.

The shift is often understood, particularly by those most disturbed by it, as an outbreak of mere egoism, or a turn to hedonism. In other words, two things which were identified clearly as vices in a traditional ethic of community service and self-discipline are targeted as the motors of change. But I think this misses an important point. Egoism and the mere search for pleasure (whatever exactly these amount to) may play a larger or smaller role in the motivation of different individuals, but a large-scale shift in general understandings of the good requires some new understanding of the good. Whether in a given individual case this functions more as rationalization or as animating ideal is neither here nor there; the ideal itself becomes a crucial facilitating factor.

Thus one of the most obvious manifestations of the individuation in question here has been the consumer revolution. With post-war affluence, and the diffusion of what many had considered luxuries before, came a new concentration on private space, and the means to fill it, which began distending the relations of previously close-knit working-class⁴ or peasant communities,⁵ even of extended families. Older modes of mutual help dropped off, perhaps partly because of the receding of dire necessity. People concentrated more on their own lives, and that of their nuclear families. They moved to new towns or suburbs, lived more on their own, tried to make a life out of the ever-growing gamut of new goods and services on offer, from washing-machines to packaged holidays, and the freer individual life-styles they facilitated. The "pursuit of happiness" took on new, more immediate meaning, with a growing range of easily available means. And in this newly individuated space, the customer was encouraged more and more to express her taste, furnishing her space according to her own needs and affinities, as only the rich had been able to do in previous eras.

One important facet of this new consumer culture was the creation of a special youth market, with a flood of new goods, from clothes to records, aimed at an age bracket which ranged over adolescents and young adults. The advertising deployed to sell these goods in symbiosis with the youth culture which develops helped create a new kind of consciousness of youth as a stage in life, between childhood and an adulthood tied down by responsibility. This was not, of course, without precedent. Many earlier societies had marked out such a stage in the life cycle, with its own special groupings and rituals; and upper-class youth had enjoyed their student days and (sometimes) fraternities. Indeed, with the expansion of urban life and the consolidation of national cultures, upper- and middle-class youth began to become conscious of itself as a social reality towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Youth even becomes a political reference point, or a basis of mobilization, as one sees with the German Jugendbewegung, and later with Fascist invocation of "Giovinezza" in their famous marching song. But this self-demarkation of youth was a break with the working class culture of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, where the necessities of life seemed to exclude such a time out after childhood and before the serious business of earning began.

The present youth culture is defined, both by the way advertising is pitched at it, and to a great degree autonomously, as expressivist. The styles of dress adopted, the kinds of music listened to, give expression to the personality, to the affinities of the chooser, within a wide space of fashion in which one's choice could align one with thousands, even millions of others.

I want to talk about this space of fashion in a minute, but if we move from these external facts about post-war consumerism to the self-understandings that went along with them, we see a steady spread of what I have called the culture of "authenticity".⁶ I mean the understanding of life which emerges with the Romantic expressivism of the late-eighteenth century, that each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority.

This had been the standpoint of many intellectuals and artists during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One can trace the strengthening, even radicalization of this ethos among some cultural élites throughout this period, a growing sense of the right, even duty, to resist "bourgeois" or established codes and standards, to declare openly for the art and the mode of life that they felt inspired to create and live. The defining of its own ethos by the Bloomsbury milieu was an important stage on this road in early twentieth century England, and the sense of the epochal change is reflected in the famous phrase of Virginia Woolf: "On or about December 1910, human nature changed".⁷ A somewhat parallel moment comes with André Gide's "coming out" as a homosexual in the 1920s, a move in which desire, morality, and a sense of integrity came together. It is not just that Gide no longer feels the need to maintain a false front; it is that after a long struggle he sees this front as a wrong that he is inflicting on himself, and on others who labour under similar disguises.⁸

But it is only in the era after the Second World War, that this ethic of authenticity begins to shape the outlook of society in general. Expressions like "do your own thing" become current; a beer commercial of the early 70s enjoined us to "be yourselves in the world of today". A simplified expressivism infiltrates everywhere. Therapies multiply which promise to help you find yourself, realize yourself, release your true self, and so on.

The contemporary ethic of authenticity thus has a long pre-history; and if we look at this, we can see that it is set in a wider critique of the buffered, disciplined self, concerned above all with instrumental rational control. If we think of the 60s as our hinge moment, we note a widespread critique of our society in the period immediately preceding it among leading intellectuals. The society of the 1950s was castigated as conformist, crushing individuality and creativity, as too concerned with production and concrete results, as repressing feeling and spontaneity, as exalting the mechanical over the organic. Writers like Theodor Roszak and Herbert Marcuse turned out to be prophets of the coming revolution. As Paul Tillich said to a graduating class in 1957: "We hope for more non-conformists among you, for your sake, for the sake of the nation, and for the sake of humanity." In one sense (perhaps not the one he intended), his wish was granted in profusion in the following decade.⁹

The revolts of young people in the "60s" (which really extended into the 70s, but I am using what has become the standard term) were indeed, directed against a "system" which smothered creativity, individuality and imagination. They rebelled against a "mechanical" system in the name of more "organic" ties; against the instrumental, and for lives devoted to things of intrinsic value; against privilege, and for equality; and against the repression of the body by reason, and for the fullness of sensuality. But these were not seen just as a list of separate goals or demands. Following axes of criticism already laid down in the Romantic period, their understanding was that inner divisions, like reason as against feeling, and social divisions, like between students and workers, as well as divisions between spheres of life, like work/play, were both intrinsically linked with each other, and inseparable from modes of domination and oppression (reason over feeling, those who think dominating those who work with their hands, the work of "serious" work marginalizing play). An integral revolution will undo all these divisions/oppressions at once. This clearly was the outlook which came to expression in the May 1968 student movement in Paris. An equal society was meant to emerge from a simultaneous breaking down of the three barriers just mentioned (le "déclouonnement"). And although the theory didn't come to exactly this articulation everywhere, it is clear that the May event had an immense resonance throughout the world; and that in turn it reflected some of the themes of the earlier movement in the U.S. which started at Berkeley in 1964.

This outlook goes back to the Romantic period; it is articulated among other places in Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*.¹⁰ It is carried down into the 1960s in part through the continuing chain of related counter-cultures, and in part expressly through the influence of writers like Marcuse. Like the ethic of au-

thenticity which is embedded in it, it moves in this period out of élite milieux to become a much more widely available option, a stance and sensibility recognizable to the society as a whole (however much disliked and maligned).

But of course, we can't read the culture of the succeeding decades simply through the aspirations of the 60s. We have to factor in, not only the reactions of those who opposed, and still oppose, this whole outlook, but also the contradictions and dilemmas that these aspirations themselves generate. Perhaps everyone would now recognize the Utopian nature of the ideals of May 1968.¹¹ In a sense, this was even so at the time; the "soixante-huitards" lacked completely the steely political determination of Lenin and the Bolsheviks; indeed, the movement emerged partly in criticism of the French Communist Party. In this sense, their hands were clean. But Utopianism has its costs. To the extent that the goals of integral self-expression, sensual release, equal relations, and social bonding cannot be easily realized together—and it seems that they can only be united with difficulty, and for a time, in small communities at best—the attempt to realize them will involve sacrificing some elements of the package for others.

And this, of course, is what we see happening in the aftermath. David Brooks sets out the synthesis between "bourgeois" and "bohemian" which he sees in the contemporary U.S. upper class. These "BoBos", as he calls them, have made their peace with capitalism and productivity, but they retain their over-riding sense of the importance of personal development and self-expression. They retain the wholehearted embrace of sex and sensuality as a good in itself, but they pursue it with the kind of earnest concern for self-improvement which is light-years away from the Dionysian spontaneity of the 60s. They have developed what he calls the "higher selfishness": "Self-cultivation is the imperative. . . . So this isn't a crass and vulgar selfishness, about narrow self-interest or mindless accumulation. This is a higher selfishness. It's about making sure you get the most out of yourself, which means putting yourself in a job which is spiritually fulfilling, socially constructive, experientially diverse, emotionally enriching, self-esteem boosting, perpetually challenging, and eternally edifying."

Among the things that get lost in the original package are, on one hand, social equality; BoBos have made their peace with the Reagan-Thatcher revolution, the slimming down of the welfare state, and increasing income inequality, where they sit at the upper end. And on the other hand, their highly mobile life-style has helped to erode community. But there is more than a residual unease about this among many of these high-flyers. They want to believe that they are contributing to the welfare of everyone; and they yearn for more meaningful community relations.¹²

In fact, this kind of capitalist sub-culture, which one found mainly in the IT world, is not unanimously accepted among the rich and powerful. There still exists a culture of the big vertical corporations; and there is a tension between the two.

