

A QUESTION OF VALUES

Six Ways We Make the Personal
Choices That Shape Our Lives

REVISED AND UPDATED EDITION

HUNTER LEWIS

Foreword by M. Scott Peck

Praise for
A Question of Values

“Not only teaches us how to think about values; it teaches us how to think. This book should be required reading in schools.”

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former president of Yale University
and commissioner of baseball

“An important book.”

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former dean of arts and sciences and currently
Lewis P. and Linda L. Geysler University Professor
Emeritus, Harvard University

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—ADELE SIMMONS,
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—SAMUEL L. HAYES III,
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“With remarkable perspicacity and skill, Hunter Lewis provides a convincing framework of values. . . . His analysis is objective, nonpartisan, wide-ranging, current, concrete, and lucid. For general readers this work will prove lively and illuminating; for undergraduates it will be a godsend and an ideal introduction to this vital subject.”

—EDGAR F. SHANNON (1918–1997),
former president and former professor of English,
University of Virginia

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*Six Ways We Make the Personal
Choices That Shape Our Lives*

Hunter Lewis



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This book is dedicated to the memory of Walter Lippmann, who assisted me when I was a young writer still in school and whose own work (especially *A Preface to Morals*) is still highly relevant to the study of values.

Foreword

A CENTURY AGO, the greatest dangers we faced arose from agents outside ourselves: microbes, flood and famine, wolves in the forest at night. Today the greatest dangers—war, pollution, starvation—have their source in our own motives and sentiments: greed and hostility, carelessness and arrogance, narcissism and nationalism. The study of values might once have been a matter of primarily individual concern and deliberation as to how best to lead the “good life.” Today it is a matter of collective human survival. If we identify the study of values as a branch of philosophy, then the time has arrived for all women and men to become philosophers—or else.

What do theologians mean when they say that we human beings are “created in the image of God”? My

own understanding of this is that we human creatures have been given free will, the extraordinary power of choice. But the power to choose is the power to choose the bad or the good; to be loving or unscrupulously self-centered. What is the nature of this power? What motivates our choices?

There is mystery here. But there is also some clarity. It is clear, for instance, that a great many humans of many different races, cultures, and nationalities are very strongly motivated by money. Indeed, it is so clear I think it would be quite safe to refer to the human species as *Homo economicus*. But economically motivated acts are not necessarily good acts. Often they are obviously malicious and sometimes downright murderous. If we cannot routinely learn to submit the personal profit motive, when appropriate, to higher principles, then we are in all likelihood—and probably quite quickly—going to murder ourselves off. Such higher principles are matters of values or, as philosophers say, matters of ethics. For our species to be truly *Homo sapiens*, that is, wise enough to figure out how to survive, then it will not be enough for us to remain merely *Homo economicus*; we must somehow become *Homo ethicus*.

So this is hardly an arcane subject; it is a life-and-death matter. And not one that admits a quick and easy, simplistic solution. I mentioned that there is mystery here. Were there not, philosophers would

long ago have closed the book on the subject. Indeed, the subject is so grand that no one book, no one author, could possibly address it exhaustively.

But that doesn't mean the frontiers of our understanding cannot be expanded. To the contrary, I hope I have made it clear that we desperately need to do so. Nor does it mean that any one probe into the mystery is going to be as worthy as any other. The subject deserves all that can possibly be brought to it in the way of clarity of thought and language, brilliance of insight, and rigor of discipline.

Although it cannot cover everything, this is a groundbreaking book. It is also an enlightening, thought-provoking, and remarkably well written book. In it the author compellingly makes the case, through a breadth of erudition that is to all intents and purposes a kind of tour de force, that we human beings have profoundly different cognitive lenses through which we view the world, and hence profoundly different styles of thinking by which we make our value judgments, our ethical decisions.

Why should such an elucidation be of groundbreaking significance? Just this: ethical behavior is, of necessity, conscious behavior. If we are unconscious of our motives, it is unlikely that we will behave in a consistently ethical manner. If we are not aware of the particular lens through which we are looking at the world, then we do not have any

true choice about what we are going to see and how we are going to respond.

In this work, Hunter Lewis makes us aware—conscious—not only of our own lenses, but also of a range of different lenses. There are two results. One is to make it possible for us to question the validity of our perceptions and values. The capacity for ethical behavior is dependent on the capacity for such self-questioning. Virtually all of the evil in this world is committed by people who are absolutely certain they know what they are doing.

The other result is that it enables us to make multidimensional rather than one-dimensional simplistic decisions. If we think just logically or just emotionally or just intuitively, then our decisions will be only logical or only intuitive or only emotional. But if we become aware of the variety of different cognitive styles, it opens up the possibility for us to make decisions that are emotional *and* logical *and* intuitive. In other words, such consciousness makes it possible for us to *integrate* different ways of knowing; to think, so to speak, with both our right brain and our left brain.

I believe such integration to be essential to our collective salvation. The noun *integrity* is derived from the verb to *integrate*. If we are going to think and behave with full integrity, then we must learn how to integrate our different ways of perceiving the world so as to develop a multidimensional, integrated worldview. To

behave ethically is to behave with integrity. In raising our consciousness of the different styles by which we make our value judgments, this important book points us toward greater wholeness and integrity.

