

ACTA

FUNDACIÓ PER A LES IDEES
I LES ARTS

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RESOLVING

The Contradictions of Modernity and Modernism:

The Case of America

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*Medievalism
rejection*

quest of coherence

The years of the modern--the period which opened explosively with the French Revolution and the belief that a religion of humanity would replace traditional faiths; the conviction of unlimited progress in man's material achievements and the spread, if not the dominance, of rationality; the creative period of a cultural modernism that broke open the ordered perceptions of space and time and brought in a syntax of disjunctive forms--are drawing to a close. The Russian and even the Chinese Revolutions, which adherents thought would be the fulfillment of the French, are now seen to be incredibly coercive efforts by ruthless leaders to transform "backward" peasant countries into "historic nations." Secular ideologies have become stilted. Technology, as an engine of progress, has become demonized by the fears of those who emphasize its spillover effects. The experimentalism of avant-gardes has become the trivialized succession of fashion. All hopes have seemingly been betrayed. The Owl of Minerva which once flew at dusk has folded its wings, because the direction of History has been lost, and it knows not what to tell us. We are left once more unaided, and have to find our own way. How do we understand the forces that have taken us where we are? In the words swirling around us, where are the stepping-stones that can take us to firmer ground? What is the modern, modernity, modernism (in its aesthetic and Catholic varieties), modernization, post-modern, and even (Clie help me) pre-post-modern, that past-imperfect transition to the new grammar of discourse?

When and how what we call "the modern" emerged is an inchoate question. One can begin, historically, with the waning of the Middle Ages and the rise of what Benjamin Nelson has called new "structures of consciousness," critical logics of casuistry and conscience which begin to emphasize

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individual interpretation, though the dogmas remained. For Jacob Burckhardt the modern begins, of course, in the Renaissance, with the emphasis on uniqueness, originality, and putting one's name on stone: but Burckhardt was more interested in the artist and the condottieri, the act of will rather than the institution. One can date the modern, aesthetically, with the rise of the museum, where cultural artifacts are wrenched from their traditional places and displayed in a new context of syncretism: history mixed up and consciousness jumbled, as when Napoleon ransacked Egypt and Europe to stuff the Louvre with his trophies; yet various emperors have always displayed their power by placing their heads on coins and their heels on culture. And if one believes that the touchstone of understanding is epistemological (rather than poetic), one would have to date the creation from Kant, and the proposition of an activity theory of knowledge, as against the classical (and even Cartesian) contemplative theories that derived knowledge from pre-existing Forms, so that, as Kant says in the Prolegomena: "The understanding does not derive its laws (a priori) from, but prescribes them to, nature," a theorem that is carried out in modern art as well as in politics.¹

It is clear in all these variegated examples that what defines the modern is a sense of openness to change, of detachment from place and time, of social and geographical mobility, and a readiness, if not eagerness, to welcome the new, even at the expense of tradition and the past. It is the proposition that there are no ends or purposes given "in nature;" that the in-

1. Kant's Prolegomena, edited by Paul Carus (La Salle, Illinois, 1945), p. 82. If the reference to politics seems strange in this context, I have in mind the contrast with the classical view that the natural order, the moral order, and the social order are all akin in having an entelechy, or inner design, defined by a telos, so that the proper ends of nature, morality, and the polis are given in the unity of purposes that exist in the constitutive structures of physis and nomos. Modernity, beginning with Hobbes, dirempts that unity and insists that the ends are individual and varied-- the hedonistic desires of the self--hence the need for an imposed order on the polis, to be created by contract, rather than the telos of the moral order. Or, to put it somewhat differently, for Hobbes the appetitive is the true order of nature, and the rational and the moral are "myths" imposed by philosophers.

dividual, and his or her self-realization, is the new standard of judgment; and that one can remake one's self and remake society in an effort to achieve those goals. Revolution, which once had been a ricorso in an endless cycle, now becomes a rupture with the revolving wheel, and begins the impulse to destroy old worlds and to create new ones.

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But this does not give us an "ordering principle" with which to frame these changes and sort out our terms. Let me begin with two principles, one metaphysical, the other sociological.

On the metaphysical frame, modernity is the move from God and Nature, the two axes of Christian and classical thought, to History as the quest for the self-realization of Man. It is the descent from natural law, which sought to bind the divine and the human in one principle, to the philosophy of history as the ground of judgment.

Philosophy had been the quest for the structure of nature. To the classical mind, the phrase "the Philosophy of History" would be an oxymoron, in that philosophy is the realm of the timeless, while History is the unwinding of Chronos. Yet it took the paradoxical wit of Voltaire to invent the phrase, and for Hegel to propose its logic, which pre-empted previous ways of looking at man's incomplete existence in this world. The difference turned on Hegel's statement that meaning was now to be found in History, as part of the human process of rational unfolding, rather than imposed on History by Providence, as in the theology of Augustine. Fate had been brought into History: World history is the court of world reason. Judgment can only come at the completion of History, so that natural law, and even religion, are inadequate as standards for morals and law. It is only after the end of History (and the end of Art as an incomplete search for aesthetic order) that philosophy as the realization of perfected Form, the realm undistorted by interests or passions, would come into its own.

In trumping the principle of transcendence, the genius of Hegel--it is the cunning of philosophy--locked together the seeming incommensurables of absolute historicism and historical relativism in one frame. Absolute his-

toricism was the telos of History, the fixed point at the end of history when the many dualities into which human life had been split would be reunited. Historical relativism explained the variations of societies and peoples within time, and the reasons for such variations. It is a striking illustration that with the dialectic one could eat one's cake and have it as well.

All this was possible because, paradoxically, Hegel was the last of the ancients and the first of the moderns. He was the last of the ancients because of his belief in a telos, the "realization" of an end that was once assumed to be immanent in nature, but was now to be found in History. He was the first of the moderns since Hegel had grasped the point that once history was unloosed from nature (or God), the self-infinite spirit of man, the Wissendrang of Faust, the impulse to go beyond--beyond morality, beyond law, beyond religion--would become the distinctive mark of Cain on the forehead of the modern.²

2. But if one does go "beyond," there is the stark question, which Hegel posed in the remarkable penultimate section of the Phenomenology, of how we live when there also arises the realization that in going "beyond," "God is dead." Hegel's first use of that phrase ("the bitter pain ... the cruel expression") is taken from a hymn of Luther's; but Luther used it as a call for renewed faith. But for Hegel, almost three hundred years later, "the realization of religion" (i.e. its fulfillment) and the key symbols of Christian thought have become dissolved. The early Christians had an image of kenosis, or of God "emptying himself of his Divine Being through factual Incarnation." But as the historical process of the rationalization of religion unfolded, the pictorial, figurative image of Christ had become an "abstract negativity," so that, as Hegel puts it, "between the religious consciousness" and the "spirit of communion," there arises a divide that modern man cannot bridge. In effect, says Hegel, the original Christian hope of unity with the Deity has become impossible, and even Absolute Knowledge for man himself may become, as Hegel puts it in a shattering phrase (that is almost the last sentence of the section) "the Golgotha of the Absolute Spirit." That is the unspoken tragedy of the belief in History.

Hegel writes about the subjectivity becoming actual Spirit as it approaches the Absolute:

"The death of this pictorial idea [of Christ] implies at the same time the death of the abstraction of Divine being, which is not yet affirmed as a self. That death is the bitterness of feeling of the 'unhappy consciousness,' when it feels that God Himself is dead. This harsh utterance is the expression of the inmost self-knowledge which has simply self for its content; it is the return of consciousness into the depth of darkness where Ego is nothing but bare identity with Ego, a darkness distinguishing and nothing more outside it." The Phenomenology of Spirit, transl. by J.B. Baillie (London: Allen & Unwin, 1955), pp. 781-782.

For the entire range of the discussion, see "Revealed Religion" (Section

The second ordering principle in the skein of modernity is the change from natural law to natural history. The beginning is not with Vico, from whom the idea of a ricorso, a metaphysical thread, remains, but with Montesquieu and the Spirit of the Laws. The way to understand morals and philosophy, said Montesquieu, is to understand the variability of societies and the different "spirit" or character they represented in types of societies. Men are shaped, he wrote, by many things: climate, religion, the examples of the past, customs, and a host of other factors. In the intercalation of such factors, societies are the result of a natural (i.e. historical, for Montesquieu) development, and any understanding, to be meaningful, must arise from a knowledge of the way those factors have combined to shape the distinctive configuration of that society. Any laws adopted by a political regime, in order to be viable, had to be related to the specific "spirit," i.e. the character, of that society. Without that understanding, the laws were bound to fail.³ With Montesquieu, sociology was emerging from the wings of philosophy and moving to the center of the historical stage.

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If sociology had moved to the forefront of the proscenium, we can identify several propositions that framed its outlook, an outlook wholly at variance with classical and medieval thought--with ways of looking at the world, the kinds of justification men sought for their lives, and their understanding of their nature. What those propositions add up to is an extraordinary change in consciousness, a view of social order and liberty which emerged in a small

(Footnote 2, continued)

VII C, *ibid.*, pp. 750-785). The first references to the death of God are on pp. 752-753; the discussion of kenosis (my phrase, from early Christian theology), on p. 780; the statements on the "death of this pictorial idea [which is] at the same time the death of the abstraction of Divine Being," on pp. 781-782; and the discussion of the separation of the religious consciousness from the spirit of communion, on pp. 783-785. The phrase "the Golgotha of Absolute Spirit," on p. 908.

For a sympathetic reading of this section, and the possibility of the resolution of Hegel's despair on the political level, at least, see Judith N. Shklar, Freedom & Independence: a study of the political ideas of Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit" (Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 203-208.

