A Secular Age

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ment akin to nationalism. Indeed, outside the Anglo-Saxon world, this organiza-
tion often took the form of a ghetto, which was meant to ensure that people would
be schooled, pay football, take their recreation, etc., exclusively among co-religion-
ists. The Catholic Church was the major architect of such ghettos, building them
even in the Anglo-Saxon world; but in the Netherlands, for instance, Protestants
did likewise. As a matter of fact, one might even claim that the "Confessional Age"
extends beyond the boundaries of Christian Churches. One can see certain analo-
gies with Social Democratic and later Communist parties, with their women and
youth groups, sports clubs, cultural organizations, and the like. The aims here were
not dissimilar to those underlying Catholic "ghettos": to penetrate more deeply the
lives of the followers, to bond them more closely together, and to minimize contact
with outsiders.86

Thus the powerful forms of faith wove four strands together in this age: spiritual-
ity, discipline, political identity, and an image of civilizational order. These four
strands had been present in elite religion in the two preceding centuries, but now
this had become a mass phenomenon. They strengthened each other, made a
whole.

But these tightly organized churches, often suspicious of outsiders, with their
strongly puritanical codes, their inherent links, of whatever sort, to political identi-
ities, and their claims to ground civilizational order, were perfectly set up for a
precipitate fall in the next age which was beginning to dawn at mid-century. To this
I now turn.

13 The Age of Authenticity

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

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

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

The causes cited for these changes are many: affluence and the continued ex-
ension of consumer life styles; social and geographic mobility; outsourcing and
down-scaling by corporations; new family patterns, particularly the growth of the
two-income household, with the resulting overwork and burnout; suburban spread,
whereby people often live, work, and shop in three separate areas; the rise of televi-
sion, and others. 3 But whatever the correct list of such precipitating factors, what
interests me here is the understandings of human life, agency, and the good which both encourage this new (at least seeming) individualization, and also make us merely uneasy about it.

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

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

One important facet of this new consumer culture was the creation of a special youth market, with a flood of new goods, from clothes to records, aimed at an age bracket which ranged over adolescents and young adults. The advertising deployed to sell these goods in symbiosis with the youth culture which develops helped to create a new kind of consciousness of youth as a stage in life, between childhood and adulthood tied down by responsibility. This was not, of course, without precedent. Many earlier societies had marked out such a stage in the life cycle, with its own special groupings and rituals; and upper-class youth had enjoyed their studen days and (sometimes) fraternities. Indeed, with the expansion of urban life and the consolidation of national cultures, upper- and middle-class youth began to become conscious of itself as a social reality towards the end of the nineteenth century.
The contemporary ethic of authenticity thus has a long pre-history, and if we look at this, we can see that it is set in a wider critique of the buffeted, disciplining self, concerned above all with instrumental rational control. If we think of the 60s as our hinge moment, we note a widespread critique of our society in the period immediately preceding it among leading intellectuals. The society of the 1950s was castigated as conformist, corrupting individuality and creativity, as too concerned with production and concrete results, as repressing feeling and spontaneity, overvaluing the mechanical over the organic. Writers like Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse turned out to be prophets of the coming revolution. As Paul Tillich said as a graduating class in 1957: “We hope for more non-conformists among you, for your sake, for the sake of the nation, and for the sake of humanity.” In one sense (perhaps not the one he intended), his wish was granted in profusion in the following decade.

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

This outlook goes back to the Romantic period; it is articulated among other places in Schiller’s Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man.11 It is carried down into the 1960s in part through the continuing chain of related counter-cultures, and in part expressly through the influence of writers like Marcuse. Like the ethic of auton
In fact, this kind of capitalist sub-culture, which one found mainly in the IT world, is not unanimously accepted among the rich and powerful. There still exists a culture of the big vertical corporations; and there is a tension between the two.