What this shows, however, is that fragments of the ideal, selectively acted on, remain powerful; and even the abandoned segments may still tug at our conscience. The ideal, however distorted, is still powerful enough in a society like the U.S. to awaken strong resistance in certain quarters, and to be the object of what have been called "culture wars". This latter term may be in some sense an exaggeration, because there is some evidence that the number of full-scale, utterly down-the-line warriors on each side may be relatively small; in fact, the great majority of Americans are caught in the middle. But the dynamic of the system, the interaction between single-issue organizations, the media, and the American party system, and perhaps the American obsession with "rights", keeps the polarization at fever heat, and prevents saner and lower-key treatment of the issues.¹³

The fact that the ideal can only be selectively fulfilled also changes the significance of those parts we do act on. Self-expression has a weight and significance when we see it as not just compatible with, but even as the road towards a true community of equals. It has to lose much of this when it turns out to concern only ourselves. Hence the invitation to irony which, for instance, David Brooks responds to in the quote above about the "higher selfishness" (and indeed, throughout his book). Selectivity not only takes a toll in the loss of the abandoned bits, but also in the potential trivialization or banalization of what remains. It also carries the danger that in holding on to our now reduced goals, we will hide from ourselves the dilemmas involved here: that we are willy-nilly impeding other valid aims, and reducing the ones we espouse and proclaim. The reduced and simplified fragment becomes the limit of our moral world, the basis of an all-encompassing slogan.

A good example of this is "choice", that is bare choice as a prime value, irrespective of what it is a choice between, or in what domain. Yet we have to admit that this is regularly invoked in our society as an all-trumping argument in weighty contexts. I can think of a number of reasons against the idea of forbidding by law at least, say, first-trimester abortions; including the fact that in our present society the burden of bearing the child falls almost totally on the pregnant woman; or the high likelihood that the law would be widely evaded, and the operations carried out in much more perilous conditions. But being in favour of choice as such has nothing to do with it—unless one would like equally to legitimate the choice of prospective parents to selectively abort female fetuses to reduce their eventual dowry costs. This kind of appeal trivializes the issue. It trades on the favourable resonances of a word which is also invoked in other contexts: for instance, in advertising where it serves to invoke the sense that there are no barriers to my desires, the child-in-the-candy-

store feeling of hovering alongside a limitless field of pleasurable options. It is a word which occludes almost everything important: the sacrificed alternatives in a dilemmatic situation, and the real moral weight of the situation.

And yet we find these words surfacing again and again, slogan terms like "freedom", "rights", "respect", "non-discrimination", and so on. Of course, none of these is empty in the way "choice" is; but they too are often deployed as argument-stopping universals, without any consideration of the where and how of their application to the case at hand. This has something to do with the dynamic of our political process in many Western democracies (I'm not taking a stand one way or another on whether it's better elsewhere); the way in which advocacy groups, media, political parties both generate and feed off a dumbed down political culture. Hunter relates the poignant fact that studies showed the "pro-life" side of the abortion debate that the best way they could make their case was in terms of "rights" and "choice".¹⁴ These favoured terms acquire a Procrustean force. Shallowness and dominance are two sides of the same coin.

But for that very reason, one can wonder how much they reflect real-life deliberation of the human beings in the society. Hunter reveals how complex and nuanced is the thinking of people who can be lined up on one side of the other by some simplifying question, like "are you pro-life or pro-choice?"¹⁵

We find another interesting reflection of this in Alan Ehrenhalt's fascinating study of 1950s Chicago, and of what became of the life in America since.¹⁶ The book starts:

Most of us in America believe a few simple propositions that seem so clear and self-evident they scarcely need to be said. Choice is a good thing in life, and the more of it we have, the happier we are. Authority is inherently suspect; nobody should have the right to tell others what to think or how to behave. Sin isn't personal, it's social; individual human beings are creatures of the society they live in.¹⁷

Anyone can recognize here widespread ideas that are often used as trumps in arguments, or enframing assumptions, even though they are often contested. Ehrenhalt's main point is very convincing here. It is absurd to adopt any of these three propositions as universal truths. It is clear that to have any kind of liveable society some choices have to be restricted, some authorities have to be respected, and some individual responsibility has to be assumed. The issue should always be which choices, authorities and responsibilities, and at what cost. In other words, falling back on slogans like these hides from us the dilemmas we have to navigate between in our choices. Properly understood, what happened in the last half of the twentieth

century in America was that some choices were freed, and some authorities overthrown, with some resultant gains, and at the cost of some losses. And most of the people who help these slogans to circulate are at some level aware of this, because they may also in another context bemoan the loss of stable, reliable and safe communities. We saw above how the majority of Americans believe that community has been undermined and that people are less trustworthy today.

In a way, the costs may be hidden by the fact that we are especially indignant, even today, about some of the restrictions and oppressions of the 50s: women confined to the home, children being forced into moulds in school. We feel these things should never occur again. Whereas the costs, like the unravelling of social connections in the ghetto, or the way so many of us "channel surf" through life, come across either as bearable, or perhaps as simply "systemic", and thus to be borne regardless.

But what emerges through all the muddle and evasion is that there has been a real value shift here. We see this in the fact that things which were borne for centuries are now declared unbearable, for instance, the restrictions on women's options in life. And so there are two points to be made about our situation. One is to pick up on the flattening and trivialization of many of the key terms of public discourse; another is to see that our actual deliberations, while distorted and partly captive of such illusions, nevertheless are always richer and deeper than these allow.

I make this point because I think we need to allow a similar double assessment of a turn like that which inaugurates the Age of Authenticity. It is tempting for those out of sympathy with this turn to see it simply in the light of its illusions; to see authenticity, or the affirmation of sensuality, as simply egoism and the pursuit of pleasure, for example; or to see the aspiration to self-expression exclusively in the light of consumer choice. It is tempting on the other side for proponents of the turn to affirm the values of the new ideal as though they were unproblematic, cost-free and could never be trivialized. Both see the turn as a move within a stable, perennial game. For the critics, it involves the embracing of vices which were and are the main threats to virtue; for the boosters, we have reversed age-old forms which were and are modes of oppression.

I want to view the turn differently. When we undergo some such transformation, the moral stakes change. I don't mean that we cannot make a reasoned over-all judgment about the gains and losses in the transition. (I believe that this one has been on balance positive, while involving palpable costs.) But I do mean that the available options have changed. This means, first, that some options available in earlier days are not possible today, like a general return to the ideal of clear and fixed gender roles in the family. And secondly, it means that there are options today, within the new context, and that some of them are better than others. This is something

which the constant harping on the most degraded forms by critics tends to occlude. These critics become unwitting allies of the trivialized forms, because they attack the new context as a whole as though it were defined by these. That one side in the abortion debate calls itself "pro-choice" has something to do with the dynamic of its battle with its polar opposite. Root and branch attacks on authenticity help to make our lives worse, while being powerless to put the clock back to an earlier time.

What are the consequences of the turn for our social imaginary? One important facet of these harks back to our discussion above about youth culture. It also constitutes an important locus of possible trivialization.

I have spoken elsewhere¹⁸ about the typically modern, "horizontal" forms of social imaginary, in which people grasp themselves and great numbers of others as existing and acting simultaneously. The three widely-recognized such forms are: the economy, the public sphere, and the sovereign people. But the space of fashion alluded to above is an example of a fourth structure of simultaneity. It is unlike the public sphere and the sovereign people, because these are sites of common action. In this respect, it is like the economy, where a host of individual actions concatenate. But it is different from this as well, because our actions relate in the space of fashion in a particular way. I wear my own kind of hat, but in doing so I am displaying my style to all of you, and in this, I am responding to your self-display, even as you will respond to mine. The space of fashion is one in which we sustain a language together of signs and meanings, which is constantly changing, but which at any moment is the background needed to give our gestures the sense they have. If my hat can express my particular kind of cocky, yet understated self-display, then this is because of how the common language of style has evolved between us up to this point. My gesture can change it, and then your responding stylistic move will take its meaning from the new contour the language takes on.

The general structure I want to draw from this example of the space of fashion is that of a horizontal, simultaneous mutual presence, which is not that of a common action, but rather of mutual display. It matters to each one of us as we act that the others are there, as witness of what we are doing, and thus as co-determiners of the meaning of our action.