—M. SCOTT PECK

Acknowledgments

I am much indebted to the following individuals: Henry Rosovsky, who designed Harvard's current core curriculum, an important new direction for American higher education that, among other things, requires undergraduates to take courses on values, and that directly inspired this book; Joe Kanon and Bill McPherson, who read the manuscript and generously offered their ideas; Kathleen Chabra, who was unstinting in providing ideas and assistance at every turn; and Tom Grady, my editor at Harper & Row, whose thoughtful observations were very valuable.

Part One

Personal Values

One

The Initial Question

AN OBJECTIVE OBSERVER, a proverbial Martian visiting this planet for the first time, would be struck, not by the unity, but by the unpredictability, the almost madcap complexity, and the incessant quarrelsomeness of human values. To illustrate this point, one need only consider a few examples drawn from the United States. First, the unpredictability:

- A wealthy young society hostess in Greenwich, Connecticut, tells a reporter that the dinner parties she is organizing, hosted by the most socially prominent families at their opulent private estates as a benefit for the local Boys' Club, will undoubtedly be a success, because God is "co-chairing" the event with her.

- A television series teaches English grammar by using music videos (lyrics flashed on the screen as subtitles contain the instruction). The program devoted to pronouns shows a hot young man, cut to a variety of longing girlfriends, cut back to the young man singing vehemently against the “self-denial we’ve been sold,” cut to a sultry young woman singing “Baby, take me home,” cut to more young couples eyeing each other seductively. The series is designed for children and run on public television stations.
- A New Jersey businessman opens a pizza parlor called “Pie in the Sky” with a pink neon sign flashing a verse from Exodus and delivery boxes emblazoned with other biblical messages. The proprietor prays daily with his corporate prayer “consultant”: “[in addition to asking for insight] I pray for cash, I ask [the consultant] to pray for cash, and it comes in.”

In addition to the unpredictability, the complexity:

- Country singer Willie Nelson is described by friends as a “Baptist Buddhist.”
- A pseudonymous member of a Catholic order describes herself to a reporter as a “practicing Zen, Catholic, lesbian, feminist nun.”

In addition to the unpredictability and complexity, the quarrelsomeness:

- Howard Phillips, chairman of the US Conservative Caucus, Inc., thinks that the American social and political system is the hope of the world. Yet another political “conservative,” Saul Bellow, the Nobel laureate novelist from Chicago, indirectly responds by stating on national television that the excess of liberty “in American culture is as serious as the deprivation of liberty in [a police state].”
- Richard Cohen, a *Washington Post* columnist, argues that the initial decision not to appoint an acknowledged homosexual to the US government’s AIDS commission (a decision later reversed) is “akin to denying Jews a place on the Holocaust commission.” Howard Phillips replies that it is “blasphemous” to suggest that the practice of homosexuality is analogous to adherence to Judaism.
- Cohen and Phillips battle again on the increasing role of religion in politics. Cohen: “[Politicians seem] now to attend church with a vengeance [but] when it comes to safeguarding civil liberties and ensuring progressive and fair social policies,

I would rather take my chances with your average atheist.”

- A *Village Voice* reporter in New York blasts the producers of a sex education film because the featured testimony of a former teenage mother (“Let me just say, sex wasn’t that great, it really wasn’t. I mean, I thought, oh my God, this is what they’ve been trying to keep me away from?”) represents an evil attempt to “preempt” the “sexuality” of ten-year-olds.

Confronted with the unpredictability, complexity, and quarrelsomeness of human values, with the apparent lack of any real agreement or uniformity in our personal evaluations and beliefs, the evaluations and beliefs that guide our everyday speech and conduct, how should we respond? Should we dismiss values as a muddle, a chaos, a Babel that is impossible to make sense of? It would be easy to draw this conclusion, but it would be hasty. Values are not necessarily the muddle they sometimes seem. There *are* some basic choices, some uniform options that we are all faced with. The very interesting task that we face as human beings is to identify these options and then to choose among them, not blindly but with a discerning eye, and thus to answer the recurring biblical question: “What manner of men and women shall we be?”

Two

Sorting It Out: How We Choose Our Values

IN ORDER TO sort out our basic choices, we need to construct a framework in which personal values can be defined, compared, and contrasted. But how can we best set about doing this? One way would be to ask people directly about their values. Assuming that confidentiality is guaranteed and people tell us the truth about themselves, we can then go about categorizing their evaluations and beliefs. Of course, individual A may be like B in one respect, like C in another, like D in another. In other ways B may be more like D, C like A, and otherwise all four may be quite different.

If we give up on the idea of simply asking people to talk about their values, we might instead try a “scientific” poll. Assuming that we avoid the obvious pitfall of oversimplified, vague, or subjective questions, a “scientific” poll of several thousand people, all given the same questions in exactly the same way, should give us what we need: “hard, factual” information on which to build.

On the other hand, poll responses depend very much on the specific questions asked (slight variations in phrasing a question elicit entirely different answers), and how can we possibly know what questions to ask? It's the old riddle "which came first—the chicken or the egg?" We cannot know the right questions to ask without some kind of framework, but we are asking the questions in the first place in order to develop a framework! Fortunately, there are other ways to proceed. We might, for example, try to stand back, get some detachment from the hurly-burly of what people say and do, focus instead on some of the simplest, most basic questions about values, beginning with what values are, and see where these questions and answers lead us:

What are values?