What this shows, however, is that fragments of the ideal, selectively acted on, remain powerful; and even the abandoned segments may still tug at our conscience. The ideal, however distorted, is still powerful enough in a society like the U.S. to awaken strong resistance in certain quarters, and to be the object of what have been called "culture wars". This latter term may be in some sense an exaggeration, because there is some evidence that the number of full-scale, utterly down-the-line warriors on each side may be relatively small; in fact, the great majority of Americans are caught in the middle. But the dynamic of the system, the interaction between single-issue organizations, the media, and the American party system, and perhaps the American obsession with "rights", keeps the polarization at fever level, and prevents saner and lower-key treatment of the issues.11

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

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

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

And yet we find these words surfacing again and again, as, in a certain manner like "freedom", "rights", or "non-discrimination", and so on. Of course, none of these is empty in the way "choice" is; but they are too often deployed as argument-stopping universals, without any consideration of the where and how of their application to the case at hand. This has something to do with the dynamic of our political process in many Western democracies (I'm not taking a stand one way or another on whether it's better elsewhere); the way in which advocacy groups, media, political parties both generate and feed off a dumbed down political culture. Hunter rests the poignant fact that studies showed the "pro-life" side of the abortion debate that the best way they could make their case was in terms of "rights" and "choice".12 These favoured terms acquire a Procrustean force. Shallowness and dominance are two sides of the same coin.

But for that very reason, one can wonder how much they reflect real-life deliberation of the human beings in the society. Hunter reveals how complex and nuanced is the thinking of people who can be lined up on one side of the other by some simplifying question, like "are you pro-life or pro-choice?13

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

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

Anyone can recognize here widespread ideas that are often used as trump cards in arguments, or engrafting assumptions, even though they are often contested. Ehrenhalt's main point is very convincing here. It is absurd to adopt any of these three propositions as universal truths. It is clear that to have any kind of liveable society some choices have to be restricted, some authorities have to be respected, and some individual responsibility has to be assumed. The issue should always be which authorities, responsibilities, and at what cost. In other words, falling back on slogans like these hides from us the dilemmas we have to navigate between in our choices. Properly understood, what happened in the last half of the twentieth
century in America was that some choices were freed, and some authorities overthrown, with some resultant gains, and at the cost of some losses. And more of the people who help these slogans to circulate are at some level aware of this, because they may also in another context bemoan the loss of stable, reliable and safe communities. We saw above how the majority of Americans believe that community has been undermined and that people are less trustworthy today.

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

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

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

I want to view the turn differently. When we undergo some such transformation, the moral stakes change. I don't mean that we cannot make a reasoned over-all judgment about the gains and losses in the transition. I believe that this one has been on balance positive, while involving palpable costs. But I do mean that the available options have changed. This means, first, that some options available in earlier days are not possible today, like a general return to the ideal of clear and fixed gender roles in the family. And secondly, it means that there are options today within the new context, and that some of them are better than others. This is something which the constant harping on the most degraded forms by critics tends to obscure. These critics become unwrting allies of the trivialized forms, because they attack the new context as a whole as though it were defined by these. That one side in the abortion debate calls itself "pro-choice" has something to do with the dynamic of its battle with its polar opposite. Root and branch attacks on authenticity help to make our lives worse, while being powerless to put the clock back to an earlier time.

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

I have spoken elsewhere about the typically modern, "horizontal" forms of social imaginary, in which people grasp themselves and grasp great numbers of others as existing and acting simultaneously. The three widely-recognized such forms are: the economy, the public sphere, and the sovereign people. But the space of fashion alluded to above is an example of a fourth structure of simultaneity. It is unlike the public sphere and the sovereign people, because these are sites of common action.

In this respect, it is like the economy, where a host of individual actions concordate. But it is different from this as well, because our actions relate in the space of fashion in a particular way. I wear my own kind of hat, but in doing so I am displaying my style to all of you, and in this, I am responding to your self-display, even as you will respond to mine. The space of fashion is one in which we sustain a language together of signs and meanings, which is constantly changing, but which at any moment is the background needed to give our gestures the sense they have. If my hat can express my particular kind of cocky, yet understated self-display, then this is because of how the common language of style has evolved between us up to this point. My gesture can change it, and then your responding stylistic move will take its meaning from the new contour the language takes up.