Spaces of this kind become more and more important in modern urban society, where large numbers of people rub shoulders, unknown to each other, without dealings with each other, and yet affecting each other, forming the inescapable context of each other's lives. As against the everyday rush to work in the Metro, where the others can sink to the status of obstacles in my way, city life has developed other ways of being-with, for instance, as we each take our Sunday walk in the park; or as we mingle at the summer street-festival, or in the stadium before the play-off game.

Here each individual or small group acts on their own, but aware that their display says something to the others, will be responded to by them, will help build a common mood or tone which will colour everyone's actions.

Here a host of urban monads hover on the boundary between solipsism and communication. My loud remarks and gestures are overtly addressed only to my immediate companions, my family group is sedately walking, engaged in our own Sunday outing, but all the time we are aware of this common space that we are building, in which the messages that cross take their meaning. This strange zone between loneliness and communication strongly impressed many of the early observers of this phenomenon as it arose in the nineteenth century. We can think of some of the paintings of Manet, or of Baudelaire's fascination with the urban scene, in the roles of flâneur and dandy, uniting observation and display.

Of course, these nineteenth-century urban spaces were topical, that is, all the participants were in the same place, in sight of each other. But twentieth-century communications has produced meta-topical variants, when for instance, we watch the Olympics or Princess Di's funeral on television, aware that millions of others are with us in this. The meaning of our participation in the event is shaped by the whole vast dispersed audience we share it with.

Just because these spaces hover between solitude and togetherness, they may sometimes flip over into common action; and indeed, the moment when they do so may be hard to pin-point. As we rise as one to cheer the crucial third-period goal, we have undoubtedly become a common agent; and we may try to prolong this when we leave the stadium by marching and chanting, or even wreaking various forms of mayhem together. The cheering crowd at a rock festival is similarly fused. There is a heightened excitement at these moments of fusion, reminiscent of Carnival, or of some of the great collective rituals of earlier days. Durkheim gave an important place to these times of collective effervescence as founding moments of society and the sacred.¹⁹ In any case, these moments seem to respond to some important felt need of today's "lonely crowd".

I have just spoken here of "common action", but this is not always the right category. It is the right word, perhaps, when the mob smashes the police cars, or throws stones at the soldiers. But at the rock concert, at the Princess' funeral, what is shared is something else. Not so much an action, as an emotion, a powerful common feeling. What is happening is that we are all being touched together, moved as one, sensing ourselves as fused in our contact with something greater, deeply moving, or admirable; whose power to move us has been immensely magnified by the fusion.

This brings us back into the category of the "festive", which I invoked above: moments of fusion in a common action/feeling, which both wrench us out of the everyday, and seem to put us in touch with something exceptional, beyond our-

selves. Which is why some have seen these moments as among the new forms of religion in our world.²⁰ I think there is something to this idea, and I'd like to examine it later on.

Now consumer culture, expressivism and spaces of mutual display connect in our world to produce their own kind of synergy. Commodities become vehicles of individual expression, even the self-definition of identity. But however this may be ideologically presented, this doesn't amount to some declaration of real individual autonomy. The language of self-definition is defined in the spaces of mutual display, which have now gone meta-topical; they relate us to prestigious centres of style-creation, usually in rich and powerful nations and milieux. And this language is the object of constant attempted manipulation by large corporations.

My buying Nike running shoes may say something about how I want to be/appear, the kind of empowered agent who can take "just do it!" as my motto. And in doing this, I identify myself with those heroes of sport and the great leagues they play in. In so doing, I join millions of others in expressing my "individuality". Moreover, I express it by linking myself to some higher world, the locus of stars and heroes, which is largely a construct of fantasy.

Modern consumer society is inseparable from the construction of spaces of display: topical spaces, palaces of consumption, like the arcades of nineteenth-century Paris thematized by Walter Benjamin, and the giant malls of today; and also meta-topical spaces which link us through commodities to an imagined higher existence elsewhere.

But all this conformity and alienation may nevertheless feel like choice and self-determination; not only because consumer spaces with their multiplying options celebrate choice, but also because in embracing some style within them, I may feel myself to be breaking out of some more confining space of family or tradition.²¹

Of course, it goes without saying that a more genuine search for authenticity begins only where one can break out of the Logo-centric²² language generated by trans-national corporations. This language occupies a large place in meta-topical spaces of display, but it is not the whole story. Admired stars, heroes, political slogans and modes of demonstration also circulate. These can suffer their own distortions (think of Che Guevara T-shirts), but they can also connect us to trans-national movements around genuine issues.

How else is the advance of expressive individualism altering our social imaginary? Here I can once again only sketch an ideal type, because we're dealing with a gradual process, in which the new co-exists with the old.

Our self-understandings as sovereign peoples haven't been displaced by this new individualism. But perhaps there has been a shift of emphasis. A human identity is a complex thing, made up of many reference points. It still seems important for many

of us that we are Canadians, Americans, Britons or French. Just watch us when the Olympics are on. But the weighting, the importance of this in our over-all sense of identity can shift.

One could argue that for many young people today, certain styles, which they enjoy and display in their more immediate circle, but which are defined through the media, in relation to admired stars—or even products—occupy a bigger place in their sense of self, and that this has tended to displace in importance the sense of belonging to large scale collective agencies, like nations, not to speak of churches, political parties, agencies of advocacy, and the like.

As for the modern moral order of mutual benefit, this has been if anything strengthened. Or perhaps, better put, it has taken on a somewhat different form. Certainly it is clear that the ideals of fairness, of the mutual respect of each other's freedom, are as strong among young people today as they ever were. Indeed, precisely the soft relativism that seems to accompany the ethic of authenticity: let each person do their own thing, and we shouldn't criticise each other's "values"; this is predicated on a firm ethical base, indeed, demanded by it. One shouldn't criticise the others' values, because they have a right to live their own life as you do. The sin which is not tolerated is intolerance. This injunction emerges clearly from the ethic of freedom and mutual benefit, although one might easily cavil at this application of it.²³

Where the new twist comes in, evident in the "relativism", is that this injunction stands alone where it used to be surrounded and contained by others. For Locke, the Law of Nature needed to be inculcated in people by strong discipline; so although the goal was individual freedom, there was no felt incompatibility between this and the need for strong, commonly enforced virtues of character. On the contrary, it seemed evident that without these, the régime of mutual respect couldn't survive. It took a long time before John Stuart Mill could enunciate what has come to be called the "harm principle", that no one has a right to interfere with me for my own good, but only to prevent harm to others. In his day, this was far from generally accepted; it seemed the path to libertinism.

But today, the harm principle is widely endorsed, and seems the formula demanded by the dominant expressive individualism. (It is perhaps not an accident that Mill's arguments also drew on expressivist sources, in the person of Humboldt.)

Indeed, the "pursuit of (individual) happiness" takes on a new meaning in the after-war period. Of course, it is integral to Liberalism since the American Revolution, which enshrined it as one of a trinity of basic rights. But in the first century of the American Republic, it was inscribed within certain taken-for-granted boundaries. First there was the citizen ethic, centred on the good of self-rule, which Americans were meant to live up to. But beyond this, there were certain basic demands of

sexual morality, of what later would be called "family values", as well as the values of hard work and productivity, which gave a framework to the pursuit of individual good. To move outside of these was not so much to seek one's happiness, as to head towards perdition. There seemed therefore nothing contrary to the three basic rights enshrined by the Declaration of Independence in society's striving to inculcate, even in certain cases (e.g., sexual morality) to enforce these norms. European societies were perhaps less keen than the Americans to enforce various modes of social conformity, but their code was if anything even more restrictive.

The erosion of these limits on individual fulfillment has been in some cases gradual, with oscillations forward and backward, but with an unmistakable general tendency over the long run. Michael Sandel has noted how the concern for the citizen ethic was much more prominent in the first century of American history. Brandeis could argue the anti-trust case at the beginning of the twentieth century partly on the ground that large combines "erod[e] the moral and civic capacities that equip workers to think like citizens".²⁴ But as the twentieth century advances, such considerations take more and more a back seat. Courts become more concerned to defend the "privacy" of the individual.

But it is really in the period after the Second World War that the limits on the pursuit of individual happiness have been most clearly set aside, particularly in sexual matters, but also in other domains as well. The U.S. Supreme Court decisions invoking privacy, and thereby restricting the range of the criminal law, provide a clear example. Something similar happens with the revisions of the Canadian Criminal Code under Trudeau, which expressed his principle that "the State has no business in the bedrooms of the nation." Michel Winock notes the change in "mentalités" in France during the 70s: "La levée des censures, la 'libéralisation des mœurs', ... entra dans la loi", with the legalization of abortion, divorce reform, authorization of pornographic films, and so on.²⁵ This evolution takes place in virtually all Atlantic societies.