The term *values* is a relatively recent one and is sometimes dismissed (for example, by the late philosopher Allan Bloom) as a piece of barbarous jargon. But most people now use it—people in everyday life, journalists, politicians, even distinguished

* The limitations of polling techniques for determining people's values may be seen in a famous study by the Stanford Research Institute of 2,713 demographically representative Americans, each of whom was led through a gargantuan 800-part questionnaire by a professional staff. The resulting nine "value" categories in which Americans were deemed to fall proved to be suspiciously subjective ("Integrators: have a kind of inner completeness") and judgmental ("Emulators: seem in some sense to lead hollow lives").

philosophers such as the late Sir Isaiah Berlin. Presidential candidates campaign by telling crowds, “I share your values,” and another head of state tells an American president, “We do not need anybody else’s values.” Although the term *values* is often used loosely, it should be synonymous with personal evaluations and related beliefs, especially personal evaluations and related beliefs about the “good,” the “just,” and the “beautiful,” personal evaluations and beliefs that propel us to action, to a particular kind of behavior and life.

But do values, in the sense of freely chosen values, truly exist? Are human beings instead driven by inherited instincts, instincts that we like to dress up with the term *values*, so that we can pretend there is a measure of choice in the process, when it is really all programmed into our genes?

This is a complicated subject, but there is a good deal of evidence that human beings are not primarily driven by genetically determined instincts but are rather free to make their own choices. For example, self-preservation and sexual drives are often cited as among the most gripping human “instincts.” Yet in medieval and even modern Japan, among other cultures, personal beliefs about correct behavior commonly lead to ritual suicide, and in Tibet before the Chinese invasion a

substantial percentage of the population chose to live celibately in monasteries. Given these rather large-scale exceptions, self-preservation and sex cannot be instincts in the same sense of the word that we apply to animals. Even if one defines the term *instinct* loosely, it is unarguable that freely chosen values supplement (if they do not completely supplant) instinct as the driving force within human beings, and that without values human behavior would be directionless, chaotic, and ultimately self-destructive.

Perhaps we are not driven by immutable instincts. But we might still be controlled by the influence of genes on our underlying personality or, alternatively, by peer pressure, by the relentless demands of the society in which we happen to live.

The proposition that individual human beings are programmed into their values, either by the influence of genes on personality or by social pressures, can be neither proven nor refuted. It all depends on how one defines words like *control* and *freedom*, and many semanticists argue that such words are undefinable.* Because this debate is irresolvable, and because most

* It is possible, of course, to define freedom in a specific, and especially in a relative, context—"I need more freedom than this job, marriage, or country allows"—but it is difficult if not impossible in a broader, more abstract, and absolute context.

people feel “free” to form and express their personal evaluations and beliefs, even if they do not always feel free to act on those beliefs, it seems reasonable to make a simplifying assumption in favor of individual human choice and freedom.

If values are freely chosen personal evaluations and beliefs, how do we arrive at these evaluations and beliefs?

This is the key question. Let’s start first with beliefs by asking ourselves how we come to believe anything. Think of something that you believe to be true: Your eyes are brown; the earth is flat or round; Jesus was resurrected or was not resurrected from the dead. Make a list of such beliefs and then ask yourself: Why do I believe this? How do I know it? If you reflect carefully, you will see that there are only a very few ways that we “know” anything. For the color of our eyes or flatness of the earth, we rely on direct observation, a simple form of sense experience; although with respect to the shape of the earth it would be wrong. To learn the real shape of the earth we would need both a much more sophisticated form of observational sense experience and some logic. In any case, it should become clear on reflection that there are very few interior mental modes through which we come to “believe” or “know” anything, indeed only four, and these may be summarized as follows:

The Most Basic Ways We Come to “Know” Something

Interior mental mode by which we arrive at “knowledge”	Explanation	Summary
1. Sense experience	Gaining direct knowledge through our own five senses	I know it’s true because I saw it, I heard it, I tasted it, I smelled it, or I touched it myself.
2. Deductive logic	Subjecting beliefs to a variety of tests that underlie deductive reasoning—e.g., consistency	Since A is true, B must be true, because B follows from A (among other tests).
3. Emotion	Feeling that something is right	I feel that this is true.
4. Intuition	The unconscious but nevertheless most powerful part of our higher mental processing capability. It may be helpful although fictitious to think of our mind as if it were in three parts: the conscious mind; the emotions; and the unconscious-but-not-emotive intuitive mind. Both the conscious mind and the unconscious-intuitive mind are highly sophisticated, but the unconscious-intuitive mind is much more powerful than the conscious mind, just as a supercomputer is more powerful than a microcomputer. Hence most creative discoveries are intuitively derived, and only later “dressed up” by logic, observation, or some other conscious technique.	After struggling with this problem all day, I went to bed confused and exhausted. The next morning, as I awakened, the solution came to me in a flash and I just knew that what I had learned was true.