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

Spaces of this kind become more and more important in modern urban society, where large numbers of people rub shoulders, unknown to each other, without dealings with each other, and yet affecting each other, forming the inseparable context of each other's lives. As against the everyday rush to work in the Metro, where the others can sink to the status of obstacles in my way, city life has developed other ways of being-with, for instance, as we meet and take our Sunday walk in the park; or as we mingle at the summer street-festival, or in the stadium before the play-off game.
Here each individual or small group acts on their own, but aware that their slight
say something to the others, will be responsive to them, will help build a com-
mon mood or tone which will colour everyone’s actions.

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

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

Just because these spaces hover between solitude and togetherness, they may
sometimes flip over into common action; and indeed, the moment when they do
may be hard to pin-point. As we rise as one to cheer the crucial third-period
goal, we have undoubtedly become a common agent; and we may try to prolong
this when we leave the stadium by marching and chanting, or even wreaking vari-
ous forms of mayhem together. The cheering roared at a rock festival is similarly
fused. There is a heightened excitement at these moments of fusion, reminiscent of
Carnival, or of some of the great collective rituals of earlier days. Durkheim gave an
important place to these times of collective effervescence as forming moments of
society and the sacred.18 In any case, these moments seem to respond to some im-
portant felt need of today’s “lonely crowd”.

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

This brings us back into the category of the “feste”, which I invoked above.
Moments of fusion in a common action/feeling, which both wrench us out of the
everyday, and seem to put us in touch with something exceptional, beyond our

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our self-understandings as sovereign peoples haven’t been displaced by this new
individualism. But perhaps there has been a shift of emphasis. A human identity is a
complex thing, made up of many reference points. It still seems important for many
of us that we are Canadians, Americans, Britons or French. Just watch us when the Olympics are on. But the weighting, the importance of this in our over-all sense of identity can shift.

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

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

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

But today, the harm principle is widely endorsed, and seems the formula demanded by the dominant expressive individualism. (It is perhaps not an accident that Mill's arguments also drew on expressive sources, in the person of Humboldt.) Indeed, the "pursuit of (individual) happiness" takes on a new meaning in the after-war period. Of course, it is integral to Liberalism since the American Revolution, which enshrined it as one of a trinity of basic rights. But in the first century of the American Republic, it was inscribed within certain taken-for-granted boundaries. First there was the citizen ethic, centred on the good of self-rule, which Americans were meant to live up to. But beyond this, there were certain basic demands of individual morality, of what later would be called "family values," as well as the values of hard work and productivity, which gave a framework to the pursuit of individual good. To move outside of these was not so much to seek one's happiness, as to head towards perversion. There seemed therefore nothing contrary to the three basic rights enshrined by the Declaration of Independence in society's striving to inculcate, even in certain cases (e.g., sexual morality) to enforce these norms. European societies were perhaps less keen than the Americans to enforce various modes of social conformity, but their code was if anything even more restrictive.

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

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

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

In fact, the need to train character has receded even farther into the background, as though the morality of mutual respect were embedded in the ideal of authentic self-fulfilment itself, which is how undoubtedly many young people experience it.
today, oblivious of how the terrible twentieth-century aberrations of Fascism and extreme nationalism have also drunk at the expressivist source.

All this perhaps reflects the degree to which these principles of mutual respect for rights have become embedded in our cultures in the Atlantic world, forming the background against which many of our political and legal procedures of rights-retrieval and non-discrimination seem totally legitimate, even though we vigorously dispute their detailed application. But it also reflects the way in which rights-consciousness has become more loosely linked to the sense of belonging to a particular political community, which has both positive and negative sides.36

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

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

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

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

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

This is why the developments of recent decades in France have been so destabilizing for both sides of the old "guerre franco-française". Not only did the church see a sharp drop in adherence, but young people began to drop out of the rival Jacobin and/or communist world-views as well. In keeping with the dynamic of baroque, paleo-Durkheimian clericalism, the struggle threw up a kind of humanism which aspired in its own way to be a kind of national "church", that of the Republic and its principles, the framework within which people would hold their different metaphysical and (if they insisted) religious views. The Republic played a kind of neo-Durkheimian dispensation against the paleo-Durkheimianism of the clerical monarchists. This tradition even took over the term "sacred" for itself. (Think of "sans état ni religion", "au main sacré" which killed Marat, etc. This usage obviously facilitated Durkheim's theoretical use of the term to over-arch both ancien régime and republic.) It is not surprising that both Catholicism and this brand of republicanism undergo defections in the new post-Durkheimian dispensation of expressive individualism.37