3. See The Spirit of the Laws, especially Books XIV to XIX. The crucial statement on variations and the factors behind them is made in Book XII. See p. 293 of the Hafner edition (New York, 1949), transl. by Thomas Nugent, with an introduction by Franz Neumann.

section of the Western world and which, in the economic and political spheres, began to spread over the next two hundred years throughout the rest of the world. There is no single term to encapsulate it, other than modernity, though that is more of an attitude and temper, and fails to specify institutional structures. Yet we can, perhaps, specify five dimensions, as follows:

Society is not a natural order, defined by a telos, but a social contract in which the individual, not the polis or the ~~community~~ ^{community}, is the primary unit of society, and where the rights of the individual (natural and inalienable), not those of a corporate body, become the foundation of the political order. The new issues of political philosophy, then, are the modes of consent: which rights could be surrendered and which should not; how one defines liberty in the negative and positive senses; what are the boundaries of the public and the private--questions raised by Hobbes and Locke, Bentham and Mill, Isaiah Berlin and John Rawls, and which remain today the central dilemmas of liberalism in a collective world.

Social life was seen as a movement from nature to culture, in which human nature was seen as a "second nature" imposed on an original human nature. Social life, thus, was an artifice, a set of multiple roles (and often vices) in which the definition of the true or "authentic" self becomes the troublesome question. For Rousseau (as later for Freud) social life was a loss of "natural liberty" in the service of civilization. For Diderot, in Rameau's Nephew, there was the dilemma of the divided self, the two voices within the same person, a theme which Hegel, in the Phenomenology (following Goethe's translation of Diderot's posthumous work), elaborated in the powerful section on "spirit in self-estrangement," the angoisse of the alienated consciousness seeking reconciliation or unity in art, if no longer in religion.

The criticism of religion as a veil over man's self-understanding. For every Enlightenment thinker, from Voltaire to Marx, religion was a superstition, the residue of the childhood of the human race that would disappear when men, in their maturity, come to see the world not darkly, but

clearly. It was no accident, so to speak, that the criticism of religion was the foundation of the criticism of society, and, conversely, in the ripostes of de Maistre and Bonald, that religion was defended as the necessary shield against the anarchic or ideolatrous impulses of men. In the radical social criticism, theology was to give way to anthropology, and man's efforts to reshape the world the attempt to realize heaven on earth. The criticism of religion, the demystification of the Word, was thus the starting point of ideology; the effort to change the world, the replacement of religion by ideology.

The autonomy of realms. In the classical view, ethics and politics, law and morality, are joined. In the modern view, these are sundered. Thus the economy is no longer subject to traditional or moral rules (e.g. the "just price") but is an autonomous activity, operating within its own self-contained boundaries, subject to its own laws, just as the discipline of economics itself comes to be a set of self-contained equations, detached from institutions. In culture the aesthetic separates itself from the moral, and the impulse to experiment and explore, to go to the depths of the new, knows no boundaries, the sensuous and the shocking have no restraints, there is "nothing sacred." And in the polity, law is independent of morality; law is purely formal and procedural, defining the rules of the game, in order to permit individuals to freely negotiate their own arrangements, so that in economic transactions as in sexual conduct, morality becomes a private matter. Given the separation of realms, no single code, moral or religious, controls all judgments. Similarly, the idea of natural law, like the natural order, is rejected as having no meaning.

The variability of human nature. The classical idea of a pan-human nature, a set of constants or human universals, is replaced by the belief in variability, a variability defined by history or culture. For Marx, man was defined less by his species being than by history, a history that is the unfolding of man's powers acquired through techne. In gaining new powers, he also finds new horizons, new needs and new wants, and so transforms himself. In anthropological theory, man is bound less by biol-

ogy than by culture and environment, so that one cannot specify any definition of man by essential characteristics, other than the elementary ones of satisfying hunger and reproduction. More often than not, though, anthropology confused variable practices with human nature; if one accepted the historicism and cultural relativism thus expressed, there is the problem of how we understand the past and those in different cultures in relation to ourselves, if any such understanding is at all possible. And, in rejecting biology and the past, a new psychological view of "modern man" emerged, so that if one asked "Who are you?" that new man would not reply, as in a traditional society, "I am the son of my father" (thus emphasizing the continuity of generations) but "I am I," a quasi-palindrome that asserts the self-referential character of the modern personality.

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Thus far, I have been speaking of modernity as that great sea-change of consciousness, protean and diffuse, which focuses on a single theme: the rejection of a revealed order or natural order, and the substitution of the individual, the ego, the self, as the lodestar of consciousness.

What we have here, curiously, is the social reversal of the Copernican revolution: if our planet is no longer the center of the physical universe and our earthly habitat is diminished in the horizons of nature, the ego/self takes the throne as the center of the moral universe, making itself the arbiter of all decisions. There are no doubts about the moral authority of the self; that is simply taken as a "given." The only question is what constitutes fulfillment of the self: endless pleasure, as in the round of Don Juan; the pyramidal accumulation of material goods; the private decision about moral conduct, as, for example, choice on abortion as against "public" morality or "natural" laws. In short, the principle of modernity, though claiming autonomy for each realm, cuts across the

The name for the cultural impulse is "modernism." Modernism, in chiaroscuro terms, is the rejection of classicism; of order, symmetry, proportion; of realism; of the "correspondence theory of truth," which is the exact relation of sign to object. It is the turn to a pragmatic theory in which usage and experiment dictate interpretation and meaning. It is no accident, so to speak, that the change in culture parallels that in philosophy, in which Peirce's attention to the ambiguity of signs, and William James's view of the world as a perceptual flux caught momentarily in different conceptual nets, anticipate multiplicity in painting, as in Cubism, or the stream of consciousness in the novel. In modernism, representation and even reference is demoted to a secondary role or eliminated. Objects are things in themselves. When Mallarmé declared that in a poem a rose did not refer to a rose, but was a "color word" of its own, or when Magritte later declared, in the lettering of a painting, "This is not a pipe" (and it is not; it is an image or a perceptual stimulus), both were proclaiming the autonomy of the word or of the sign, as signifiers and signified.

If there is a single axis to this crossover from the contemplative and the bounded to the modern, it is the diremption of mimesis, the shattering of the mirror of nature, particularly in art. Much of what happened follows the course (in the English language) of the single prefix re, the power of the artist, as John Dewey put it in Art as Experience, to dictate the re: the re-arrangement of forms, the re-orientation of vision, the re-design of objects, and more broadly, the effort of reformers and revolutionaries to re-make society and the self. What makes culture "modern," then, is the crossover from the external world and a copy theory of knowledge as primary, to the subjective standpoint of the knower, and the artist, at the apex of imagination.

Every rising movement has its imperialist phase and its hubris. When Marcel Duchamp took a urinal (a pissoir) and called it an aesthetic object, he was speaking from the new throne of art. He meant it half as a Dadaist jape (one more derision of the bourgeoisie, which immediately purchased the urinal and installed it in a museum) and half as a serious philosophical

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question as to what constitutes an aesthetic object: is it something inherent in the character of the object itself, or is it the decision of the artist? But that is only one kind of issue: there is another fateful dimension. When aestheticism becomes an ideology, and ideology replaces religion, the artist replaces the priest, proclaiming himself the voyant and the prophet.

At the turn of the century, aestheticism became a temple and a cult (as with Swinburne and Huysmans). But then it became a revolutionary surge which sought to repudiate the bounded limits of perception and the everyday routines of life. In the Futurism of Marinetti in Italy, of Khlebnikov and Mayakovsky in Russia, and the Vorticism of Wyndham Lewis in England, there was, on the formal level, an emphasis in art on movement and motion, of multiplicity and montage, the unity of kinesis on a whirling kinematic screen. But such art, when it spills over into life, also spills blood. What it offered was a malodorous mixture of technology and biological vitalism, an "animal consciousness" (as Wyndham Lewis put it) that was transmuted through machine imagery (and machine weapons) into a destructive consciousness that hailed itself as creative.

All of this began as theatricality, yet for Marinetti (as for Mayakovsky) "everything of value is theatrical," the pose of gesture and declamation. In Italy, one saw the effort to fuse the warrior and the artist, in order to resolve the split between thought and action which modern rationalism had produced. D'Annunzio used the arditi, the jeunesse dorée of Italian youth, to storm Fiume as a form of political drama. And it was the "triumph of the will" in Germany, its martial beat of jackboots, that attracted the expressionist poet Gottfried Benn and the volkisch philosopher Martin Heidegger to Nazism as the way of expressing disdain for the insipidities of bourgeois life. (Can one say, though it is perhaps too facile, that as Marxism is the joining of economics to politics, Fascism juxtaposes culture to politics?)

Thus modernity in its starkest form, the extremes of modernism in culture; yet extremes, though coarse, often reveal a salient outline. As in aesthetics, so in economics. It is called capitalism. What are the words that define the modern capitalist mode? Accumulation, optimization, maximization, the highest yield on capital, and other terms that signify the impulse to burst the bonds of traditionalism (the backward-bending supply curve of labor) and "re-order" work, products and market^s in the ceaseless urge to "make it new."

Is it an accident (again?) that Keynes spoke of the "animal spirits" that drive the entrepreneur, the financier, and the speculator to what Schumpeter called the "creative destruction" of the traditional world? We have long been mesmerized by Max Weber in his emphasis on the sober, the practical, the methodical, the rational (and limiting) organization of capitalist routines, and ignored the other roots which Werner Sombart discovered, the adventurers and great buccaneers of trade and mining (such as Cecil Rhodes) who plundered the resources of the world, and the robber-barrons who built the railways and skyscrapers of the modern era (men who achieved their apotheosis in the fiction and philosophy of Ayn Rand).

(Capitalism has been a curious mixture of interests and passions, and as the passions have become subdued, the interests have also become routinized. The overtly naked exploitations in the past, of men and the earth, have given way to corporate bureaucracies, harnessing technology to increase wealth. Yet as new technologies begin to shape new organizational forms, that phase too, is passing and a new kind of economics may be arising, an economics largely different from the mass-production systems of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But that is another story, and outside the compass of this paper.)

And in politics: the word for modernity is liberalism. In classical thought (at least in its normative sense), the political is also the social, and the polis is the common bond prior to the individual. In the redefinition of the polis that one finds in Renaissance civic humanism, the normative ideal is republic^{an} virtue, the primacy of the civitas in the speci-

fication of the common good.