In addition to these four basic interior mental modes, we also rely heavily on two major synthetic mental modes, that is, on two mental modes that draw upon and combine the four basic modes in particular ways:

Interior Mental Mode by which we arrive at “knowledge”	Explanation	Summary
5. Authority	<p>Because we are social creatures, we often utilize an indirect mental mode that allows us to rely on someone else or on something else in order to draw a conclusion without having to see or feel or think it through from the beginning on our own. However, in order to use an authority, we must first accept it as valid, and in order to do that we must become convinced of its reliability by our sense experience, logic, emotion, or intuition, and thence come to trust it, which is why this mode is synthetic. We may apply this mode to the shape of the earth (relying on the testimony of scientists), to the resurrection of Jesus (relying on or not relying on the testimony of Church or Bible), or to anything else.</p>	<p>I have faith in the authority of . . .</p>

Interior Mental Mode by which we arrive at “knowledge”	Explanation	Summary
6. “Science”	<p>Also a synthetic mental mode but one that is even more formal in its operation. In general, it relies on emotion to give us the energy and motivation to begin investigating something; on sense experience to collect the observable facts; on intuition to develop a testable hypothesis about the facts; on logic to develop the test (experiment); and on sense experience again to complete the test.</p>	<p>I tested the hypothesis experimentally and found that it was true. In the physical realm, this truth will be provisional, because science does not ever claim to be definitive. Beyond the purely physical realm, no hypothesis can ever be claimed to be scientifically true, for reasons first explained by the philosopher David Hume in the 18th century (more on this later), only that it has been arrived at through a process suggested by or analogous to science. For this reason, science is here denoted as “science” and, as we shall see, easily lapses into pseudo-science.</p>

These four basic and two major synthetic mental modes not only describe how we approach things in general, they also describe how we develop and choose values. Many value systems are based on the shortcut of authority; others are based on deductive logic, sense experience, emotion, intuition, or “science.” Over the centuries, for example, Christianity has often been associated with authority, although it makes a direct emotional, intuitive, and logical appeal as well. Political candidates’ frequently professed values of “family and neighborhood” are mostly emotional, and so on. All values and value systems may be defined in these terms, as the remainder of this book will attempt to demonstrate. This may not be the only way to organize and categorize what is otherwise a chaotic maelstrom of unrelated personal evaluations and beliefs but, in contrast to previous frameworks, it does represent the beginning of a workable approach, one that can be used to distinguish, separate, compare, and contrast so that people better understand the choices they face.

Are the four basic modes of developing values truly complete? Are there really no others?

Possibly, but not likely. People endlessly dispute this kind of thing, but if they reflect carefully they will discover that most of the argument is over words, not the underlying concepts the words are supposed

to represent. What is called intuition here may be given a different name elsewhere—indeed, it may have a dozen or a hundred other names, each with a different linguistic nuance, and the same goes for the other modes as well.

The problem of terminology, with all the endless confusion that it engenders, may be illustrated in the following way. One reader of this book in an early draft objected that the basic modes were indeed incomplete because they omitted divine revelation. To this reader, a charismatic Christian, divine revelation was not only a basic mode; it was the most important mode of all, one that she had discovered at a crucial point in her life and that had transformed her life.

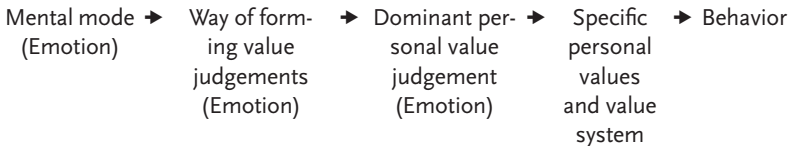
After some discussion, however, the reader agreed that revelation could be viewed as a special case of sense experience, intuition, emotion, or a combination of these ways of gaining moral knowledge. If the Lord's coming is not simply accepted as a matter of authority, that is, if the Lord directly appears to an individual, as Jesus appears to Thomas in the gospel, that event certainly involves sense experience: seeing, hearing, and in Thomas's case even touching. On the other hand, if the Lord's presence is not physical, if it comes as an interior message, then it may involve intuition, which always takes the form of a quiet voice within, or it may involve emotion, which will usually be anything but quiet.

Not every reader, to be sure, will accept this explanation. Atheists will dismiss any need for the discussion because in their view divine revelation cannot exist. Some believers will still prefer to make divine revelation a basic mode, because thinking of divine revelation in this way is more helpful or meaningful to them. The lesson here is not that everyone must agree, but rather that everyone should define his or her terms carefully and thus avoid, as much as possible, unnecessary battles amidst the briars and thickets of human language.

Even if the four basic modes and two major synthetic modes through which we form our values are accepted as correct and complete, should we not be concerned that this framework puts too much emphasis on how we arrive at our values? Surely what matter most are the values themselves, not the way we arrive at them.

This is an arguable point. But the larger point is this: human beings cannot separate the way they arrive at values from the values themselves. Sense experience, emotion, logic, intuition, authority, and “science” are mental modes or techniques through which we form our values, but by adopting and emphasizing one over the other we also turn them into dominant personal values in their own right. When Sir Alec Guinness, playing the heroic old Obi-Wan Kenobi in the film

Star Wars, repeats to his young protégé Luke Skywalker, “Luke, trust your feelings, Luke, trust your feelings,” he is certainly recommending a particular mental mode, the mode of emotion. But he is also saying that the testimony of the emotions is more valuable than the testimony of deductive logic, more *valuable* than the testimony of sense experience, more *valuable* than the testimony of an authority such as Scripture, and so on. In other words, he is making an evaluation or *value judgment*, a value judgment of such importance that it will dominate and color all other value choices, as per the following diagram:



If, like Obi-Wan Kenobi, we emphasize emotion over other ways of forming values, will that lead us directly to certain specific evaluations, beliefs, and actions?