This changes utterly the ways in which ideas of order used to be interwoven with the polemic between belief and unbelief. What has changed to make this much less the case is not only that we have achieved a broad consensus on our ideal of moral order. It is also that in our post-Durkheimian dispensation, the "sacred", other religious or "laïque", has become uncoupled from our political allegiance. It was the rivalry between two such kinds of global allegiances that animated the "guerre franco-française". It was also this older dispensation which could send masses of men into the trenches to fight for their country in 1914, and keep them there, with few desertsions and rare instances of mutiny for over four years.38

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

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

That the new dispensation doesn't provide the whole story is readily evident from the struggles in contemporary society. In a sense, part of what drove the Moral Ma-
iority and motivates the Christian Right in the U.S.A. is an aspiration to re-establish something of the fractured neo-Durkheimian understanding that used to define the nation, where being American would once more have a connection with theology, with being "one nation under God", or at least with the ethic which was interwoven with this. Similarly, much of the leadership of the Catholic Church, led by the Vatican, is trying to resist the challenge to monolithic authority which is implicit in the new expanded understanding of spirituality. And the Catholic Church in the U.S. frequently lines up with the Christian Right in attempts to re-establish earlier versions of the moral consensus which enjoyed in their day neo-Durkheimian religious grounding. For all these groups, the idea remains strong that there is a link between Christian faith and civilizational order.

But the very embattled nature of these attempts shows how we have slid out of the old dispensation. This shift goes a long way to explain the conditions of belief in our day. But it also underlines a point I made earlier. My terms "neo-Durkheimian" and "post-Durkheimian" designate ideal types. My claim is that our present day is unambiguously post-Durkheimian, as say, medieval France was unquestionably paleo-Durkheimian, and say, the nineteenth-century U.S.A. was neo-Durkheimian. Rather there is a struggle going on between these two dispensations. But it is just this, the availability of a post-Durkheimian dispensation, which destabilizes us and provokes the conflict.

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

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

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

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

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

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

These are connected movements. The new prosperity came along with better communications, and this opened horizons; but then the new pursuit of happiness drew people so strongly that they began to desert the older ritual life which was built around the community and its common efforts to survive in the physical and spiritual world. This ritual life then begins to shrink, in part disappar, and there is less and less to hold those who might want to stay within it.29

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

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

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

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

But all this was intensified by the cultural revolution of the 1960s, not only in that more people were swept into a stance in opposition to much of the religious ethic, but also in that the new sexual mores were even more strongly at odds with it.
matter of simply agreeing with what they say. There has been too much hype, un-
plian illusion, and sanctimony to old tabus in the sexual revolution for this to make
sense. And indeed, 40 years on this is more and more evident to lots of young peo-
ple. (Which is not to say that churches don’t also have something to learn from this
whole transition.)

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

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

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

In the Christian context, this was reflected, as well as further entrenched, by a re-
ative drop in male practice as against female. “Les hommes s’en vont” is the uni-
momous lament of priests in the Ain Department in the nineteenth century, particu-
larly in the latter half. This absence reflects often a sense of male pride and dignity,
which is seen as incompatible with a too unbridled devotion; there is something
“womansy” about this kind of dedication. This sense was connected to, fed and was

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

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

Of course, not everybody agrees with this account of female desire. But it shows a
new uncertainty about the forms of women’s identity—matched by corresponding
uncertainty among men. It is not possible to address the question of sexual ethics
without engaging with these issues.
But we have clearly stepped way beyond these limits today. Not only do people experiment widely before settling down in a stable couple, but they also form couples without ever marrying; in addition, they form, then break, then reform these relationships. Our peasant ancestors also engaged in a kind of "serial monogamy", but in their cases the earlier unions were always broken by death, while in ours it is divorce (or in the case of unmarried partners just moving out) which ends them.39