Yet the modern man, as Rousseau pointed out so acutely, is both bourgeois and citoyen, impelled by his own self-interest yet responsible to the commonwealth. Liberalism, in its early modern form, is the effort to circumscribe the political, to separate the social from the political, to enhance the private realm and reduce the public sphere. But liberalism has been caught between the conflicting claims of the economy and morality. Thus, in one transmutation, where the economic sphere had been unrestrained, liberalism (in this respect a form of social democracy) invoked the "public interest" as against private economic power to make moral claims for regulation. Yet in the sphere of moral conduct (in particular, personal and sexual relations) it has sought to limit the incursions of public morality into the private sphere, and insisted on the complete free choice of personal decision in matters of life-style. Liberalism has thus lived on a cleft stick, unable to formulate a coherent philosophy of moral obligation and of the proper distinctions between the public and private good.

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Although I have been tracking three realms, there is, as I indicated, a singular theme that unites them, the claim of autonomy. And in that claim we have the grounds of the contemporary crisis, for the claims to autonomy are the claims to pursue ends derived from the character of the realms themselves: to transgress traditional moral boundaries in the name of the aesthetic; to pursue economic ends by destroying the old--buildings, monuments, even cemeteries--if they stand in the way of maximum profit; and to deny the idea of public morality in the defense of one's personal fulfillments and preferences.

Are there to be no limits on impulse and autonomy, in any or all of these realms? And if so, how are they to be defined, and by whom? If we accept some of the claims of tradition, how are they to be re-established (I accept the irony in this use of the prefix re)? And if we still find

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inadequate the claims of religion and the conceptions of natural law, what are the grounds in moral philosophy that provide for a new conception of the polis and the public good?⁴

II.

Let me bring this discussion from sociological generalization^z to historical particularity: a case study of the United States and the several disjunctions that have been evident in its history--the tensions between economic modernity and cultural modernism, and the contradictions within the character of modernity itself as exemplified in the history of the American polity.

For many writers, the United States was always considered the embodiment of modernity, "the land of the future ... the land of desire for all those who are weary of the historical lumber-room of old Europe," as Hegel put it. Yet Hegel also said, in the introduction to his lectures on the philosophy of history, that America was still only a dream, and in tracing the vicissitudes of the Begriff, he retreated to "the Old World--the scene of World's history." Today, if we are mindful of what is (even if it is not rational), we have to be concerned with the United States, though as

4. I have sought to restate here, on the terrain of political philosophy, the sociological distinctions I laid out in my Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism. There I posed the paradox of capitalism and modernism as being brothers under the skin, emerging from the same historical womb, yet developing a fierce antagonism to each other; the fear of the bourgeoisie, who were tearing up the economic world, of the libertine impulses of the avant-garde and bohème, and the contempt for the sensation-seeking poets in the costive bourgeoisie. And yet, in the transmutation of capitalism, we find modernism becoming the new chic mode of the modern culturati, who adopt it as a free life-style, while corporate capitalism becomes the major consumer of modern art, which it places on its board-room walls or gives to museums.

The further sociological questions about the character of American society--what I have called here the contradictions of modernity and modernism--are discussed in the following sections. Yet I am painfully mindful of the moral-philosophical dilemmas, and I can only reserve that discussion for an ongoing work, a project that began in the three Fels lectures I delivered at the University of Pennsylvania in May 1986.

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we approach the twenty-first century we may be seeing a great historic shift of economic power to the Pacific rim, and the reappearance of Clio in samurai dress. If that occurs, more may also be at stake, for it could signal the passing of the Euro-centered civilizations, which have been the heart of World History for the past twenty-five hundred years, to a new cultural fulcrum.

Still, tattered and frayed, this remains the American century, as historians will have to acknowledge, though the dreams of those who had fashioned the contours of that idea have turned to nightmare. The United States is still the foremost military and technological power, and the dollar the uneasy foundation of the world economy. And, pace Paris and London, it is the cultural marketplace, if not the cultural center, of the world. If there is no outright hegemony, the United States is still the paramount power, unmatched by the Soviet Union. More ⁱ importantly, it is, together with the United Kingdom, one of the few nations of the world that have been able to create institutional stability, so that for 200 years (with the exception of the Civil War) peaceful elections and civil order have been maintained. The understanding of that "secret" is one of the important sociological contributions to political theory.

What is the distinguishing feature of the United States, one that has been its strength throughout its history, and may, perhaps, now be its weakness? It is, simply, that the United States has been the compleat civil society, perhaps the only one in political history. Hegel thought that England, as a bourgeois nation, exemplified civil society in its self-interest and its utilitarian character. But Hegel, at the beginning of the nineteenth century (and Marx, who lived in England for almost all his adult life), never understood the character of England: the symbolism of the Crown, the strength of the landed classes, the centrality of an Established Church, the desire of the bourgeoisie, or its sons, to become gentry and gentlemen, the weight of the Establishment and the lure of titles and honors--the fact that England was a society in which a status order dominated the political and economic orders. The Manchester Liberals, such as Cobden

and Bright, did not wish to rule, for not only (as they said) did they not know how to govern, they sought primarily the autonomy of the economic order from the State, the freedom to pursue trade, industry, and wealth. British imperialism of the late nineteenth century, as distinct from the colonialism of the eighteenth, was, as Schumpeter cogently argued, an extension of the status order, allied with finance, an outlet through the Army and administration overseas for the "second sons" disinherited by primogeniture, and a means, by emphasizing the primacy of Empire (and pomp and glory), of cowering the staid bourgeois classes.

The United States was from the start a rejection of the old social order by a motley class of novi homines, vagabonds, adventurers, convicts, dispossessed cavaliers, and dissident Protestants, from Quakers to Puritans, reinforced in the next century by a flood-tide of immigrants from all the countries of Europe, from southern Italy to northern Scandinavia. It was an open society. Each man was free to "make himself" and (he hoped) to make a fortune. Marx was constantly warning the German radicals not to go to the United States, for he saw, as happened with Hermann Kriege and August Willich and dozens of others, that the democratic atmosphere of the United States, its basic egalitarianism, would supplant the old European-bred socialist beliefs. For them the attraction of the future was not some cosmological telos of universalism, but the yearning to be treated as a person and the desire for opportunity and advancement--a feature Marx himself recognized, but only in the footnotes of Capital, where he writes with amazement of the number of individuals who could move about freely and change their occupations, "such as a man could change his shirt, egad."

In Hegel's sense--and it is a central starting point--there was no State in the United States, no unified, rational will, only individual self-interest and a passion for liberty. In ~~every~~ every European nation (with the partial exception of England), the State ruled over society, exercising a unitary or quasi-unitary power (enforced by a military class and a bureaucracy); and the state itself was the focus of power.

Revolution, as Marx and Engels knew, meant the seizing of State power. Paradoxically, the United States probably experienced more internal violence (the Civil War apart), call it even class struggle, than most countries of Europe: the agrarian conflicts against the moneyed interests and, more focussed, the labor conflicts against the capitalists. By any set of rough indicators--more strikes, longer strikes, more dynamiting, more times troops were called out, more lives lost--in the period from the railway strikes of the 1870s to the auto and steel strikes of the 1950s, the American labor struggles were more prolonged and more violent than any in Europe. But these were not (nor could they be thus interpreted) attempts to seize State power. They were primarily economic conflicts, against particular corporations and, in the instances of the great union actions in the 1930s, in coal, steel, auto and rubber, against entire industries, but they were not contests for State power--organized actions, paradoxically, ^{undertaken} with the support of the New Deal political administration against corporate power.

If there was no State, what was there?⁵ To make a semantic yet substantive distinction, there was a government. The government was a political marketplace, an arena within which interests contended (not always equally) and deals could be made. Fortuitously, for it was not planned (nor were these powers specified in the Constitution), the Supreme Court became the final arbiter of disputes, and the mechanism for the adjustment of rules, which allowed the political marketplace to function, subject to the amendment of the Constitution itself--which then again was interpreted by the

5. In a recent paper, Quentin Skinner has argued that the word State came to be recognized when political philosophers (he singled out Hobbes) sought a term that would identify an emerging realm of power distinct from res publica or civitas, since those terms designated popular sovereignty, and from the literal power holders, such as a monarch, who would insist on fealty sworn to them, as persons, rather than to an institution. The State, thus, was an entity that doubly abstracted sovereignty from rulers and ruled, and combined the rights alienated from it in the persona ficta of "the State." This theme of alienation is found in Hobbes, and later in Rousseau, where, in the "social contract," each person submerges himself and his rights into the general will.

If one defines the State by this vocabulary, then it is certainly clear that there was no State in the United States, for the very character of the founding documents denied the idea of alienated rights and expressed sovereignty in "We, the People."

Court. The Constitution and the Court became the bedrock of civil society.⁶

There was an underlying philosophical theme expressed in the Declaration of Independence: the theme of rights, inalienable rights, rights naturally endowed. But these rights inhered in each person, not in a group which the law had to protect, and institutions were designed to embody and protect them.⁷ The Constitution of the United States was a social contract, a contract initially between the several states, yet transferred over time as a social contract between the government and the people. It is perhaps the only successful social contract we know in political history; perhaps because the State was so weak and often non-existent.

Behind this contract lay a distinctive political culture. In the early years of the country's formation, there was a self-consciousness of being the first new nation: not a new social order, as proclaimed in the French Revolution, but the carrying out, as Jefferson put it, of a deism, of the conception of God as a workman whose design for a free people could for the first time be expressed on the virgin and fertile continent; thus, too, the expression on the

6. In the nineteenth century, the United States was engaged in nation-building an effort ratified by the Civil War and justified as a continental adventure by the belief in Manifest Destiny. There was no national ruling class, though Mark Hanna sought to shape one at the end of the century by welding the plutocracy together, yet only elites, not a consistent ruling class, have remained. In the twentieth century, the lineaments of a State began to emerge out of the national problems of managing an economy and giving direction to economic growth, the requirements of providing a national welfare system and the support of the universities and research. Yet a State began to emerge fully only with the centrality of foreign policy and the need to mobilize a unified will against an outside enemy. Historically, it is foreign policy and military necessities that give rise to a continuing State. To this extent there is truth to Carl Schmitt's thesis that economics is the competition between rivals while politics is the contest between friends and enemies; and such politics gives rise to States.