Not directly. The choice of emotion as a primary mode of forming value judgments—and thus a dominant personal value judgment in itself—means that we are predisposed to certain specific values, as other sections of this book will show. But even if you know what a person’s dominant mode is, you will not be able to forecast his or her specific

values and actions with precision. In *Star Wars*, both Obi-Wan Kenobi and the arch-villain, Darth Vader, are telling Luke to trust and follow his emotions—in the first instance, an emotional love of humanity and hope for its betterment; in the second instance, an emotional love for one's parent. Part of the drama of the film is seeing where this conflict between related but opposing emotional values will eventually lead.

Characters in *Star Wars* are obviously not real people. Do real people actually choose emotion or deductive logic or sense experience as a primary mode of forming value judgments and, concurrently, as a dominant personal value judgment?

Yes and no. It is true that real people in real life do not tend to follow Obi-Wan Kenobi's heroic but somewhat simplistic advice, do not rely on a single mental mode, but rather rely on a combination of modes, with sharply different emphases. One person may emphasize emotion very strongly, but still rely on the other modes. Another person may emphasize sense experience and loathe emotional judgments without ever completely escaping them. This is one of the factors that makes human values so subtle, complex, and infinitely diverse, at least to the casual eye. And when human privacy (we may not want

to disclose to others how we evaluate or what we believe), deception (we may lie about how we evaluate or what we believe), and changeability (we may change our mind about how we evaluate or what we believe) are factored in, potential variations on the four basic and two major synthetic mental modes we have so far outlined (six dominant personal values) become literally uncountable.

How can I identify my own primary mental mode(s)/dominant personal value judgments?

This is not easy, because we habitually rely on all the modes, and it is hard to sort out. As a first step, however, imagine that you have a serious personal issue on your mind, such as the choice of a career. Whom would you choose to confide in and seek counsel from?

1. A professor of history and literature who befriended you in college and seemed learned and wise, offering . . .	his own personal <i>sense experience</i> , plus the accumulated <i>sense experience</i> of Western culture, as contained in its greatest works of history and literature
2. Another professor from college, this time a professor of philosophy, also a good friend and mentor, also learned and wise, offering . . .	an ability to think through the problem in a structured and highly <i>logical</i> way

3. A family member or very close friend, offering . . .	strong <i>emotional</i> empathy from a member of your most immediate group or “tribe”
4. A Hindu, Buddhist, or possibly “New Age” guru, a person of calm, poise, equilibrium, and unspoken wisdom, offering . . .	meditation and other tools designed to unlock your own inner powers of <i>intuition</i> , your own inner voice, your own inner guru
5. A friendly, compassionate, and wise Catholic priest, offering . . .	faith in the higher <i>authority</i> of the Catholic Church
or A traditional Protestant minister, or An Orthodox Jewish rabbi, offering . . .	faith in the higher <i>authority</i> of the Bible
6. A respected psychiatrist, offering . . .	a systematic appraisal based on <i>social science</i> methods and principles

You might reasonably reply that your choice would depend on the issue: one person for career counseling, another for marriage counseling, and so on. Or if deciding between these admittedly simplistic and artificial choices seems impossible, you might assign a percentage value to each (with all adding up to 100). What if you are the kind of person who will never seek advice from anyone? Then you probably fall into category one (in effect, you are drawing upon your own accumulated sense experience rather

than relying on the favorite teacher of history and literature to open up the accumulated sense experience of Western culture).

The preceding question seems to imply that priests, psychiatrists, philosophers, and others to whom we habitually turn for personal guidance are all offering—in some cases, perhaps even “selling”—a particular approach to personal values. Is this true? If so, where can we turn for a broader overview of personal and moral options, presented as fairly, impartially, and objectively as possible?

One of the advantages of a framework based, at least initially, on modes of evaluating, believing, and knowing, rather than on evaluations and beliefs per se, is that it underscores how bias and subjectivity necessarily creep into any discussion of values, even when an attempt is made to keep the discussion as fair and objective as possible. For example, most books about personal values are written by priests, ministers, rabbis, psychiatrists, academic philosophers, and so on. Such professionals may possess the highest credentials (a lifetime of study and work in their field, a strong professional reputation), but they are by definition specialists, sometimes specialist-advocates, and one should not necessarily expect an objective, unbiased account of conflicting value

systems from such a source. The priest will naturally look at things from a particular point of view (usually faith in authority); the philosopher from another (usually deductive logic); the psychiatrist or social psychologist from still another (usually “science,” especially social science).

There is an irony here: neither the philosopher nor the psychiatrist wants to be an advocate; within their own disciplines, they try very hard to minimize bias. Even so, techniques of philosophy or psychiatry are not merely tools; they involve important value choices; they stake out a particular position. To many Christians, any discipline that rejects faith in an authority is biased; to many deductive philosophers, any discipline that accepts faith in an authority is biased; and within their own contexts, each is right. In today’s society, a layperson (someone without “professional” credentials in the realm of values) may stand as good a chance as anyone else of producing a truly objective account of the entire spectrum of personal evaluations, beliefs, and systems. Ideally we should have a new academic specialty, one devoted solely to an overall account of values, but such a specialty does not yet exist.