There is something here deeply at odds with all forms of sexual ethic—be it folk tradition or Christian doctrine—which saw the stability of marriage as essential to social order. But there is more than this. Christians did see their faith as essential to civilized order, but this was not the only source of the sexual ethic which has dominated modern Western Christianity. There were also strong images of spirituality which enshrined particular images of sexual purity. We can see these developing in the early modern period. John Bosby has argued that in the medieval understanding of the seven deadly sins, the sins of the flesh (pride, envy, anger) were seen as more grievous than those of the flesh (gluttony, lechery, sloth: avarice could be put in either column). But during the Catholic Reformation, emphasis came to be more and more on concupiscence as the crucial obstacle to sanctity.40

What was perhaps ancient was seeing sexual ethics through a prism of pollution and purity. "Hence the ban on marriage during Lent and at other seasons, the doctrine that sexual acts between the married were always sexually sinful, the purification of women after childbirth, the peculiar preoccupation with sexuality among priests."41 The modern age seems to have spiritualized the underlying notion of purity, and made it the principal gateway (or its opposite the principal obstacle) to our approach to God.

We can think of the Catholic Reformation, and in particular in France, in the terms I have been using in this study, as an attempt to inoculate a deep, personal devotion to God (through Christ, or Mary) in (potentially) everyone; an attempt, moreover, which was to be carried out mainly through the agency of the clergy who would preach, persuade, cajole, push their charges towards this new, higher orientation, and away from the traditional, community, pre-axial forms of the sacred. If we posit this as the goal, we can think of various ways in which one might try to encompass it. A heavy emphasis might be put on certain examples of sanctity, in the hope of awakening a desire to follow them. Or else, the major thrust might be to bring people by fear to shape up at least minimally. Of course, both of these paths were tried, but the overwhelming weight fell on the negative one. This was, indeed, part of the whole process of Reform from the High Middle Ages. Jean Delumeau has spoken of "la pastorale de la peur" (a pastoral policy of fear).42

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

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

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

Soon the hour of your death will sound; continue the web of your disorders; sink yourselves deeper in the mire of your shameful passions; insist by the impurity of your heart Him who judges even the just. Soon you will fall under the pointless blows of death, and the measure of your iniquities will be that of the fearful torments which will then be inflicted upon you.43

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

What emerges from all this is what we might call "morality", that is, the crucial importance given to a certain code in our spiritual lives. We should all come closer to God; but a crucial stage on this road has to be the minimal conformity to the code. Without this, you aren't even at the starting line, as it were, of this crucial journey. You are not in the game at all. This is perhaps not an outlook which it is easy to square with a reading of the New Testament, but it nevertheless achieved a kind of hegemony across broad reaches of the Christian church in the modern era.
This outlook ends up putting all the emphasis on what we should do, and/or what we should believe, to the detriment of spiritual growth. Sister Elizabeth Germain, analyzing a representative catechism in wide use in the nineteenth century, concludes that

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

An analogous view was very strong in the Victorian era, in both England and America. Sex was meant to bond the couple. Sex is healthy, and hence pleasure is attached to it, but pleasure shouldn't be its main object.  However, the framework in
which this understanding stood was very different. It was, of course, still considered a Christian doctrine. But it was also, and mainly, justified in terms of science. Medical experts, and their ideas of health, were as important if not more so than divines with their notions about God's will.

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

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

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

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

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

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

But then, to return to our story, in the hands of certain writers at the turn of the century, "science" itself began to break the alliance with religion. For thinkers like Freud, Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter, sexual gratification was either itself good, or at least seen as a virtually unattainable force. This fed into a counter-culture, some strands of which saw sexuality as a form of Dionysian release from discipline and repression. Around the beginning of the twentieth century, all this came together with new social conditions, mainly in cities, where young people could pair off without supervision. The 1920s was aware of a new kind of freedom which young people, particularly women, were enjoying, which took the form of a sensuality not connected to marriage or procreation.