The heart of this revolution lies in sexual mores. This was a long time a-building, as the previous paragraph indicates, but the development took place earlier among cultural élites. In the 1960s, it was generalized to all classes. This is obviously a profound shift. The relativization of chastity and monogamy, the affirmation of homosexuality as a legitimate option, all these have a tremendous impact on churches whose stance in recent centuries has laid so much stress on these issues, and where piety has often been identified with a very stringent sexual code. I shall return to this shortly.

In fact, the need to train character has receded even farther into the background, as though the morality of mutual respect were embedded in the ideal of authentic self-fulfillment itself; which is how undoubtedly many young people experience it

today, oblivious of how the terrible twentieth-century aberrations of Fascism and extreme nationalism have also drunk at the expressivist source.

All this perhaps reflects the degree to which these principles of mutual respect for rights have become embedded in our cultures in the Atlantic world, forming the background against which many of our political and legal procedures of rights-retrieval and non-discrimination seem totally legitimate, even though we vigorously dispute their detailed application. But it also reflects the way in which rights-consciousness has become more loosely linked to the sense of belonging to a particular political community, which has both positive and negative sides.²⁶

I leave aside the pros and cons here to concentrate on what is relevant to our purposes, which we could describe as the imagined place of the sacred, in the widest sense. Drawing an ideal type of this new social imaginary of expressive individualism, we could say that it was quite non-Durkheimian.

Under the paleo-Durkheimian dispensation, my connection to the sacred entailed my belonging to a church, in principle co-extensive with society, although in fact there were perhaps tolerated outsiders, and as yet undisciplined heretics. The neo-Durkheimian dispensation saw me enter the denomination of my choice, but that in turn connected me to a broader, more elusive "church", and more importantly, to a political entity with a providential role to play. In both these cases, there was a link between adhering to God and belonging to the state—hence my epithet "Durkheimian".

The neo-Durkheimian mode involves an important step towards the individual and the right of choice. One joins a denomination because it seems right to one. And indeed, it now comes to seem that there is no way of being in the "church" except through such a choice. Where under paleo-Durkheimian rules one can—and did—demand that people be forcibly integrated, be rightly connected with God against their will, this now makes no sense. Coercion comes to seem not only wrong, but absurd and thus obscene. We saw an important watershed in the development of this consciousness in the reaction of educated Europe to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Even the Pope thought it was a mistake.

But the expressivist outlook takes this a stage farther. The religious life or practice that I become part of must not only be my choice, but it must speak to me, it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development as I understand this. This takes us farther. The choice of denomination was understood to take place within a fixed cadre, say that of the apostles' creed, the faith of the broader "church". Within this framework of belief, I choose the church in which I feel most comfortable. But if the focus is going now to be on my spiritual path, thus on what insights come to me in the subtler languages that I find meaningful, then maintaining this or any other framework becomes increasingly difficult.

But this means that my placing in the broader "church" may not be that relevant for me, and along with this, my placing in the "nation under God", or other such political agency with a providential role. In the new expressivist dispensation, there is no necessary embedding of our link to the sacred in any particular broader framework, whether "church" or state.

This is why the developments of recent decades in France have been so destabilizing for both sides of the old "guerre franco-française". Not only did the church see a sharp drop in adherence, but young people began to drop out of the rival Jacobin and/or communist world-views as well. In keeping with the dynamic of baroque, paleo-Durkheimian clericalism, the struggle threw up a kind of humanism which aspired in its own way to be a kind of national "church", that of the Republic and its principles, the framework within which people would hold their different metaphysical and (if they insisted) religious views. The Republic played a kind of neo-Durkheimian dispensation against the paleo-Durkheimianism of the clerical monarchists. This tradition even took over the term 'sacred' for itself. (Think of "l'union sacrée", of "la main sacrilège" which killed Marat, etc. This usage obviously facilitated Durkheim's theoretical use of the term to over-arch both ancien régime and republic.) It is not surprising that both Catholicism and this brand of republicanism undergo defections in the new post-Durkheimian dispensation of expressive individualism.²⁷

This changes utterly the ways in which ideals of order used to be interwoven with the polemic between belief and unbelief. What has changed to make this much less the case is not only that we have achieved a broad consensus on our ideal of moral order. It is also that in our post-Durkheimian dispensation, the "sacred", either religious or "laïque", has become uncoupled from our political allegiance. It was the rivalry between two such kinds of global allegiance that animated the "guerre franco-française". It was also this older dispensation which could send masses of men into the trenches to fight for their country in 1914, and keep them there, with few desertions and rare instances of mutiny for over four years.²⁸

I speak of this in the past tense, because in many of these same countries which were the prime belligerents in this war the new dispensation has probably made this kind of thing impossible. But it is also clear that the geographic area for which this holds true is limited. Down in the Balkans, not that much has changed since the wars which broke out in 1911. And we should not be too sanguine in believing that the change is irreversible even in the core North Atlantic societies.

Paleo-, neo-, post-Durkheimian describe ideal types. My claim is not that any of these provides the total description, but that our history has moved through these dispensations, and that the latter has come to colour more and more our age.

That the new dispensation doesn't provide the whole story is readily evident from the struggles in contemporary society. In a sense, part of what drove the Moral Ma-

majority and motivates the Christian Right in the U.S.A. is an aspiration to re-establish something of the fractured neo-Durkheimian understanding that used to define the nation, where being American would once more have a connection with theism, with being "one nation under God", or at least with the ethic which was interwoven with this. Similarly, much of the leadership of the Catholic Church, led by the Vatican, is trying to resist the challenge to monolithic authority which is implicit in the new expressivist understanding of spirituality. And the Catholic Church in the U.S. frequently lines up with the Christian Right in attempts to re-establish earlier versions of the moral consensus which enjoyed in their day neo-Durkheimian religious grounding.²⁹ For all these groups, the idea remains strong that there is a link between Christian faith and civilizational order.

But the very embattled nature of these attempts shows how we have slid out of the old dispensation. This shift goes a long way to explain the conditions of belief in our day. But it also underlines a point I made earlier. My terms "neo-Durkheimian" and "post-Durkheimian" designate ideal types. My claim is not that our present day is unambiguously post-Durkheimian, as say, mediaeval France was unquestionably paleo-Durkheimian, and say, the nineteenth-century U.S.A. was neo-Durkheimian. Rather there is a struggle going on between these two dispensations. But it is just this, the availability of a post-Durkheimian dispensation, which destabilizes us and provokes the conflict.

Before examining the embattled link between faith and civilizational order, however, I want to bring out how much the shift I have been talking about consorts with the logic of modern subjectification, and with what we might call the "buffered self". We already saw in the eighteenth century, at one of the important "branching points" mentioned in the preceding Part, that one reaction to the cool, measured religion of the buffered identity was to stress feeling, emotion, a living faith which moves us. This was the case, for instance, with Pietism and Methodism, for whom a powerful emotional response to God's saving action was more important than theological correctness.

Of course, these movements wished to remain within orthodoxy, but it wouldn't be long before the emphasis will shift more and more towards the strength and the genuineness of the feelings, rather than the nature of their object. Later in the century, the readers of *Émile* will admire above all the deep authentic sentiments of the characters.

There is a certain logic in this. Where before there was lots of passionate belief, and the life and death issues were doctrinal; now there comes to be a widespread feeling that the very point of religion is being lost in the cool distance of even impeccable intellectual orthodoxy. One can only connect with God through passion. For those who feel this, the intensity of the passion becomes a major virtue, well

worth some lack of accuracy in theological formulation. In an age dominated by disengaged reason, this virtue comes to seem more and more crucial.

By the time of the Romantic period, the same issue has been somewhat transposed. Now it appears to many that desiccated reason cannot reach the ultimate truths in any form. What is needed is a subtler language which can make manifest the higher or the divine. But this language requires for its force that it resonate with the writer or reader. Getting assent to some external formula is not the main thing, but being able to generate the moving insight into higher reality is what is important. Deeply felt personal insight now becomes our most precious spiritual resource. For Schleiermacher, the crucial thing to explore is the powerful feeling of dependence on something greater. To give this reign and voice in oneself is more crucial than getting the right formula.

I believe that the present expressive outlook comes from that shift having penetrated in some general form deep into our culture. In an age which seems dominated by the "learned despisers of religion", in Schleiermacher's phrase, what is really valuable is spiritual insight/feeling. This will inevitably draw on a language which resonates very much with the person who possesses it. Thus the injunction would seem to be: let everyone follow his/her own path of spiritual inspiration. Don't be led off yours by the allegation that it doesn't fit with some orthodoxy.