Even if I accept the preceding argument (that a broad and objective look at values would be useful but is not likely to come from priests, ministers, rabbis, philosophers, or psychiatrists, insofar as they are acting as specialists), I wonder whether anybody, specialist or not, can ever be objective.

Ultimately, of course, nobody can ever be objective. The author of this book may not be a specialist, he may not be committed in a professional sense to any of the six mental modes (dominant personal values), but he is a human being: he has personal evaluations and beliefs of his own, and these will inevitably color what he writes. Not only is the very desire to be objective a “value judgment” or bias, so is the desire to define, categorize, compare, and contrast the different ways that we choose values. Consider the following dialogue between the author and a friend:

AUTHOR: This book is about the ways that we choose values.

FRIEND: Anybody who tries to count the ways we choose values does not know what values are.

AUTHOR: People who object to defining and categorizing the way we choose values fall into value system one.

This dialogue is a variation on the old saying: There are two kinds of people—those who divide the world into two kinds of people, and those who do not. In other words, this book is necessarily and unavoidably loaded with personal biases. The only difference is that it tries to provide an overview of the entire realm of values and is not written from the specific point of view of a priest, minister, rabbi, academic philosopher, or psychiatrist.

If we can establish a framework for sorting through values, and keep it as objective as possible, will it help us in our lives?

Many people seem not only barraged by an informational overload of conflicting and ill-defined value systems; they also seem increasingly unsure about how to respond. The fortunate among us have strong values, however difficult it may be to articulate or defend those values. The unfortunate suffer chronic anxiety, as described by Walter Lippmann in *A Preface to Morals*:

He may be very busy with many things, but he discovers one day that he is no longer sure they are worth doing. . . . He has become involved in an elaborate routine of pleasures; and they do not seem to amuse him very much. He finds it hard to believe that doing any one thing is better than doing any other thing, or, in fact, that it is better than

doing nothing at all. It occurs to him that it is a great deal of trouble to live, and that even in the best of lives the thrills are few and far between.

Personal values matter a great deal. Without them, we cannot live at all, for they are just as essential as air, food and water, and protection from the elements. Without clearly focused values, it is probably impossible to lead a purposeful and satisfying life. Sorting through available value choices in a systematic way is arguably more important than any of the other discretionary things we do.

There was a time, seventy or more years ago, when politics, economics, and personal values were all studied together in the same university department, usually called the department of moral philosophy. These subjects were thought to be inextricably linked as well as intensely practical, of immediate use in the lives of students. Today we have mostly forgotten about these natural linkages, have forgotten that finance, economics, politics, and personal values are all related subjects, and while we have continued to devote tremendous intellectual resources to finance, economics, and politics, we have mostly given up the attempt to define, organize, categorize, and study the personal value choices that face us.

This book is above all an attempt to redress this situation, to help restore the study of values in general

(as opposed to the propagation of a particular “religion”) to its rightful place in our intellectual world, to clarify the choices, and hopefully to spark a more meaningful dialogue between opposing viewpoints.

Twenty-five centuries ago in Athens, Plato faced a moment in history at least slightly analogous to ours, in that Athenian values had ceased to be homogenous and a thousand moral “schools” clamored to be heard. The early Platonic dialogues responded by defining, comparing, contrasting—elucidating choices. This is a useful method for our time as well, one that has been followed as faithfully as possible in the chapters that follow.

Part Two

Four Basic Mental Modes
and the Value Systems
Associated with Them

Three

Value Systems Based on Sense Experience

IN ORDINARY LANGUAGE, the word *experience* can refer to almost anything. We can and do speak of experiencing logic, emotion, intuition, and so on, as in: “I experienced [the emotion of] falling in love for the first time.” But when we speak of sense experience, we are referring to something narrower and more specific: the knowledge that we get directly by seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, or touching.

Obviously, all of us obtain general knowledge, as well as the knowledge needed to form values, through this avenue of direct sense experience. Some people, however, seem to place considerably greater emphasis on the testimony of their senses than on other modes

of learning, believing, knowing, and judging. They do not want to accept the teachings of the Bible or the church on faith. They do not want to sit in a dark room working through abstruse logical problems. They want to see and hear it themselves, either on the spot in their own communities or traveling in foreign lands, or vicariously through books and films. If a friend or a stranger or the author of a book tells them that something is true, they do not ask themselves: What authority or logic backs up this statement? They ask instead whether the alleged truth corresponds to their own entirely personal sense experience in this world—and, if it does not, the alleged truth is quietly but decisively put aside.

Seeing and Hearing: Eudora Welty

As one might expect, votaries of a “religion” of sense experience often possess acutely developed powers of seeing and hearing. For example, novelist and short story writer Eudora Welty begins a brief memoir of her early life in Jackson, Mississippi, with an account of sounds, especially the sounds of her parents:

I'd listen toward the hall: Daddy upstairs
was shaving in the bathroom and Mother

downstairs was frying the bacon. They would begin whistling back and forth to each other up and down the stairwell. My father would whistle his phrase, my mother would try to whistle, then hum hers back. It was their duet [from] “The Merry Widow.” . . . Their song almost floated with laughter: how different from the [Victrola] record, which growled.