All this involved: (a) a hesitant lifting of the age-old denigration of sensuality (at least in white, middle-class circles), and (b) a hesitant affirmation of women's desire (often denied in the high Victorian period), and of their right to seek pleasure as well. This was, of course, still fraught with danger, because women still had to bear the brunt of any negative consequences of pregnancy.
If we fast-forward to the 1960s, we have, of course, to take account of new social factors: women in the work-force, the contraceptive revolution, and others. But even as above, my interest here is to articulate the ethical changes of this time, rather than enumerating the facilitating causes. What were the main strands of this revolution?

There was indeed, one which was characterized by a supposedly worldly-wise hedonism, the one associated with *Playboy*. But the main ones associated with the movements of students and young people were fourfold: (1) a continuation and radicalization of (a) above, the rehabilitation of sensuality as a good in itself; (2) the radicalization of (b): affirming the equality of the sexes, and in particular articulating a new ideal in which men and women come together as partners, freed of their gender roles.15 (3) A widespread sense of Dionysian, even "transgressive" sex as liberating; and (4) a new conception of one's sexuality as an essential part of one's identity, which not only gave an additional meaning to sexual liberation, but also became the basis for gay liberation, and the emancipation of a whole host of previously condemned forms of sexual life.16

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

But just as above, the fact that there was one interconnected ideal here did nothing to guarantee its realization. The hard discontinuities and dilemmas which beset human sexual life, and which most ethics tend to ignore or downplay, had to assert themselves: the impossibility of integrating the Dionysian into a continuing way of life, the difficulty of containing the sensual within a continuing really intimate relation, the impossibility of escaping gender roles altogether, and the great obstacles to redefining them, at least in the short run. Not to mention that the celebration of sexual release could generate new ways in which men could objectify and exploit women.17 A lot of people discovered the hard way that there were dangers as well as liberation in throwing over the codes of their parents.

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

gation and a strong image of sexual purity, is to be in turn condemned. This would be a clerical-Reform way of dealing with the Reform-clerical complex. It is clear that there have been and are today celibate vocations which are extremely spiritually fertile, and many of these turn centrally on aspirations to sexual abstinence and purity. It would just repeat the mistake of the Protestant Reformers to turn around and deprecate these. The fateful feature of Reform-clericalism, which erects such a barrier between the Church and contemporary society, is not its animating spirituality; our world is if anything dowered in exalted images of sexual fulfillment, and needs to hear about paths of renunciation. The deviation was to make this take on sexuality mandatory for everyone, through a moralistic code which made a certain kind of purity a base condition for relating to God through the sacraments. What Vatican II and later documents of similar import make premises, whether they be called anti-sacramental or not, is the need to find a way to embrace in a way that is at the same time both profound and practical the idea that God-fearing, sexual persons need the Church in their lives.

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

RELIGION TODAY

So the dominant religious forms of the Mobilization Age have been destabilized by the current cultural revolution, even as those of the ancient régime were by the onset of the Age of Mobilization. The forms of the last two centuries have taken a double whammy: on one side, an undermining of churches connected to strong national or minority identities, on the other, an estrangement from much of the ethic and style of authority of these same churches.

We might even speak of a double whammy, if we think of the way in which the neo-Durkheimian embedding of religion in a state and as the mainstay of a civilization morality, especially in secular ethics, intercut in the family. The best-known case of this double embedding is perhaps the U.S.A., particularly in the immediate post-war era: for this was a time in which American patriotism, religion, and sense of family values seemed to be in perfect lock step. On the one hand, the new opportunities for a large segment of the population to live to the full the life of the nuclear family in the growing suburbs was seen as a realization of the American dream. What America was about was the opening of this kind of opportunity, in which eventually all could prosper. That life in a suburb should have seemed to so many people as the acme of prosperity makes sense if one asks where they were coming from. Some had a past, especially recent immigrants, of dense insertion in extended families and kin networks, in relation to which this new life seemed a liberation, which also brought their lives into line with a hallowed model in established American society. For others, this life had been impeded by poverty and the dangers that beset poverty: unemployment, lack of discipline, drink. As last they had acceded to respectability. Moreover, these people were emerging from a catastrophic depression and a world war, and it seemed that at last green fields were opening before them.

If this kind of prosperity was central to the American way of life, so was religion. Yet it could be seen as following God's design, and America as a nation was espe-