Hence while in the original paleo-Durkheimian dispensation, people could easily feel that they had to obey the command to abandon their own religious instincts, because these being at variance with orthodoxy must be heretical or at least inferior; and while those inhabiting a neo-Durkheimian world felt that their choice had to conform to the over-all framework of the "church" or favoured nation, so that even Unitarians and ethical societies presented themselves as denominations with services and sermons on Sunday; in the post-Durkheimian age many people are uncomprehending in face of the demand to conform. Just as in the neo-Durkheimian world, joining a church you don't believe in seems not just wrong, but absurd, contradictory, so in the post-Durkheimian age seems the idea of adhering to a spirituality which doesn't present itself as your path, the one which moves and inspires you. For many people today, to set aside their own path in order to conform to some external authority just doesn't seem comprehensible as a form of spiritual life.³⁰ The injunction is, in the words of a speaker at a New Age festival: "Only accept what rings true to your own inner Self."³¹

Of course, this understanding of the place and nature of spirituality has pluralism built into it, not just pluralism within a certain doctrinal framework, but unlimited. Or rather, the limits are of another order, they are in a sense political, and flow from the moral order of freedom and mutual benefit. My spiritual path has to respect those of others; it must abide by the harm principle. With this restriction, one's

path can range through those which require some community to live out, even national communities or would-be state churches, but it can also range beyond to those which require only the loosest of affinity groups, or just some servicing agency, like a source of advice and literature.

The a priori principle, that a valid answer to the religious quest must meet either the paleo- or neo-Durkheimian conditions (a church, or a "church" and/or society) has been abandoned in the new dispensation. The spiritual as such is no longer intrinsically related to society.

So much for the logic of the expressivist response to the buffered identity. But of course, this didn't have to work itself out as it has done. In certain societies at least, the principal catalyst for its having done so in recent decades seems to have been the new individual consumer culture released by post-war affluence. This seems to have had a tremendous appeal for populations which had been living since time out of mind under the grip of what appeared unchanging necessity, where the most optimistic horizon was maintaining a level of modest sufficiency and avoiding disaster. Yves Lambert has shown how this new culture at once loosened the tight community life of a Breton parish, and turned people from their dense communal-ritual life to the vigorous pursuit of personal prosperity. As one of his informants put it, "On n'a plus le temps de se soucier de ça [la religion], il y a trop de travail. Il faut de l'argent, du confort, tout ça, tout le monde est lancé là-dedans, et le reste, pffff!"³² (We no longer have time to care about that [religion]. One seeks money, comfort, and all that; everyone is now into that, and the rest, bah!)

These are connected movements. The new prosperity came along with better communications, and this opened horizons; but then the new pursuit of happiness drew people so strongly that they began to desert the older ritual life which was built around the community and its common efforts to survive in the physical and spiritual world. This ritual life then itself begins to shrink, in part disappear, and there is less and less to hold those who might want to stay within it.³³

It is almost as though the "conversion" was a response to a stronger form of magic, as earlier conversions had been. It is not that the religion of the villagers in Limerzel was exclusively concerned with economic survival and the defense against disaster, but their faith had so woven together the concern for salvation with that for well-being, that the prospect of a new individual road to prosperity, proven and impressive, dislocated their whole previous outlook. Said another informant: "Pourquoi j'irais à la messe, qu'ils se disent, le voisin qui est à côté de moi, il réussit aussi bien que moi, peut-être même mieux, et il n'y va pas."³⁴ (Why would I go to mass, they say to themselves, when my next-door neighbour is doing as well as me, perhaps even better, and he doesn't go.)

In other words, in the late-surviving AR form of this Breton parish, the old out-

look bound together a composite of concerns, worldly and other-worldly, which now fell apart quite decisively. It couldn't be reconstituted, and the faith has only survived among those who hold to it by evolving, as Lambert describes.³⁵ Something analogous happened in Québec, though this was a much more urbanized society, in the 1960s. Here the effect was delayed by the neo-Durkheimian link between national identity and Catholicism, but when this knot was untied, the falling off happened with a bewildering rapidity. The development has perhaps some affinities with what is taking place in contemporary Ireland, or what is beginning to emerge in Poland.

The corresponding slide in other, Protestant, especially Anglophone, societies has been more gradual and less dramatic, perhaps because the new consumer culture developed more slowly and over a longer period of time. But in both Britain and America, the expressivist revolution of the 60s seems to have accelerated things.

How to understand the impact of this whole shift on the place of religion in public space? It can perhaps be envisaged in this way. The invention of exclusive humanism in the eighteenth century created a new situation of pluralism, a culture fractured between religion and areligion (phase 1). The reactions not only to this humanism, but to the matrix (buffered identity, moral order) out of which it grew, multiplied the options in all directions (phase 2). But this pluralism operated and generated its new options for a long time largely within certain elite groups, intellectuals and artists.

Early on, especially in Catholic countries, there arose political movements of militant humanism which tried to carry unbelief to the masses, with rather modest success; and religious alienation also detached some strata of the common people from the church without necessarily offering them an alternative. On the other side, large numbers of people were either held outside this pluralist, fractured culture; or if on the fringes of it, were held strongly within the believing option, by different modes of Durkheimian dispensation, whereby a given religious option was closely linked to their insertion in their society. This could be of the paleo type, which although it began to decay rapidly on the level of the whole society could still be very operative in rural areas at the level of the local community, as in Lambert's Limerzel. Or it can be of the neo type, as in the triumphant sense of national providence, or among oppressed groups, defending a threatened identity against power of another religious stripe (including atheism in the case of recent Poland), or among immigrant groups. Or the sense of necessary insertion in the faith community could be underpinned by the unchallenged belief that Christianity, in whatever locally dominant form, was the indispensable matrix of civilizational order.

My hypothesis is that the post-war slide in our social imaginary more and more into a post-Durkheimian age has destabilized and undermined the various

Durkheimian dispensations. This has had the effect of either gradually releasing people to be recruited into the fractured culture, or in the case where the new consumer culture has quite dislocated the earlier outlook, of explosively expelling people into this fractured world. For, while remaining aware of the attractions of the new culture, we must never underestimate the ways in which one can also be forced into it: the village community disintegrates, the local factory closes, jobs disappear in "downsizing", the immense weight of social approval and opprobrium begins to tell on the side of the new individualism.

So the expressivist revolution has undermined some of the large-scale religious forms of the Age of Mobilization: churches whose claim on our allegiance comes partly through their connection to a political identity. Even where this identity remains strong, the connection to the spiritual has been broken for those in the new post-Durkheimian dispensation.

But there is more than this. The expressive revolution has also undermined the link between Christian faith and civilizational order. A leading feature of many of the religious forms of the Age of Mobilization described above was their strong sense of an ordered life, and their attempts to aid/persuade/pressure their members into realizing this. As I indicated above, it was perhaps inevitable, as the new disciplines became internalized, that this disciplining function would be less valued, that some of the rigid measures earlier seen as essential, such as absolute temperance, or total Sabbath observance, would appear irksome to the descendants of those who had put them in place. There was always a certain resistance to evangelicals, on the alleged grounds that they were puritans, spoil sports, sowers of division. Fictional portrayals like Dickens' Melchisedech Howler and Jabez Fireworks, as well as George Eliot's Bulstrode, express some of this hostility, and there were sometimes criticisms of Methodists, with their insistence on temperance and banning village sports, as disrupting convivial community culture, and setting people against each other.³⁶ A more general reaction set in towards the end of the nineteenth century against evangelical morality as desiccating, repressing freedom and self-development, uniformizing us, denying beauty, and the like. Writers like Shaw, Ibsen, and Nietzsche articulated this very powerfully; and something of this is expressed in J. S. Mill's famous "pagan self-assertion is better than Christian self-denial".³⁷ For his part, Arnold bemoaned the lack of cultivation of the Nonconformist Middle Class. And the culture of Bloomsbury can be seen as formed partly in reaction to this whole religious climate.

But all this was intensified by the cultural revolution of the 1960s, not only in that more people were swept into a stance in opposition to much of the religious ethic, but also in that the new sexual mores were even more strongly at odds with it.