Later, when Eudora was a young woman, her powers of observation lead her to “mak[ing] pictures with a camera.” Both in her photographs of Mississippi during the Depression and in her more celebrated fiction, Welty’s unblinking but warmly compassionate gaze seemed to penetrate into the very “mind, heart, and skin” of her subjects.

But where does such heightened sense experience, heightened hearing and seeing, take us in our personal values? Miss Welty is reluctant to say; indeed, it might be said to be contrary to her values to comment directly. After all, she suggests, the point of hearing and seeing is to hear and see for yourself. If you want to know what a fiction writer and photographer in Mississippi has heard and seen, you should read her fiction or look at her photographs, then make up your own mind about what it means to you. The point of art is to broaden the reader/viewer/listener’s sense experience, put people and things in a different,

perhaps a more revealing or telling, perspective, not to serve up ready-made answers.

This might seem to be an uncompromising attitude, but it is tempered by Miss Welty's graciousness. If you arrived at her house on the tree-lined street in Jackson, like so many newspaper interviewers and PhD candidates did, you were probably taken in for a warm chat. And if you were unhurried, listened intently, and enjoyed good conversation, you soon recognized that Miss Welty's values, however reluctant she may have been to express them directly, are of a particular, recognizable type, one that descends from an individual who may be thought of as the progenitor of all such values in modern Western culture, the sixteenth-century French aristocrat, Michel de Montaigne.

High Sense Experience: Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592)

As with Welty, you cannot pursue Montaigne's personal beliefs too directly. You will not find them listed conveniently in some tract, or laboriously argued in a philosophical tome. You must be patient and approach his personal beliefs obliquely by first getting to know the man. For example, when we meet Montaigne in his delightful but purposefully wandering *Essays* (Montaigne invented the term *essay*, which originally referred to an attempt to gain knowledge,

especially self-knowledge and moral knowledge), he is wearing silk hose and padded doublet covered by a wrap of vulture's skin to protect himself against a piercing cold wind as he paces his library on the top floor of a tower, which is itself attached to a fortified manor house perched high on a hill overlooking the rolling, checkerboarded fields of rural Gascony. As he observes,

I can see below my garden, my courtyard, and much of my house. There I turn the pages now of one book, now of another, without method or plan, reading bits and pieces. Sometimes I think, and sometimes I dictate my thoughts, walking back and forth, as at present.

On the first [floor of the tower] is my chapel, on the second a bedroom with ante-chambers, where I often lie down. . . . My [top floor] library is round, with a bit of flat wall occupied by my table and chair. Being round I can see all my books at once. From this room I can see three ways, and walk sixteen steps. . . . If I were not averse to trouble (which I try to avoid), I could easily create a place to walk outside on the wall a hundred steps long and twelve wide. Every place of retirement should have somewhere to walk. . . .

In the past, [the tower] was the most useless part of the house. Now I spend most days there, and most of the hours of the day. . . . It is my kingdom, and I try to rule here absolutely. . . . Miserable, I think, is a man with no place to be alone, where he can conduct himself in complete privacy. Rightly ambition plagues her votaries by keeping them always on display. . . . They do not even have privacy in the privy. . . . I think it is much more bearable always to be alone than never to be able to be so.

A servant breaks the spell of solitude by announcing that an armed horseman is at the gate. Montaigne recalls that

I knew his name, and thought he could be trusted as a neighbor and distant kinsman. I let him in as I do everyone. He stood before me, seemingly frightened, with his horse hard ridden. His story was that he had been ambushed by an enemy, someone I also recognized and knew to be feuding with him. He said that, caught unawares and outnumbered, he had fled to my keep. He was worried about his men, whom he thought lost. I innocently did my best to comfort, assure, and refresh him.

Shortly came four or five of his soldiers similarly frightened and out of breath, asking to be let in. Then more, and still more, coming to 25 or 30, all pretending to have escaped an enemy. I began to be suspicious; I was not ignorant of the age I lived in, how much my house might be envied. But not thinking it wise to have some inside and some outside, I took the simplest course and admitted them all.

These men stood in my courtyard, while their leader was with me inside. He saw that he was master of the moment, and could carry out his plan. [Yet] he mounted his horse; and his followers, whose eyes were set on him, to watch for his signal, were amazed to see him ride off and abandon his plan.

In the midst of religious warfare and banditry, plague periodically grips the countryside:

Apprehension . . . is especially part of this disease. You . . . spend your days worrying . . . with your imagination worked to a pitch. [Among the peasants], they all renounced any desire for life. The grapes, which are the main source of wealth in the area, remained on the vines; and each unconcernedly prepared for a death which they expected that

night or the next day. . . . Because they are all dying together at the same time, the young and old, they cease to be astonished, they even cease to lament. I saw some who were afraid of staying behind, as in a dreadful solitude, and I found them only unconcerned about their burial. It appalled them to see bodies about the fields, eaten by the wild animals. Some, while still healthy, were digging their grave; others lay down in theirs while alive; and one of my laborers, even as he was dying, pulled the earth down upon himself with his hands and feet.