For a discussion of the relation of Manifest Destiny to American imperialism, see my essay "The End of American Exceptionalism?" in The Winding Passage (Basic Books, 1980), pp. 249-255, and on the forces shaping the emergence of a State in the U.S., The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism (Basic Books, paperback edition, Chapters 5 and 6).

7. When the question arose as to whether business corporations could enjoy the protection of the law under the 14th Amendment, the Court ruled, by creating a fiction, that the corporation was a person and could thus be protected. And this is also why there is so much litigation in American society, and such an expansive role of the courts, for if the foundation of the society is one's individual rights, then one sues to defend and protect them.

18.

Great Seal of the United States: Novus Ordo Seclorum, a new order of the ages.⁸ There was equally a strong republican emphasis and a civic (not State) consciousness of republican virtue, derived from reading the history of the Roman Republic and the desire to avoid the degenerative diseases--civil strife spawned by faction, the use of mercenaries rather than a citizen's army, and the arbitrary concentration of power--that had crippled the republics of the past. One sees this double consciousness in the Federalist Papers, with its echoes of Montesquieu, and in the writings of John Adams, reflecting on Davila and revolution.

There was, self-consciously, an intellectual (and intellectualist) foundation. But as the nation expanded and political parties developed--for political parties had not been foreseen or even desired by the Founding Fathers--the competition in the political marketplace spurred the egalitarianism and populism which have been, since the 1830s, the distinguishing features of American politics. This is why some writers have argued that the political structure of the United States was transformed from a republic to a mass democracy. As I will argue later, this is true, but on one level only.

What one did see was a shift from intellectualism and thought (the Lockean emphasis, in a sense) to sentiment and emotion (a strange Rousseauian twist), for while intellectualism implies a hierarchy of thought and respect for the learned, sentiment affirms egalitarianism and a common feeling among all men. And this was reflected as well in a turn away from history and from Europe, the turn inward to the land and the moving frontier. All this was symbolized in the election of General Andrew Jackson, the first "Western" President, in 1828 (and the throwing open of the

8. "It has been the will of heaven," John Adams wrote in 1776, "that we should be thrown into existence at a period when the greatest philosophers and lawgivers of antiquity would have wished to live. A period when we have an opportunity of beginning government anew from the foundation.... How few of the human race have ever had any opportunity of choosing a system of government for themselves and their children?"

White House to the people), and was ratified, so to speak, in the "cider barrel" election of 1840, when the regal Eastern Whigs, realizing the necessity for a populist appeal, nominated another war hero, General William Henry Harrison (nicknamed Tippicanoe for his battles against the Indians), and had him tour the country atop a wagon, dispensing free cider from a barrel to the multitude.⁹

The other transforming element of American politics became the role of money, the rise of the plutocracy and the easy use of money to buy politicians, gain influence, or exert outright corruption, a feature that reached its apogee in the administration of another war hero, General Ulysses S. Grant, and that disgusted the fastidious scion of the (now patrician) Adams family, the great-grandson of John Adams and the grandson of John Quincy Adams, the historian Henry Adams--a scene portrayed in Adams' novel entitled, significantly, Democracy.

The outcome of these changes is the strange structure of domestic American politics which few foreigners, and not even many Americans, understand. The American political order is a two-tiered structure: the Presidency is a plebiscitarian referendum, in which the person, not the party, is the cynosure of identification and judgment, the focus of mass passions, while the Congress, the Senate and the House, are elected by and responsive to interests, though today not necessarily the moneyed interests.

It is no accident that so many Presidents have been "heroes" or celebrities, so many of them Generals, from Washington to Eisenhower, usually elected after a war, in a country that has never had a large standing army, because they were considered to be "above" party; while during periods of normalcy the Presidents have been colorless neuters such as McKinley, Harding,

9. Harrison's campaign also introduced the fashion of slogans as an electoral technique. Bracketed with his vice-presidential candidate, who succeeded him on his early death in office, the banner across the cider wagon read: "Tippicanoe and Tyler too."

or Coolidge. (The one certified intellectual, Woodrow Wilson, a political-science professor who had once been president of Princeton University, was elected in 1912 because of a three-way split, the only instance of its kind in American history, and he was re-elected during the war in Europe on the ground that he would keep America out of the war.) Such presidents of the post-World War II years as Truman, Nixon, Carter, and Reagan have been unabashed populists, running against the Establishment and often minimizing party identification.¹⁰

Yet the elections to the Congress show a very different pattern. One can see this two-tiered structure with startling clarity in 1984. Ronald Reagan, one of the most popular Presidents in history, who carried all the states in the nation except one (Walter Mondale's home state of Minnesota), won in the state of New Jersey by one million votes, yet the Democrat, Bill Bradley, won the Senate seat in that state by one million votes. Reagan carried Massachusetts by a half-million votes, yet John Kerry, the Democrat, was elected Senator against a Republican businessman who identified himself completely with Reagan, by a half-million votes. Since World War II, though the Presidents have come largely from the Republican side, the Congress, especially the House, has more often been Democratic.

Populist in politics, that mentality also affected the popular culture (not the modern mass-media culture), which was largely a religious culture. Protestant, moralizing, and fundamentalist, it was also, given its emphasis on the literalism of the Word, anti-intellectual and anti-institutional. There was, of course, of course, no aristocratic tradition or strong artistic he-

¹⁰ Harry Truman, who became President on the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt, won his own election in 1948 by running against a Republican Establishment candidate, Thomas E. Dewey. Yet Truman did accept the Establishment figures fully in international affairs because the Cold War required their experience in foreign policy. But the Vietnam War destroyed the moral authority of the Establishment, and foreign policy has become the focus of passions and ideologies crossed with national interest. For those reasons, it has lacked a consistent focus or a sense of long-range purpose. For a shrewd history of this early postwar period, and the men who shaped American foreign policy, see The Wise Men, by Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, a "group biography" of Acheson and Harriman, Mcloy and Lovett, Keenan and Bohlen.

ritage: the arts were crafts--plain, simple, and utilitarian. And the Catholic tradition, which in Europe provided a firm intellectualist foundation in theology and dogmatics, a beauty in litany and liturgy, and a set of distinctive styles in architecture and sculpture, all of which became fused with an historic high culture, was in the United States embodied in the Irish church, made up largely of immigrants or rude self-made men, so that (with the exception, say, of a John Courtney Murray) it has until recently lacked intellectual weight and made little contribution to American thought and culture.

Thus we find a society deeply individualist and populist, its modernity shaped by the open expanse of geography (a natural world that could easily be plundered without remorse) and, in the economy, by the rule of money, the riches going to the rugged men bent on pursuing their own ends. Both were unencumbered by the polity. Indeed, from the 1870s to the 1930s, the Court consistently struck down most efforts of social legislation and regulation, other than anti-trust laws. Freedom was defined principally in individualistic economic terms. That was the consensus. That was the framework of the civil society.

III

What of culture--thinking of culture as a meditation upon meanings, or as the mediation between the historical and transcendental, or the concept and the experiential, rather than culture as a commodity produced for entertainment and escape, or as an object for conspicuous consumption.

American culture, as expressed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was primarily religious or vernacular, the contrast expressed most sharply in Van Wyck Brooks' colloquial phrases (1913) "high-brow" and "low-brow." The singular high-brow was the stern Calvinist theologian Jonathan Edwards, who later became the first president of Princeton University; the common low-brow, that shrewd publicist Benjamin Franklin, whose public homilies about prudence misled Max Weber and whose private vices exemplified the rollicking appetites of the earlier Dutch burghers. The guilt and gloom of Jonathan Edwards became transfigured into the brooding and metaphysical writings of Hawthorne

and Melville on sin and pride. The plain-speaking idiom of Franklin could later be found in the bombastic diction of Mark Twain in his stories about the Mississippi, and in the direct and unadorned prose (no adjectives, please) of an Ernest Hemingway; that laconic prose became the hallmark of the distinctive American ^{genre} ~~genre~~, the detective story of Dashiell Hammet and Raymond Chandler.

There were few traces of modernism in American culture, certainly no indigenous roots, though in Europe one can locate its wellsprings in the 1850s (with Baudelaire) and ^{find} a high watermark by the 1890s. Modernism in culture is profoundly anti-bourgeois, finding one set of cultural resources in the aristocratic and Catholic traditions, with their profound contempt for the prosaic, money-making, anti-intellectual character of bourgeois life; or another in the revolutionary impulses, fascist and communist, which derided traditional (and museum) culture, and in its rhetoric espoused violence and heroic gestures. There were no aristocratic or Catholic re-doubts in American culture from which to attack the bourgeoisie. Nor were there bohemian enclaves for those who wished to live freer lives; those who were restless could always go West, where the saloons and dance-halls provided havens for the uprooted, or ship out in the merchant marine. Or one could go to Europe, as many did.

American culture derived from the Protestant conception of sin and the capitalist drive for success. What united both strains was anti-intellectualism, in two different senses: the one, as Richard Hofstadter used the term, was liberalism about "the Word" and hostility to any interpretive theology; the other, in a sociological sense, scorned intellectuals for being "unworldly." If, as Santayana once remarked, Americans were innocent of poisons, they were even more so about the perfumes of sexuality--but not about sex. Can one imagine a Huysmans, a Swi^zburne, or an Aubrey Beardsley--though the Yellow Book was founded in London by an American expatriate--or any other "dandy aesthete" (to use Martin Green's phrase) on the American scene?