There was a tripartite connection which seemed to many absolutely unquestionable in the past: between Christian faith and an ethic of discipline and self-control, even of abnegation, on one hand; and between this ethic and civilizational order on the other. But as I described above, this second link has come to seem less and less credible to more and more people. The pursuit of happiness has come to seem not only not to need a restrictive sexual ethic and the disciplines of deferred gratification, but actually to demand their transgression in the name of self-fulfillment. The people who feel this most strongly are, of course, precisely those for whom many of these disciplines have become second nature, not needing a strong ethical/spiritual backing to maintain themselves. To the surprise of many Weberian sociologists of my generation, the children of the 1960s and 70s managed to relax many of the traditional disciplines in their lives, while keeping them in their work life. This is not necessarily easy to manage; some people can't make it. There are moreover whole milieux, where the disciplines are still too new and distant from their way of life, for this kind of picking and choosing to be possible. As David Martin puts it, in describing the advance of Pentecostalism in the global South,

In the developed world the permissions and releases can be pursued by quite large numbers of people while ignoring the economic disciplines, at least for a quite extended period of licence, but in the developing world the economic disciplines cannot be evaded. Though in the developed world you can accept the disciplines in your working life and ignore them elsewhere, in the developing world your disciplines must govern your whole life, or you fall by the way-side—or fall into crime.³⁸

This feat of selective assumption of disciplines, which supposes a long, often multi-generational interiorization, is a crucial facilitating condition of the new stance; even though the expressive revolution provided the reason to transgress the old boundaries. At other times and places, such principled transgression seems insane, almost suicidal.

Now where the link between disciplines and civilizational order is broken, but that between Christian faith and the disciplines remains unchallenged, expressivism and the conjoined sexual revolution has alienated many people from the churches. And this on two scores. First, those who have gone along with the current changes find themselves profoundly at odds with the sexual ethic which churches have been propounding. But second, their sense of following their own path is offended by what they experience as the "authoritarian" approach of churches, laying down the law, and not waiting for a reply.

Churches find it hard to talk to people in this mindset. Talking to them is not a

matter of simply agreeing with what they say. There has been too much hype, utopian illusion, and reacting to old tabus in the sexual revolution for this to make sense. And indeed, 40 years on this is more and more evident to lots of young people. (Which is not to say that churches don't also have something to learn from this whole transition.)³⁹

But just as in face of any responsible agent, those who claim to possess some wisdom have an obligation to explain it persuasively, starting from where their interlocutor is, so here. The attachment to a rigid code, as well as the sense of being an embattled band of the faithful, developed through the defensive postures of the last two centuries, makes it almost impossible to find the language.

The break has been very profound. As Callum Brown has shown for the evangelical case, the ethical stance was predicated on an idea of women as wanting a stable family life, which was constantly endangered by male temptation, to drink, gambling, infidelity. And we see similar ideas propounded on the Catholic side. This way of defining the issues was not without basis in the past; where women feared the consequences for themselves and their children of male irresponsibility, and even violence. And it is not without basis in many milieux in the present, especially in the global South, as David Martin has pointed out.⁴⁰

We connect up here with a profound development, evident across the confessional divide over the last two or three centuries, which has been called the "feminization" of Christianity, about which Callum Brown speaks in his interesting recent book.⁴¹ It obviously has something to do with the close symbiosis established between Christian faith and the ethic of "family values" and disciplined work, which has downgraded if not been directed against military and combative modes of life, as well as forms of male sociability: drinking, gambling, sport, which took them outside the arenas of both work and home. This has not just been an issue for churches; we can see the conflict—and the ambivalence—reflected in the whole society, with the development of the ideal of "polite" society, based on commerce in the eighteenth century. Even some of the intellectual figures who defined and welcomed this new development, like Adam Smith or Adam Ferguson, expressed their misgivings about it. It might lead to an atrophy of the martial virtues necessary to the self-governing citizen. Others feared an "effeminization" of the male.⁴² Feminization of the culture went parallel to feminization of the faith.

In the Christian context, this was reflected, as well as further entrenched, by a relative drop in male practice as against female. "Les hommes s'en vont" is the unanimous lament of priests in the Ain Department in the nineteenth century, particularly in the latter half.⁴³ This absence reflects often a sense of male pride and dignity, which is seen as incompatible with a too unbridled devotion; there is something "womanly" about this kind of dedication. This sense was connected to, fed and was

fed by a certain mistrust of clerical power: the priest (whose habit resembled that of a woman) had perhaps too much power over wives and daughters; but on the other hand, that was no bad thing, because he taught them chastity and fidelity, and offered security to the male head of household. But at the same time, however good for women, this kind of acceptance of clerical leadership was incompatible with the independence which was a crucial part of male dignity. Obviously, this attitude could give a point of purchase to the philosophical anti-clericalism of the Republican.⁴⁴

But the present sexual revolution in the West has challenged the whole picture of male and female on which this understanding of civilizational order reposed. It has brought with it a gamut of feminist positions, and for some of these, women should demand for themselves the same right to sexual exploration and unfettered fulfillment which were previously thought central to male desire. This totally undercuts the conceptual base of the hitherto dominant ethic. In a line from a 1970 Church of Scotland report on the issue: "It is the promiscuous girl who is the real problem here."⁴⁵

Of course, not everybody agrees with this account of female desire. But it shows a new uncertainty about the forms of women's identity—matched by corresponding uncertainty among men. It is not possible to address the question of sexual ethics without engaging with these issues.

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Thus the generations which have been formed in the cultural revolution of the 1960s are in some respects deeply alienated from a strong traditional model of Christian faith in the West. We have already seen how they are refractory to the sexual disciplines which were part of the good Christian life as understood, for instance, in the nineteenth century Evangelical revivals in English-speaking countries. Indeed, the contemporary swing goes beyond just repudiating these very high standards. Even the limitations which were accepted generally among traditional peasant communities, which clerical minorities thought were terribly lax, and which they were always trying to get to shape up; even these have been set aside by large numbers of people in our society today. For instance, the clergy used to frown on pre-marital sex, and were concerned when couples came to be married already expecting a child. But these same peasant communities, although they thought it quite normal to try things out beforehand, particularly to be sure that they could have children, accepted that it was mandatory to confirm their union by a ceremony. Those who try to step outside these limits were brought back into line by strong social pressure, charivaris, or "rough music".⁴⁶

But we have clearly stepped way beyond these limits today. Not only do people experiment widely before settling down in a stable couple, but they also form couples without ever marrying; in addition, they form, then break, then reform these relationships. Now our peasant ancestors also engaged in a kind of "serial monogamy", but in their cases the earlier unions were always broken by death, while in ours it is divorce (or in the case of unmarried partners just moving out) which ends them.⁴⁷

There is something here deeply at odds with all forms of sexual ethic—be it folk tradition or Christian doctrine—which saw the stability of marriage as essential to social order. But there is more than this. Christians did see their faith as essential to civilizational order, but this was not the only source of the sexual ethic which has dominated modern Western Christianity. There were also strong images of spirituality which enshrined particular images of sexual purity. We can see these developing in the early modern period. John Bossy has argued that in the mediaeval understanding of the seven deadly sins, the sins of the spirit (pride, envy, anger) were seen as more grievous than those of the flesh (gluttony, lechery, sloth: avarice could be put in either column). But during the Catholic Reformation, emphasis came to be more and more on concupiscence as the crucial obstacle to sanctity.⁴⁸

What was perhaps ancient was seeing sexual ethics through a prism of pollution and purity. "Hence the ban on marriage during Lent and at other seasons, the doctrine that sexual acts between the married were always venially sinful, the purification of women after childbirth, the peculiar preoccupation with sexuality among priests."⁴⁹ The modern age seems to have spiritualized the underlying notion of purity, and made it the principal gateway (or its opposite the principal obstacle) to our approach to God.

We can think of the Catholic Reformation, and in particular in France, in the terms I have been using in this study, as an attempt to inculcate a deep, personal, devotion to God (through Christ, or Mary) in (potentially) everyone; an attempt, moreover, which was to be carried out mainly through the agency of the clergy, who would preach, persuade, cajole, push their charges towards this new, higher orientation, and away from the traditional, community, pre-Axial forms of the sacred. If we posit this as the goal, we can think of various ways in which one might try to encompass it. A heavy emphasis might be put on certain examples of sanctity, in the hope of awakening a desire to follow them. Or else, the major thrust might be to bring people by fear to shape up at least minimally. Of course, both of these paths were tried, but the overwhelming weight fell on the negative one. This was, indeed, part of the whole process of Reform from the High Middle Ages. Jean Delumeau has spoken of "la pastorale de la peur" (a pastoral policy of fear).⁵⁰

Perhaps we might just take this as a given, particularly as the tradition goes so far

back before the modern period. But we can perhaps also see it as inseparable from the Reforming enterprise itself. If the aim is not just to make certain forms of spirituality shine forth, and draw as many people as possible to them; if the goal is really to make everybody over (or everybody who is not heading for damnation), then perhaps the only way you can ever hope to produce this kind of mass movement is by leaning heavily on threat and fear. This is certainly the pattern set up very early on in the process of Reform, in the preaching mission of wandering friars from the thirteenth century.