More importantly, the critical literature in the United States towards

the end of the nineteenth century reacted against the brutal indifference of capitalism to poverty, and the crabbed nature of personal life. It was realist and naturalist, and it openly sought to shock the bourgeois world and expose its hypocrisies, as in the novels of Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, and, in a lesser vein, Upton Sinclair. The mirror of realism for these writers was not a surface to be broken by syntactical literary experiments or prismatic textual tricks, but a harsh reflective searchlight.

American modernists interested in the aesthetics of literary experiment, or the subtle delineation of manners and morals, or the relaxed atmosphere of bohemia, could find these only in Europe; and they went: Henry James from New York and Boston; Ezra Pound from Idaho; T. S. Eliot from St. Louis and Harvard; Gertrude Stein from Baltimore; Ernest Hemingway from Oak Park, Illinois. In the nineteenth century and up to World War I, the expatriates went to London; in the 1920s, the restless "lost generation" revelled in Paris. Though the New York Armory show of 1913 introduced the excitements of modernist painting, those who responded to the new modes did so by going to Paris. And so did the composers, spending an obligatory period abroad.

The two most innovative American writers of their day, John Dos Passos and William Faulkner, were experimentalist and modernist (having also been in Europe during World War I, Dos Passos in the Medical Corps, Faulkner in the Air Force), but they were not part of a native modernist culture in the sense that Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Proust left their imprint indelibly on French literature. Dos Passos fused a style of montage from the cinema and the marz juxtapositions of a Schwitters and the Cubists with the social content of the realists; but his influence was largely confined to the radical milieu of the 1920s and '30s. When Dos Passos abandoned his radicalism, disillusioned by the activities of the Communists in Spain, his new explorations of American life were written off by radical critics as inept, though the techniques were the same.

Faulkner wrote complex experimental novels (The Sound and the Fury

can rank with any of the great modernist romans fleuves, and even anticipated the techniques of the French nouveau roman), yet they received little attention when first published, and his waning reputation revived only in 1945, when Malcolm Cowley presented the map of Yoknapatawpha County that Faulkner had sketched for him, to show how the novels were threaded together, and Faulkner was then redefined in a sociological context--in the struggle between the Sartorises and the Snopeses for the soul of the South--rather than as a modernist writer.

The distinct modernist innovations--as culture--were jazz and film. But jazz was regarded as sinful in the "jazz age" of the twenties, and became influential only with the large commercial jazz bands of the forties and, later, with the superior musicianship of a Benny Goodman or a Duke Ellington. Modernist composers returning from Paris, such as Aaron Copland, sought to integrate jazz rhythms and folk vernacular into their neo-Stravinskian (but not Schoenbergian twelve-tone) music. (Charles Ives, later hailed as a modernist genius, led a totally isolated life.) Photography, despite Alfred Stieglitz, was marginal in American culture. The one great technological innovation, photography as motion picture, was regarded in the United States primarily as "the movies," a form of mass entertainment, and sneered at by the intellectuals as Hollywood kitsch. It was hailed as an art form only when it became the subject of critical commentary by the cinéastes in France and was re-exported back to the United States as an aesthetic.

In these different respects, while there were modernist currents in the United States, until after World War II there was no modernist culture in any coherent form that dominated any genre or field.¹¹ The one

11. I leave aside poetry for a double reason: unlike France or England, poetry did not play a major role in American culture, and until World War II and after, the indigenous influences were the vernacular and free-verse locutions of a Walt Whitman. Such poets as Edgar Lee Masters or Robinson Jeffers used jazz rhythms or classical diction. Robert Frost and William Carlos Williams mixed vernacular and modernist techniques. But again, as with Pound and the Imagists, the orientation was most often to Europe. The one singular figure who went her own way, who never left home, was Marianne Moore:

Standing outside much of this (again, until after World War II) was the

place where a modernist culture could be detected was in the machine aesthetic. And as the old saying goes, again, this was no accident. The machine aesthetic was primarily a form, not a content: it excluded the self and the person; it was abstract and functional, concerned primarily with design. Photography came into its own not with the periodical Camera Work (which was self-consciously modern in its effort to become "art"), but in Fortune magazine, the showcase of American business, where photographs triumphantly illustrated the power of American capitalism. In architecture, the soaring skyscrapers and the great factories, as well as the curving ribbons and clover-leaf patterns of the concrete motorways, became the emblems of the new culture, much as cathedrals had symbolized the religious age. The key term that defined this form was functional. Modernist artists such as Charles Sheeler, in his "precisionist" paintings and photographs, reflected the buildings as abstract geometrical designs. Abstract artists, such as Stuart Davis, fused linear design with jazzy squiggles in order to provide a feeling of rhythm, much as the Futurist artists, such as Balla and Boccione, sought to convey a sense of speed in their concentric paintings. In the machine aesthetic, the character of the economy was imprinted on culture, much as kings had once imprinted their faces on coins.

1 line space

The rise--and quick dominance--of modernism in American culture occurred largely after World War II. It came about with the collapse of the small-town Protestant hold on American life, the rise of a new urbanism and the explosive expansion of the universities, the emergence of New York intellectuals as cultural arbiters, and the growth of a new middle-class audience, the culturati, responsive to the more open modes of expression, social and

(Footnote 11 continued)

South. In their novels and stories, Southern writers drew largely upon an oral and folk culture that, in its mythos, was an organic Gemeinschaft, yet those who gave it intellectual expression, principally the Southern Agrarians--John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks--combined a romantic pastoral criticism of industrialism with a formalist, classical "new criticism" that excised any historical or biographical contexts in judging the literary nature of a poem. In the end the Southern Agrarians became largely an "academic" culture in the double sense of that word.

sexual, that were sanctioned, if not promoted, by a liberal culture. But most important, perhaps, was the flood of Europeans who came just before and during the war and who exerted great personal influence on the receptive Americans: the surrealists such as Breton, Masson, and Ernst, who were the tutors of Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollock, and Robert Motherwell; the Russian émigrés from Paris such as Stravinsky and Balanchine, who began to dominate music and the dance; linguists and art historians such as Roman Jakobson and Erwin Panofsky, who taught Americans a new language of criticism; and the hundreds of German and Middle European scholars who transformed sociology and philosophy and social thought, as well as physics and the other sciences. The complete story of all these myriad influences remains to be told.

Symbolically, if not actually, the greatest transformation took place in painting, with the rocket-like rise of Abstract Expressionism, which, for the first time, made New York the center of an historic culture. It is not only the blazing energy of the famous names that is important, but two crucial facts: One was that, for the first time in American life, the artist, not the audience, dictated the definition of culture and the appreciation of cultural objects. The populism that had long held sway, in response to the often banal taste of the audience (featuring the vernacular paintings of a Grant Wood or a Thomas Hart Benton), gave way to a generation of hitherto unknown artists, and to the critics who interpreted them for the new audience.

The second fact was the formalism which dominated the intentions and character of the new style, even though its leading critics, such as Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg--and behind them the towering polymathic presence of Meyer Schapiro--had been political radicals and stars of the New York intelligentsia. There may be valid sociological reasons why Abstract Expressionism was so formalistic. The previous American styles had featured "content" in the vernacular efforts of the Midwestern painters or the social realists of New York. Abstract Expressionism was principally an "internal dialogue" with such European movements as Cubism. Against Cub-

ism and its exploration of the sculptural and the shallow space, the Abstract Expressionists emphasized the materiality and texture of paint; the properties of the pigment became the "problem" for a Pollock or a de Kooning. And, in the reaction against line and light and dark as defining the boundaries of space, they concentrated on color alone--in its pools of light, as in Rothko, or the monochromatic textures of Barnett Newman and the staining of the canvas by Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis--on color in its soft and hard edges.

But there was also the argument that as an aesthetic the style was radical. As Meyer Schapiro had written in 1937: "In abstract art ... the pretended autonomy and absoluteness of the aesthetic emerged in a concrete form. Here, finally, was an art of painting in which only the aesthetic elements seem to be present." And Harold Rosenberg wrote about the imperial nature of gesture: Action painting dispensed with the representation of the paint, but imprinted the physical movement of the painter in the painting, like the Shroud of Turin. "The action on the canvas became its own representation."

These statements articulate a powerful set of arguments about the intentions of the artist and the complex nature of painting, but they are almost entirely formal, defining aesthetic issues primarily in structural or plastic terms: the depiction of space as flat or illusionistic; the dimensionality of the picture plane as the field of action; the texture and properties of paint (or other materials of expression) as delineating the style of the painter. True, such matters have always concerned the artist. In the painting in the Dahlem Museum attributed to Rembrandt, "The Man in the Golden Helmet," one is startled by the thick blob of pigment which immediately focuses our eye on the helmet. In Rubens' painting of Diana (in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts), one is struck by the strokes of paint, casually applied and built up like impasto, to suggest the folds in the dress. Yet these were stylistic techniques in the service of representation. Now all that exists are the "things in themselves," with little relation to the living world of experience. Can a vibrant culture exist,

divorced from the social scene^A to be experienced largely through the formal concerns of the artists themselves^A no matter how powerful they may be?¹² (Analogously, in serial music and similar musical modes, emotion is ruled out or denoted, and we are to understand the music largely through the ingenious permutation and combination, mathematically expressed, of the relation between sounds.) A strange feature in the history of culture.

Yet social life--since there is always an audience--takes its own paradoxical revenge. Though the artist may dictate what is art, the competition between artists, particularly in the whirl of generations, leads to the strangling rituals of the Golden Bough in the groves of Nemi, and style replaces style in rapid succession--so much so, that a painter is rarely identified by a single picture but by his style, and the style becomes a trademark.

Once fashion takes over, what was once shocking and disturbing becomes, like a butterfly in a case, dead and decorative, and viewers are no longer drawn into a pictorial space to experience renewed surprise through new angles of vision, for the evocative powers are lost when it is all surface and style, chromatic color or crockery glued to a canvas. And since it is fashion, the museums are caught up in the race to keep up, to exhibit a selection of each new style, and proclaim this triumphantly as the advance of culture, when

12. The curious fact is that the first generation of Expressionists and the pioneers of Abstraction had contrary intentions. Kandinsky was deeply religious, his earliest abstract paintings (c. 1910) based on apocalyptic millenarian references, such as the Flood or the Last Judgment, and he entitled his first book Concerning the Spiritual in Art. Franz Marc, with whom Kandinsky was associated in the Moderne Galerie in Munich, described the aim of the moderns as "mystic-inward construction ... the creation of symbols of their times which belong on the altars of the coming spiritual religion and behind which the artist disappears."

Less than a decade later, following the horrors of World War I, many Expressionist painters and writers turned to revolutionary activism. Max Pechstein and Ludwig Meitner were influential members of the "Working Soviet for Art," while Conrad Felixmuller sought to make membership in the Communist Party compulsory for everyone associated with the Expressionist Secession Group 1910, which he founded in Dresden. The Expressionist theatre of Toller and Piscator dealt with revolutionary themes, and the stark lighting and bare sets sought to focus attention on the words in the plays, not on the setting.

Why, then, the turn to formalism among the American painters and critics of the 1940s and 1950s, almost all of whom had come from a radical political background? A crude answer, from Serge Guillaud, is that they were in the service of American imperialism, engaged in "stealing" the center of the art world from Paris. If that is so, why did Paris, London,

what the museums have actually become are the mummified depositories of modernism.

Modernist culture was extraordinarily creative because it lived in tension with bourgeois society, because, as Paul Tillich once observed, it reached down to the taproots of the demonic and transformed those wayward and perverse impulses into the order of art. Today bourgeois culture has collapsed and the demonic cavorts everywhere, for there are few taboos. Alfred Jarry could once open his Ubu Roi with the clownish king saying "Merdre," but how much of a shock is that today, against the fantasies of a Genet or a Burroughs?¹³

What is left is a culture that is eclectic and syncretistic because the distinction between genres, the rational organization of space and time, and the mirror of nature have all been shattered. The disjunction of forms growing out of the disruption of mimesis has become arbitrary, and the formalism largely self-referential. The disjoined and alienated experiences are now sociological clichés used aimlessly by the minimalist writers, who lack "shape" (to use Jean Rhys's term) and fail to engage any experience other than their own narcissistic reflection.

Was modernism "co-opted" by capitalism, as Herbert Marcuse claimed, or was it a contradiction of capitalism? Marcuse made his case from the standpoint of culture, yet one can argue that the psychological force which became dissipated in this century was not culture, but bourgeois society. Mar-

(Footnote 12 continued)

Milan, and the rest of Europe eagerly embrace and accept that art? One can only speculate that the impulse to inherit and extend the modernist modes from Europe, taking root and triumphing so spectacularly, led the American painters to work out all the "immanent" formal problems that were still unresolved by Cubism and its successors. For a provocative discussion of that question, see Frank Stella, Working Spaces (Harvard University Press, 1996).

13. Ubu Roi, with sets elaborated by Bonnard, Vuillard and Toulouse-Lautrec, was the first of the public utterances of obscenity. The word merdre set off a pandemonium that lasted throughout the evening. Presented in 1896, it could not be staged again until 1909. Though used privately as the mot de Cambronne, spoken by one of Napoleon's generals at Waterloo, the public utterance of the word in 1896, as Roger Shattuck has observed, was "unthinkable." Hence the added letter "r". Compare this scandale with Genet's graphic description of homosexual rape in Notre Dame des Fleurs (and the film made of his fantasies) or Burroughs' description of the sexual ejaculation of a man while being hanged, in Naked Lunch. Merde, of course, is now the commonplace word for good-luck for a student going off to an examination or a friend setting off on a journey. Does everything, in time, become tamed? For a discussion of Jarry and Ubu Roi, see Roger Shattuck, The

cuse claimed (in his One-Dimensional Man, 1964) that all aspects of life--art, technology, working-class rebellion, black resentment, the Sturm und Drang of youth--had been flattened by the power of technological rationality, only to find himself hailed a few years later, by the raucous students of Berlin and Paris, as the Pied Piper of the cultural revolution. Capitalism, said Marcuse, was based psychologically on "surplus repression," imposed by the severity of the superego through the agency of the family. In the United States today, almost one out of every two children will spend some part of his or her youth in a one-parent or fatherless family. The reigning fear of the right is the destruction of the family. If one looks at capitalism today, one can stand Marx on his head. It is culture with its varying demands that has become the substructure of Western capitalist society, and the production system has been reorganized to meet its voracious appetites--material; erotic and aesthetic; high, middle, and low; punk and rock; Hollywood Squares and TV bang-bang. Who has co-opted whom?

1 line space

The new vague term is "post-modernism." Its meaning is as amorphous as modernism itself, but the term also contains a set of paradoxes as startling as the engagement of modernism with capitalism in the past hundred years.

Post-modernism, if we date it from the subterranean writings of Michel Foucault in France and Norman O. Brown in the United States, proclaimed what Frank Kermode has called "the sense of an ending." It announced not only the "de-construction of man" and the end of the humanist credo, but also the "epistemological break" with genitality and the dissolution of focussed sexuality into the polymorph perversity of oral and anal pleasures. For those writers, post-modernism was the liberation of the body, as modernism had been the liberation of the imagination. The sexual revolution that followed split into the gay and lesbian movements as one current and the homo-

(Footnote 13 continued)

Banquet Years (London, 1959), Chapter 7, esp. p. 161. The play has been fully translated under the strange title of King Turd by Beverley King and G. Legman (New York, 1953).

what overlapping rock-drug culture as another. Repression had come out of the closet and lived out its impulses flagrantly--and within the freedom of bourgeois, not communist, societies.

Foucault and Brown had sought to establish the transgression of all taboos. By a strange twist of cultural fate, the term post-modernism itself was then appropriated by a generation of architects and artists who used the slogan to mock modernist formalism and tear down the walls of high culture that resist the onslaught of popular culture. In its modes, the practitioners of post-modernism have substituted pastiche for form and cleverness for creativity. In architecture, Michael Graves mixes Moorish fantasy with heavy Byzantine arches in his Portland, Oregon building, while Philip Johnson, once a high priest of modernism, places a Chippendale-furniture ~~piece~~^{motif} as the pediment of the A.T.&T. skyscraper on Madison Avenue in New York. In literature, there is the flat, affectless prose of Ann Beattie that set the style for New Yorker fiction. In painting, we see the re-introduction of shadowy figuration, like X-ray images, in the canvases of the neo-expressionists. And on the stage we find the hypnotic dream imagery and slow-motion tableaux of Robert Wilson, underscored by the monotonous minimalism of Philip Glass. And the culturati, ever ready, follow the winds of fashion.

Much of this was already foreshadowed by Pop Art, the successor to Abstract Expressionism, which opened the road back to kitsch with its homosexual ~~and~~ ^{and} the Beatles or Bob Dylan with the achievement of T. S. Eliot in breaking the mold of conventional poetic diction. Andy Warhol could recycle images through silk-screen stencils to repeat the faces of Marilyn Monroe and Mao Zedong side by side, using lurid fuchsia or garish purple colors to create a varying, Derain-like phosphorescent glow. And a Claes Oldenburg could reproduce a giant-size hamburger, on the ground that a still-life is a still-life is a still-life, as valid as Cezanne's apple. Some artists, such as Jasper Johns or Jim Dine, have used the print medium or paint to capture the tension of texture and image, and achieve an originality which is the stamp of the creative artist. But with the juxtaposed collages of a Rauschenberg, or

Lichtenstein's enlargement of the mechanical benday dots from a half-tone photoengraving, the technique becomes too mechanical and the images too blatant.

What passes for serious culture today lacks both content and form, so that the visual arts are primarily decorative and literature self-indulgent babble or contrived experiment. Decoration by its nature, no matter how bright and gay, becomes, in its finite and repetitive patterns, mere wallpaper, a receding background incapable of engaging the viewer in the renewable re-visions of perception. Self-referential literature, when both the self and the referent repeat the same old refrains, becomes a tedious bore, like Uno in the circus, showing that he can raise himself on one finger. A culture of recycled images and twice-told tales is a culture that has lost its bearings.

1 line space

If modernism has been, in two of its major facets, experiment and rebellion, then these live today in two unexpected places: the experimental techniques utilized by the visual mass media, and the rebellion ^{vised} (in the popular-music culture of the young).

The syntax of modernism, as I once put it, employs four different modes--sensation, simultaneity, immediacy, and impact. Immediacy gives one a sense of being there and caught up in the flow of events, as, for example, in the prose of Gertrude Stein, who eliminated all commas so as not to impede the torrent of words. Simultaneity, the invention of Cubism, sought to capture the multiple and shifting images of a three-dimensional object on a single picture plane. Impact was achieved in the sprung rhythms of Gerard Manley Hopkins, or in the length of a poetic line shaped not by meter but by breath, as in the poems of Robert Creeley. And sensation was the visual and visceral feelings aroused in looking at the whirling futurist images of Balla or the vorticism of Wyndham Lewis. These modes, eliding foreground and background, breaking up the boundaries of time and space, cut across modernist painting, music, poetry and novels.¹⁴

¹⁴. I have elaborated this theme, which I call "the eclipse of distance," in Chapter 2, "The Disjunctions of Cultural Discourse," in The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism (expanded edition, Basic Books, New York, 1978, especially pp. 99-119).

While that syntax has become standardized and regarded even as a routine element in the repertoire of art, thus losing its initial powers to shock and "overwhelm" the spectator, paradoxically--or is it simply an illustration of the sociology of cultural absorption?--it is contemporary television which most adroitly uses these techniques as a means of manipulating an audience and capturing its attention. Since attention is fleeting and boredom an ever-present threat, the use of these multiple codes becomes a way of seizing the viewer and flooding him with images, to create the simulacrum of intensity, as ^{one} compresses attention into fifty-second segments. Television must be in constant motion, since a fixed camera or a fixed subject is "death," except for the use of the freeze-frame to signal the end of a story. The camera is like the head of the viewer at a three-ring circus, constantly swiveling, shifting, turning, caught by the flickering movement of the acrobat or the antics of the clowns. For television, life is always spectacle, and spectacle becomes the scene of life even in politics, ^{as} ~~the~~ riots and violence erupt, as if by signal, when the cameras begin to turn. But such techniques are in the service not of a new aesthetic but of excitement. After a while, acting-out and acting-up lose their shock value and the events become trivialized, leading to a new and greater threat of boredom. With such techniques there is no genuine involvement, no catharsis, only de-sensitization.