The irony is that where clerical leadership really managed to transform a community, it was through the personal holiness of the incumbent, and not through his parading the horrors of Hell. I mentioned in the previous section the case of the *curé d'Ars*. But, as I said then, you can't expect a Jean Vianney in every parish. If the goal is to move everyone, even through spiritually unimpressive agents, then fear is your best bet.

To quote a mission preacher at the time of the Restoration in France:

Soon the hour of your death will sound; continue the web of your disorders; sink yourselves deeper in the mire of your shameful passions; insult by the impiety of your heart Him who judges even the just. Soon you will fall under the pitiless blows of death, and the measure of your iniquities will be that of the fearful torments which will then be inflicted upon you.⁵¹

Once one goes this route, something else follows. The threat has to attach to very clearly defined failures. Do this, or else (damnation will follow). The "this" has to be clearly definable. Of course, there were periods, particularly in the Calvinist theological context, in which it has to remain ultimately uncertain whether anyone had really been chosen by God. But as Weber pointed out, this is an unlivable predicament, and very soon certain signs of election crystallize out, whatever the lack of theological warrant. In the context of the Catholic Reformation, the relevant standards are not signs of election, but minimal conformity to the demands of God: the avoidance of mortal sin, or at least doing whatever is necessary to have these sins remitted.

What emerges from all this is what we might call "moralism", that is, the crucial importance given to a certain code in our spiritual lives. We should all come closer to God; but a crucial stage on this road has to be the minimal conformity to the code. Without this, you aren't even at the starting line, as it were, of this crucial journey. You are not in the game at all. This is perhaps not an outlook which it is easy to square with a reading of the New Testament, but it nevertheless achieved a kind of hegemony across broad reaches of the Christian church in the modern era.

This outlook ends up putting all the emphasis on what we should do, and/or what we should believe, to the detriment of spiritual growth. Sister Elisabeth Germain, analyzing a representative catechism in wide use in the nineteenth century, concludes that

morality takes precedence over everything, and religion becomes its servant. Faith and the sacraments are no longer understood as the basis of the moral life, but as duties to be carried out, as truths that we must believe, and as means to help us fulfill these moral obligations.⁵²

Now one can have clerically-driven Reform, powered by fear of damnation, and hence moralism, and the code around which this crystallizes can nevertheless take different forms. The central issues could be questions of charity versus aggression, anger, vengeance; or a central vector can be this issue of sexual purity. Again, both are present, but with a surprisingly strong emphasis on the sexual. We saw above that in a sense, the emphasis shifted in this direction with the Catholic Reformation. It is not that sins of aggression, violence, injustice were neglected. On the contrary. It is just that the code, the definition of what it is to get to the starting line, was extremely rigid on sexual matters. There were mortal sins in the other dimensions as well, for instance, murder, and there were many in the domain of church rules (skipping Mass, for instance); but you could go quite far in being unjust and hard-hearted in your dealings with subordinates and others, without incurring the automatic exclusion you incur by sexual license. Sexual deviation, and not listening to the church, seemed to be the major domains where automatic excluders lurked. Sexual purity, along with obedience, were therefore given extraordinary salience.

Hence the tremendous (as it seems to us) disproportionate fuss which clergy made in nineteenth-century France about banning dancing, cleaning up folk festivals, and the like. (There are analogues, of course, among Evangelicals in Protestant countries.) Young people were refused communion, or absolution, unless they gave it up altogether. The concern with this issue appears at certain moments obsessive.

I can't pretend to be able to explain this; but perhaps a couple of considerations can put it in context. The first is the pacification of modern society that I discussed in previous chapters; the fact that the level of everyday domestic violence, caused by brigands, feuds, rebellions, clan rivalries, and the like, declined between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries. As violence and anger became less overwhelming realities of life, the attention could shift towards purity. The second is the obvious remark that sexual abstinence was a central fact of life for a celibate clergy. It is perhaps not surprising that they made a lot of it.

In any case, it was clearly fated that this combination of clerical Reform from the

top, moralism, and repression of sexual life, would come into conflict with the developing modernity that I have been describing in these pages. The emphasis on individual responsibility and freedom will eventually run athwart the claims of clerical control. And the post-Romantic reactions against the disciplines of modernity, the attempts to rehabilitate the body and the life of feeling, will eventually fuel a reaction against sexual repression.

These tensions were already evident before the mid-twentieth century. I mentioned above the decline in male practice, in relation to females, from the late eighteenth century on. One common explanation I mentioned there invoked images of male pride and dignity. But we might also come at the same phenomenon from another direction, stressing that this more rigid sexual code frontally attacked certain male practices, particularly the rowdy life-style of young men. And perhaps more profoundly, it seems that the combination of sexual repression and clerical control, as it was felt in the practice of confession, drove men away. Clerical control went against their sense of independence, but this became doubly intolerable when the control took the form of opening up the most reserved and intimate facet of their lives. Hence the immense resistance to confession, at just about any period, and the attempt to confess, if one had to, not to one's own curé, but to a visiting priest on mission to whom one was unknown. As Delumeau put it, "la raison principale des silences volontaires au confessionnal fut la honte d'avouer des péchés d'ordre sexuel". Eventually, this tension drove men out of the confessional; as Gibson describes the sequel in the nineteenth century, "unable to take communion, and angry at the prying of the clergy, they increasingly abandoned the Church".⁵³

In order better to understand the gap in outlook here, it might be useful to review some of the features of the sexual revolution, which up to now I have just been invoking globally. It too has a pre-history, some of which I have invoked. We might even stretch this history out over centuries, and take as our starting point certain mediaeval Catholic teachings which looked askance at sexual pleasure, even among married couples in the process of procreation. Over against this, Reform thinkers rehabilitated married love as a good of its own. The "mutual comfort" that marriage gave included sexual intercourse, which was given a positive evaluation by this phrase. But sex still had its primary goal in procreation. "Unnatural" acts were those which broke with any procreative purpose. For these reasons, and because they could lead us away from a centring of our lives on God, the sensual or erotic side of love was considered dangerous and questionable.⁵⁴

An analogous view was very strong in the Victorian era, in both England and America. Sex was meant to bond the couple. Sex is healthy, and hence pleasure is attached to it, but pleasure shouldn't be its main object.⁵⁵ However, the framework in

which this understanding stood was very different. It was, of course, still considered a Christian doctrine. But it was also, and mainly, justified in terms of science. Medical experts, and their ideas of health, were as important if not more so than divines with their notions about God's will.

We can see here a further development of the crucial turn in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which I described above: the equation of God's will for us with the reigning conception of human flourishing, in that case defined by the Modern Moral Order. God designs Nature, and he does so with our good in mind. His will can therefore be read off this design. We put ourselves in tune with its benign functioning, and we are following His will. Locke argues this way in his *Treatises of Civil Government*. With the advance of science, this opens the way for a naturalization, a medicalization of sexual ethics, without any sense that this is somehow displacing faith.

But the background assumptions are very different. For the Puritan, the right ordering of our sexual lives can only come with grace and sanctification. It's not something available to the ordinary, non-deviant or non-depraved person. (In a parallel way, one might say, ancient ethics based on Nature were thought to propound a perfection which the vast majority of ordinary human beings couldn't attain to; that's why whole classes of people: non-Hellenes, slaves, workmen, women, weren't really candidates for virtue.) By contrast, the medicalized view offers us a picture of health, which ought to be attainable by the average person, bar some terrible defect in nature, or depraved training. The point where, as it were, the demands of the good and our sexual lives meet should be right here in everyday life, and not at the end of a transformation which takes us beyond ordinary flourishing.

Thus the medicalizing nineteenth century needed an explanation why normal sexual fulfillment was not very widespread, although this need could be hidden by a lot of the reticence and cover-up which surrounded the lives of the respectable. But when the issue was faced, a lot of weight was put on depraved training (evident in immigrants, natives of colonies, the working classes, etc.); and also as the century goes on, more ominously, on supposed differences of race. There were certain "degenerate types" and certain inferior races.

We are still living with the consequences of this elision of virtue, health, and even sanctity, opposing together vice, sickness and sin. For one, it can generate the negative moral aura which surrounds sickness, the notion that those who suffer from cancer are somehow themselves to blame, which Susan Sontag has so vigorously protested against.⁵⁶ The healthy feel a morally-tinged goodness, and the sick a vice-tainted badness. We are very far from the older Christian perception of the ill as a locus of suffering which brings Christ close to them, and hence also the rest of us.