"Whether ritualized or not, art contains the rationality of negation," Herbert Marcuse once wrote. It is a half-truth (is religious art negation?), as valid as the similar belief that art is truth (and not destruction?). Even if we follow Marcuse, the major current of expressed negation today is found in the popular culture, an irrational current that has broken all boundaries and sets itself up against traditional social values in American society, or against the good manners of class, as in the United Kingdom. The mirthless paradox, again, is that sex and rebellion are marketed wildly and successfully by the purveyors of capitalism and mass culture.

On television today, soap operas--the continuous series of the afternoon--are the Streets of Libido, the soft-core pornography that titillates housewives and adolescents with a fantasy life they can act out at home. And

heavy-metal and hard-core rock appeal to youths who feel angry and discouraged about the dead-end prospects of earning a living. The sex-obsession exhibited by Madonna or Prince takes an ever more explicit form. One can imagine the graffiti on the wall: "Genet lives!"

For the entertainment industry--movies, TV, rock-music records, and publishing--all this is free enterprise and free speech, and the government must not interfere with the libertarianism/libertinism of the marketplace. Again a cultural contradiction of capitalism? A century and a quarter ago, the bourgeoisie condemned Les Fleurs du Mal as an outrage against public decency. Today it is Foucault and Lustler magazine as brothers in "negation."

Cultural fashions, especially in popular culture, come and go in spasms. With the rising threat of AIDS, the campaigns against drugs, tobacco, and alcohol, the sheer exhaustion of the ugliness of sexual violence (as demonstrated in the film Sid and Nancy), plus the middle-aging of the youth culture (clearly embourgeoisement does not tame; it only expands the thirst for consumption), are we on the verge of a new sobriety? That remains to be seen. Never call retreat a maxim of the ideologue, not of culture.

IV

Today we are witnessing almost everywhere a revolt against modernity. This has taken different forms, in historical and idiosyncratic ways. Yet, as with any pervasive sociological phenomenon, though the manifest expressions follow national and cultural tracks, there would seem to be a generic component that derives from some latent, common source.

It has been claimed that the revolt against modernity is a revolt against modernization and the disruption of "traditional societies" by technology. But that is too facile. A strongly integrated nation and culture, such as Japan, has successfully introduced a new form of modernization, contradicting Max Weber's thesis that radical individualism and the break-up of tradition were the necessary conditions of capitalist enterprise and economic development. And while Nazism emphasized a pseudo-Gemeinschaft, volkisch myth, it was able to face an aesthetic drawn from anti-bourgeois sentiments (these,

for example, of Ernst and Friedrich Jünger) with a technological war machine. The Italian proto-fascists, such as d'Annunzio and Marinetti, proclaimed the unity of the artist/warrior and the destruction of the past in the name of futurism. And even the rejectionist regime of the Ayatollah Khomeini, thundering its contempt for the secularism of the West, does not give up the technology that extracts its oil and lays its mines.

If the revolt against modernity is no longer free religion, then the revolt against modernity may reflect the exhaustion of ideology and the arid lives, without ritual or transcendence, that the secular cultures have created. The searches for meaning, thus, are no longer the exploration of the unrestrained selves for personal expression, but for new institutions and communities to which men and women seek to belong. And where some old threads remain, they become the effort for re-tribalization and new definitions of primordial allegiances.

My focus has been the United States, which, as the first new nation, has lived in the tension between openness and mobility on the one hand, and populism and conformity on the other, working out that tension primarily in the economic sphere, where it encouraged openness while being hostile to modernism and freer life-styles in the cultural realm. The revolt against modernity--which I identify primarily with the upsurge of religious fundamentalism--is, in many respects, a "return of the repressed." As such, it has two dimensions: one is the protest against the growth of government, and even the emergence of a State, shaped as it has been by the dictates of foreign policy and military necessity; the other, a resistance against intrusions into one's life, but again, primarily in the economic sphere. For obviously the Fundamentalists are not libertarians, and the strength of their beliefs derives in part from the repression of impulses and the need to convert these repressions into a set of social values that they wish to impose on the rest of the society. In all this there is an historical paradox: in the period from 1870 to the 1930s, the United States experienced an almost unrestrained economic impulse, in which all efforts at economic regulation were struck

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down by the Supreme Court, while at the same time there was widespread social regulation of manners and morals, with the country going so far as to enact a constitutional amendment prohibiting people from drinking liquor or beer with more than minimal alcoholic content. Yet from the 1930s to the 1980s, we have seen the spread of detailed economic regulation and the unleashing of cultural permissiveness to a degree not seen, perhaps, since the days of Messalina.

What we see today is a revolt in the social and cultural sphere against a cosmopolitan liberal culture which, since World War II, has been dominant in the universities, the arts, the elite media, the publishing world, and the museums, and which, in the name of artistic freedom, had been tolerant of anything expressed in the imagination, but did not know how, or feared, to draw the line when imagination in its kinky fantasies spilled over into life-style.¹⁵

In the West, at least, the revolt against modernity, then, is a revolt against contemporary liberalism, and since that revolt itself has no sense of boundaries, it has become retrogressive to an extreme. Is it not time for the re-affirmation of modernity, if by modernity we mean its unique achievement-- the unfolding of a philosophical anthropology and sociology that sought to answer Kant's question: Was ist der Mensch?

1 line space

Modernity, in sociological retrospect, is the break with ascription (the assignment of place in the world by birth) and with fixed hierarchies disguised as natural hierarchy. Modernity is individualism, the effort of individuals to remake themselves and, where necessary, to remake society in order to allow design and choice. Within limits, it remains the condition of a free and diverse society open to talent and artistic vision. It is the nine-

¹⁵. The further paradox--for paradox is the name of history--is that the deeply committed feminists, the newest militant minority, in their attack on dominant male power, have seized upon pornography and the fantasies it represents as the battleground for a new effort of social regulation. In the communist countries, though the initial ideologies were revolutionary and emancipatory, the regimes have gone furthest in the enforcement of puritanical attitudes, so that in these countries, for example, homosexuality is outlawed, perhaps verifying Freud's thesis that the need to mobilize the economic impulse requires the suppression of the sexual.

teenth-century heritage as its best: individuals, liberty, and the sanctity of life.

In the "natural history" of human societies, primacy has always gone to the group, the collective, the tribe as the source of attachment. Man was regarded as socius, realizing his nature in the social world. Much of this is understandable, given the long history of hunting-and-gathering societies, and the "male bonding" these activities reinforced. Agrarian society, particularly where private property developed, narrowed this focus to the family and the village, and institutions such as primogeniture and entails served to conserve property and insure the centrality of the family as the source of social continuity.

In the social structure of ascriptive societies--tribe, clan, caste, slave, feudal and bureaucratic despotisms--the "individual" is wholly a socially determined being, his precise place in the hierarchical order, his social and legal standing, the precedence in the allocation of benefices and abodes, stipulated by his assigned place. He is an individual in the mere biological sense, but he is not a person; he is, one might say, a persona, a mask or role or status into which he fits his person.

The breakdown of that kind of ascription and the rise of individual mobility is the primal act of modernity.¹⁶ Yet such mobility may only be ^{the} mobility of an individual within a rigid frame, a circulation of elites that leaves the hierarchy itself intact. The second step has been the challenge to a structural hierarchy, defined legally as differences in precedence and rank, by the idea of the natural equality of all men in possession of inalienable rights. This is the beginning of individualism in the double sense: of equality of all persons before the law, and of material and social reward on the

16. The "natural" basis for hierarchy may be found in the early superiority of the strongest in the hunt, and the patriarchy of the family. What is less clear is the way--and why--the continuation of inequalities established by generational transfers became justified in philosophy and legitimated through the development of institutions and laws. One argument, developed by Plato in The Republic, and assented to by Freud in Civilization and Its Discontents, is that "communism" is impossible because of the "natural" desire of fathers to favor their sons over others. More recently, Robert Nozick, in Anarchy, State and Utopia, has argued that the initial advantage, freely obtained, is legitimately transferred on the

basis of individual achievement. In that respect, too, as Simmel cogently pointed out, the development of a money economy is a source of freedom, since one could use money to live where one wished or to buy one's own food, rather than being dependent on the designated benefices of an institution--court, college, or monastery.

The idea of man not as socius but as solus, of the single individual as the primary unit of society (of the ego and his Eigentum, a man of qualities rather than a man without qualities), arises in modern times in the fictions of Locke and the fables of Defoe. Some of its sources are clear in the Christian view of the sanctity of each soul and the equality of all (baptized) men before God, a view that gained strong resonance in the Protestant Reformation. But with Luther (as earlier with Paul) that equality was deemed to be spiritual; its full realization would come only in the next world, and only after passing through the judgment of the Lord. Some left-wing Protestant sects, from the Anabaptists to the Fifth Monarchy Men, sought to realize the kingdom of heaven on earth, and failed. But in small sections of the Western world, individualism was established as a legitimate principle of society in this world. It gained philosophical justification in the powerful currents of agnostic political and moral philosophy from Hume to Bentham. It became established, institutionally, through the development of market society, and the credo of individual choice and individual responsibility as an economic and political reality. Beginning in a small geographical enclave, it has spread through the rest of the world principally through its identification with capitalism, science, and rationality. In any anthropo-

(Footnote 16 continued)

basis of free will and testament. Yet at what point does continuing advantage act as a barrier to the effort of those in succeeding generations to attain their own "initial" advantage?