Moreover, there is a crucial difference between health as conceived by modern

medicine and the older (and I think deeper) notions of virtue. In the case of health, what is required for the fullness of excellence is split in two. There is a knowledge component and a practice component. But these may reside in quite different people. The expert may be leading the most "unhealthy" life, without ceasing to be an expert; whereas the dutiful patient, who (we hope) is brimming with health, understands very little why his régime is a good one. We are in a different universe from that of, say, Aristotelian ethics, where a concept like 'phronesis' doesn't allow us to separate a knowledge component from the practice of virtue.⁵⁷ This becomes possible with modern science, construed as knowledge of an objectified domain, as with our contemporary Western medicine. Even more striking, this recourse to objectified knowledge begins in modern culture to take over ethics. On the utilitarian viewpoint, for example, the knowledge/expertise necessary to make the calculus which will reveal the right action is quite unconnected from one's own motivation in relation to the good. It is the kind of knowledge which can permit the bad person to do harm, just as much as the well-disposed agent to do good. This is precisely the kind of knowledge which Aristotle *contrasted* to practical wisdom (phronesis). Analogously, for many contemporary neo-Kantians, it might seem that what you need is the sharpness to follow the logic of an argument, another capacity which seems detachable from moral insight.

It goes without saying that this emphasis on objectified expertise over moral insight is the charter for new and more powerful forms of paternalism in our world. Who dares argue with "science", whether delivered by doctors, psychiatrists, or visiting economists from the IMF telling you to slash health care in order to achieve fiscal "balance"?

But then, to return to our story, in the hands of certain writers at the turn of the century, "science" itself began to break the alliance with religion. For thinkers like Freud, Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter, sexual gratification was either itself good, or at least seen as a virtually unstoppable force. This fed into a counter-culture, some strands of which saw sexuality as a form of Dionysian release from discipline and repression. Around the beginning of the twentieth century, all this came together with new social conditions, mainly in cities, where young people could pair off without supervision. The 1920s was aware of a new kind of freedom which young people, particularly women, were enjoying, which took the form of a sensuality unconnected to marriage or procreation.

All this involved: (a) a hesitant lifting of the age-old denigration of sensuality (at least in white, middle-class circles), and (b) a hesitant affirmation of women's desire (often denied in the high Victorian period), and of their right to seek pleasure as well. This was, of course, still fraught with danger, because women still had to bear the brunt of any negative consequences of pregnancy.

If we fast-forward to the 1960s, we have, of course, to take account of new social factors: women in the work-force, the contraceptive revolution, and others. But just as above, my interest here is to articulate the ethical changes of this time, rather than enumerating the facilitating causes. What were the main strands of this revolution?

There was indeed, one which was characterized by a supposedly worldly-wise hedonism, the one associated with *Playboy*. But the main ones associated with the movements of students and young people were fourfold: (1) a continuation and radicalization of (a) above, the rehabilitation of sensuality as a good in itself; (2) the radicalization of (b): affirming the equality of the sexes, and in particular articulating a new ideal in which men and women come together as partners, freed of their gender roles;⁵⁸ (3) a widespread sense of Dionysian, even “transgressive” sex as liberating; and (4) a new conception of one’s sexuality as an essential part of one’s identity, which not only gave an additional meaning to sexual liberation, but also became the basis for gay liberation, and the emancipation of a whole host of previously condemned forms of sexual life.⁵⁹

All this shows that the sexual revolution was an integral part of the 60s, as I defined them above; that is, that it was moved by the same complex of moral ideas, in which discovering one’s authentic identity and demanding that it be recognized (strand 4) was connected to the goals of equality (strand 2), and of the rehabilitation of the body and sensuality, the overcoming of the divisions between mind and body, reason and feeling (strands 1 and 3). We cannot simply treat it as an outbreak of hedonism, as though its total definition could fit into the discourse of Hefner and *Playboy*.

But just as above, the fact that there was one interconnected ideal here did nothing to guarantee its realization. The hard discontinuities and dilemmas which beset human sexual life, and which most ethics tend to ignore or downplay, had to assert themselves: the impossibility of integrating the Dionysian into a continuing way of life, the difficulty of containing the sensual within a continuing really intimate relation, the impossibility of escaping gender roles altogether, and the great obstacles to redefining them, at least in the short run. Not to mention that the celebration of sexual release could generate new ways in which men could objectify and exploit women.⁶⁰ A lot of people discovered the hard way that there were dangers as well as liberation in throwing over the codes of their parents.

However, once again as in the earlier discussion, we have to recognize that the moral landscape has changed. People who have been through the upheaval have to find forms which can allow for long-term loving relations between equal partners, who will in many cases also want to become parents, and bring up their children in love and security. But these can’t be simply identical to the codes of the past; insofar

as these were connected with, e.g., the denigration of sexuality, horror at the Dionysian, fixed gender roles, or a refusal to discuss identity issues. It is a tragedy that the codes which churches want to urge on people still (at least seem to) suffer from one or more, even sometimes all, of these defects.

The inability is made the more irremediable by the unfortunate fusion of Christian sexual ethics with certain models of the “natural”, even in the medical sense. This not only makes them hard to redefine; it also hides from view how contingent and questionable this elision is, how little it can be justified as intrinsically and essentially Christian. Once again, the eighteenth century identification of God’s will with certain supposed human goods is operating as a great engine of secularization (engendering secularity 2).

The repellent effect of this fused vision is clearly at its maximum in the Age of Authenticity, with a widespread popular culture in which individual self-realization and sexual fulfillment are interwoven. The irony is that this alienation takes place just when so many of the features of the Reform-clerical complex were called into question at Vatican II. Unquestionably, clericalism, moralism, and the primacy of fear were largely repudiated. Other elements of the complex were less clearly addressed. It’s not clear that the full negative consequences of the drive to Reform itself, with its constant attempt to purge popular religion of its “unchristian” elements, were properly understood. Certain attempts at Reform in Latin America, post-Vatican II and in its spirit, like those around “liberation theology” seem to have repeated the old pattern of “clerical dechristianization”, depreciating and banning popular cults, and alienating many of the faithful, some of whom—ironically—have turned to Protestant churches in the region, who have a greater place for the miraculous and the festive than the progressive “liberators” had.⁶¹ A strange turn of events, which would surprise Calvin, were he to return! As to the issue of sexual morality, attempts to review this, in the question of birth control, were abandoned in a fit of clerical nerves about the “authority” of the Church.

In fact, the present position of the Vatican seems to want to retain the most rigid moralism in the sexual field, relaxing nothing of the rules, with the result that people with “irregular” sexual lives are (supposed to be) automatically denied the sacraments, while as-yet-unconvicted mafiosi, not to speak of unrepentant latifundistas in the Third World, and Roman aristocrats with enough clout to wangle an “annulment”, find no bar.

But however incomplete and hesitantly followed the turnings taken at Vatican II, it has clearly relativized the old Reform-clerical complex. It has opened a field in which you don’t have to be deeply read in the history of the Church to see that the dominant spiritual fashion of recent centuries is not normative. Which is not to say that this whole spirituality, aspiring to a full devotion to God, and fuelled by abne-

gation and a strong image of sexual purity, is to be in turn condemned. This would be a clerical-Reform way of dealing with the Reform-clerical complex! It is clear that there have been and are today celibate vocations which are extremely spiritually fertile, and many of these turn centrally on aspirations to sexual abstinence and purity. It would just repeat the mistake of the Protestant Reformers to turn around and depreciate these. The fateful feature of Reform-clericalism, which erects such a barrier between the Church and contemporary society, is not its animating spirituality; our world is if anything drowned in exalted images of sexual fulfillment, and needs to hear about paths of renunciation. The deviation was to make this take on sexuality mandatory for everyone, through a moralistic code which made a certain kind of purity a base condition for relating to God through the sacraments. What Vatican rule-makers and secularist ideologies unite in not being able to see, is that there are more ways of being a Catholic Christian than either have yet imagined. And yet this shouldn't be so hard to grasp. Even during those centuries when the Reform-clerical outlook has dominated pastoral policy, there were always other paths present, represented sometimes by the most prominent figures, including (to remain with the French Catholic Reformation) St. François de Sales and Fénelon, not to speak of Pascal, who though he gave comfort to the fear-mongers, offered an incomparably deeper vision.

But as long as this monolithic image dominates the scene, the Christian message as vehicled by the Catholic Church will not be easy to hear in wide zones of the Age of Authenticity. But then these are not very hospitable to a narrow secularism either.