More broadly, in the rise and fall (and rise again) of institutional hierarchy, we lack an understanding of the pervasive role of kingship in the most diverse array of societies, from the ancient kingdoms of the Near East to the tribal societies of Africa and the empires of Asia, and the corresponding question of how the idea of self-governing communities, such as republics, took hold in small portions of the "civilized world," as in classical Greece, and then in medieval Italy, only to fade and then reappear and assert itself so quickly in the modern age.

logical sense, modernity would have to be looked at as a mutation in social evolution.

This was recognized from the start in the virulence of the attacks from all quarters--Catholic, corporatist and socialist--on "odious individualism." Hegel and Marx sought to unite the Christian and secular views by arguing that it was not in the present (bourgeois) world that freedom and individualism would be achieved, but in the next (social) world; that the bourgeois conception of individualism was the last stage in the progressive unfolding of reason/techne; and that freedom of property and freedom of religion would disappear as men gained freedom from property and freedom from religion, after passing through the judgment of History.

Radical social analysis has been subject to two distortions in thinking about social institutions and making philosophical judgments. One is the genetic fallacy, the other is historicism. The genetic fallacy assumes that the origin of an institution explains and even determines its function. This is not so. One sees this, particularly, in the institution of the market. Though the market has been associated historically with the rise of Western capitalism, as a mechanism which equilibrates diverse demands and limited supply it can exist in diverse social contexts, as the "state socialist" economies are now reluctantly coming to accept. The second fallacy was to believe, as Engels once put it, "that all theories of morality are the product ... of the contemporary economic conditions of society," so that "morality has always been a class morality." Even if true as historical description, this is false as moral judgment. A morality that decries torture, that asks for equality of all persons before the law, and protects criticism, in speech and assembly, from arbitrary authority, retains its power across history, precisely because these normative claims are grounded in transcendental judgments, and the institutions that embody them command enduring respect, independent of existing regimes.

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In exploring the dimensions of modernity, we have to distinguish between

civil society on the institutional level, bourgeois character as the psychological component, and philosophical individualism as the normative justification, in order to restate what is valuable in the claims of modernity. It is the failure to distinguish between these that has often led to confusion, and to indiscriminate attacks on liberalism because of the critics' dissatisfaction with the inadequacy of one or another factor.

Civil society is the realm of relationships apart from the ascriptive ties of kinship, fealty, and religion on the one hand, and the State as the imposition of a unitary will and unitary order on the other. It is the realm of self-interest, in which men are free to pursue diverse ends to enjoy the fruits of their own labor as producers and consumers, and of voluntary associations for the realization of civic purposes. The crux of the matter, historically, has been the distinction between the social and political orders, in which the adherents of civil society sought to establish an autonomous realm to safeguard their own activities. Hegel sought to override the distinction by specifying the one as the particular, the other as the universal, treating civil society as an inferior realm, with no principle of reason to guide its development or justify its existence, while the State was the embodiment of the rational will. Freedom, for Hegel, is a predicate of the State, not of civil society. Yet this is surely wrong, especially when the State embraces all areas of life, and there is little possibility of an independent livelihood or of social attachments in societies, such as the Communist ones, that proclaim a unitary purpose.

Yet there is a serious question--whose ramifications are too large to be explored in a brief section--whether the distinction between the social and the political can be maintained on practical and ethical grounds. For Aristotle the politeia was both the moral quest for the good life and a set of institutions, where ethics and politics were joined. The fact that goals are pursued in the modern world by individuals and corporations, and not by formal agencies of government, does not make these goals less political, in Aristotle's sense. The corruption of civil society occurs when self-interested

individualism is pursued without reference to the social costs and side effects that result in the destruction of environments or involuntary unemployment, and these can be as destructive of a society as the excessive concentration of arbitrary power in the State. A contemporary society, as I have formulated the concept, is also a "public household," in which the social needs of all members must be a primary obligation, if one is to retain a conception of citizenship. If one seeks to maintain a viable conception of civil society outside the State, one must also recombine the social and political, and understand their interconnections.

Bourgeois character, as in the images of Adam Smith and Max Weber, emphasized prudence as the exercise of virtue; it was practical and utilitarian; pursued interests, not passions; wealth rather than honor (and was thus held in lower esteem in aristocratic and samurai cultures); and emphasized a harmony of interests--and society--through the rational exchange of goods and services ^{within} ~~within~~ a market. Yet in practice, especially when faced with the libertinism of bohème, bourgeois character could be mean and petty, crabbed and repressive, haunted by ressentiment against those who proclaimed freedom in the cultural, not economic, sphere. It was the effort to stamp bourgeois character (as myth and reality) on the whole of the society, and to expunge cultural modernism, which created the first contradictions of capitalism. Yet bourgeois character has been transformed as much by capitalism as by modernism itself. Bourgeois character has now become consumerism, so that going into debt is a happy way of life, and between the sexes the round of divorce and re-marriage is accepted as a facet of freedom, even for Presidents of the United States. As for culture, socialist realism is one-dimensional art while it is present-day bourgeois society that sustains the production of serious art, even though, as fashion, that culture may often become trivialized.

The philosophical liberalism that I espouse is not the utilitarian concept of individual hedonism, where the greatest good determines the greatest number (and the outcomes are induced by the legislator acting through the

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sanctions of pleasure and pain), but the Kantian distinction between the public and the private, where the autonomy of the individual is defended in his contractual and moral endeavors. It is a conception of society not as unitary but as plural, where freedoms are guaranteed by due process, and voluntary agreements between individuals on matters of private concern are respected. In this conception, too, where possible, social and political matters are best left to institutions mediating between the State and the individual, the voluntary and professional associations of kindred individuals--in short, the civil society--as the instruments of public activities.

Collectivist doctrines--communism and fascism, and, in some of its extreme forms, cultural modernism--are doctrines of the will, the imposition of ideology and imagination on society. Some doctrines find their legitimacy in the State, claiming its sovereignty in the double alienation of power from rulers and ruled, or in a Party that embodies the general will in a single institution or leader. Liberalism is a doctrine of rights that are embodied in the individual and are not alienable, though they are subject to negotiation, especially when rights conflict with rights, but protected always against arbitrary actions, even by the law. That is the hallmark of liberalism, the curious fusion of Locke and Kant, of a procedural formalism given a transcendental foundation.

The defense of rights, and the extension of rights, has been the basic thread of constitutional law, winding into a single skein the continuity of American society. The debate over rights, beginning with the first amendments to the Constitution, persists down to the present day, when new rights, such as the right to privacy, are justified, not as the original intentions of the Founding Fathers, or the imposition by a single group of its own moral conceptions, but in a reasoned debate that seeks to broaden the conceptions of moral personality. What other nation has seen such a sustained debate, consciously explored, throughout its history?

been conflicts of interests, and even when issues of moral passion, such as temperance, have been written into law, the framework of debate and reversal was never traduced. The virtue of conflicts of interests is that they are usually instrumental--they do not encompass the whole of one's life--and they are negotiable. Wars of truth, wars of ideology, wars of passion are not negotiable. They become wars à l'outrance, and the testimony of the Holocaust, the Gulag, the Cambodian killing fields or Beirut today shows the ghastly, inexpressible consequences of such conflicts.

The danger to any civil society arises when moral issues and cultural values become politicized and are placed within the crucible of the State. For these issues, being non-negotiable, only polarize a society. That is why one of the founding premises of American society was to separate Church and State, even though the Founding Fathers themselves were deeply religious. To insist on pluralism, and the separation of realms, is not moral or cultural relativism. It is the injunction that one cannot impose one's own version of truth on the entire society, particularly when the society, like most in the world today, is a plural and multi-group, multi-faith society.¹⁷

The distinction between the public and private, and the urgency of maintaining that distinction when civitas is ignored, when individuals pursue unlimited economic ends, heedless of consequences, or others pursue private pleasures that know no bounds--is still the condition of a civilized life. Civil society is a contract. That initial feature of modernity remains an ineradicable fact, a condition of the free public life, lest we succumb to an unyielding collectivism or religious absolutism. But is a contract enough to hold a society together?

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Men find their meanings and belief in culture, and the fundamental

17. This is why, for example, as I have argued, no State monies should be used for abortions, but neither are they to be prohibited as a matter of private choice. Yet as private choice they should be privately paid for. If one argues, understandably, that the poor are thus excluded, the relevant point is that private foundations, established by those who believe in private choice, should underwrite these costs. The politicization of moral issues can only be destructive of a plural society.

dilemma of liberalism is the problem of maintaining a sustainable culture. The secular religions of messianic and chiliastic thought sought to fuse culture and politics and renew men's visions through some new transfigurations of belief. And disaster has been the outcome. Yet men do resist the mundane and do want some larger vision. For Nietzsche, and to some extent for Max Weber, the choice was between a culture of materialistic rationality or one of intoxication, and while Nietzsche chose the latter, and ended in madness, Weber could only live in cultural despair. Such choices may be possible for individuals, and the self-despairing and the self-intoxicated fill the pages of literature and criticism, but they are not possible for societies which must find common rules and common meanings, especially when one seeks the sacred but knows that one lives in the mundane. The culture of rationality is mundane, but it lacks a sense of the sacred. The literary effort to construct ritual, whether in art or theatre, becomes modish, or pseudo-mystical, or hermetic.

And yet liberalism, I would say, provides the basis for a culture, and one that draws deeply from the ethical traditions of the West. For if one asks, justly, for rights, one must accept obligations as well. And the thread of obligation, when expressed over generations and time, is the reciprocity of redemption. It is the recognition by the individual that he does not come out of himself but is the son of his father, with the obligation to redeem, as Goethe once said, the inheritance he has received. It is the tie to tradition and the continuity of identity which provide the anchorage in the parochial as one seeks the consciousness of the universal as well. The obligation to others is the obligation to the community, the sharing of reciprocal rights which makes one a member of the community and creates the sense of civitas and public weal. Redemption, thus, freely accepted, unites the individual and the communal, and by crossing time it provides a transcendental foundation for a moral bond beyond one's self. It is in this sense that liberalism is not only the re-design of the future but also the redemption of the past. And in respecting the claims of both, it becomes a faith that draws on the sacred as well.