Montaigne is spared from plague, but suffers excruciating kidney stones, an inherited affliction which had killed his father:

People . . . see you sweat with pain, turn pale, tremble . . . suffer strange contractions and convulsions, the tears dropping from your eyes. You release thick, dark, and dreadful urine, or have it stopped by a sharp rough-edged stone that cruelly pricks and tears bladder or penis; and all the time you are conversing with those around you, your face in an ordinary expression, making light of your suffering, excusing yourself, trying to talk normally.

Notwithstanding these obstacles, and despite long absences from the tower, first to visit Rome by way of Switzerland (where Montaigne views, and rejects, the novelty of using knives and forks instead of fingers at supper) and then to serve as mayor of Bordeaux, the *Essays* are eventually completed. The first two unrevised volumes are presented to Henry III, monarch of France, equally famous for his transvestism, his court *mignons*, his exquisite manners, and his love of learning. A three-volume edition is later presented to the dashing and energetic Henry of Navarre (Henry IV), whom the nobleman has helped ascend the throne. Even the papal censor joins in the praise, although his successors will eventually reconsider and place the work on the *Index of Forbidden Books*.

Essays: General Approach

In setting down his *Essays*, Montaigne reveals himself as the kind of man who does not stick to the subject, and who does so brilliantly. As the French philosopher Diderot later described his method: “He cares little where he starts from, how he goes, or where he ends up.” Topic is piled on topic (idleness, books, smells, even cannibals)—“I take the first subject that comes to me, all are . . . equally good”; digression is piled on digression (a discussion of Christian mysticism merges with a crude scatological story,

both adorned by abstruse Latin references). The only thread that runs through all these disconnected impressions is the author himself, his mind and life, the former occasionally contradictory, the latter presented without a trace of chronology.

Even in the midst of this melee, however, the reader is not confused or lost. On the contrary, we are carried along by a transparently clear prose; by an easy, relaxed, entertainingly conversational tone; by an absence of artifice or pretension (“I had rather know what [Brutus] did in his home than what he did before the Senate”); and above all by a rivetingly honest stream of self-revelation. It is not just that we learn the nobleman’s sleeping habits (late to bed and late to rise: “I like to lie on a hard bed alone . . . without my wife”), or bowel habits (early in the morning), or weakness for physical beauty (the chief criterion by which he chooses household servants as well as lady loves), or fondness for animals (“I cannot refuse my dog when he . . . asks me to play with him at an inconvenient time.”). It is rather that through this one human being, who has chosen to “spy on himself from close up” with complete objectivity, we are able to learn about ourselves.

A man who is now a doctor tells the story of being unable to consummate his first love affair during high school. In a state of near-tearful collapse, he secretly visits a psychiatrist who tries to be reassuring: impotence in young men is often curable, though the treatment

may take years. Talking sessions ensue, but self-doubt and panic are only further magnified. Then the youth chances on a passage from the *Essays*:

I consider this problem, which society loves to talk about, to be likely caused by apprehension. I know a man who cannot possibly be considered impotent. He had heard a friend tell of losing his manhood at just the wrong moment. Later when he was at such a moment, the story filled his mind and the same fate befell him. Afterward the memory of it preyed on his mind so that he suffered repeatedly. But he found a remedy. By confessing the problem in advance, he reduced the fear and apprehension, so it did not weigh so much on his mind. By taking this precaution, he found that he was completely cured.

After reading this passage, the young man is instantly cured.

Attack on Christianity and Logic

The author would assure us that there is no message at all buried among the charming intimacies and digressions of the *Essays*, that he has reached no “conclusions,” that he is not “well enough instructed to instruct anyone else,” that his work is “frivolous”

and of “little weight.” But such aristocratic subterfuges must be set aside. The *Essays* are not at all what they appear. They are at once a repudiation both of faith in a higher authority and of logic, the two reigning paradigms of the time, and the most complete exposition yet offered of an alternative, an approach to forming values based primarily on personal sense experience.

Montaigne does not directly attack the idea of faith in a higher authority, much less the all-powerful spiritual authority of his day, the Catholic church of France. To do so would bring himself and his family to ruin. As he tells a favorite lady: “I speak the truth, so much as I would prefer, but as much as I dare; and as I become older, I become a little more daring.” Besides, in his view the right way to deal with imperious spiritual authorities, Catholicism included, is not to contest them; opposition just makes them wax hotter and stronger. The best approach is to ignore them, to show them a tolerant, even an affectionate, respect, and then to do as you please.

Nor does the nobleman want to interfere with anyone else’s beliefs. If you think that you need God or the church, or an infallible book, that is all right. Indeed, popular religion is conceded to have two indisputable advantages, at least in the short run: not only does it provide answers to questions that are otherwise unanswerable; it also helps you

discipline yourself and control passions that might otherwise prove uncontrollable. In the long run, however, too many answers, in a world where answers are not really available, may become a sort of drug. Like other drugs, it may lead to a cycle of craven dependence alternating with boundless pride, a deadly combination that virtually guarantees misery for believer and unbeliever alike. What people really need, according to Montaigne, is just the reverse: an independent spirit tempered by humility and modesty. Such a spirit may choose to worship a God, but not a God who “fears . . . is angry . . . loves” or otherwise suffers “agitations and emotions” common to us. Better still is to make no assumptions, to remain “doubtful and undecided,” to rest one’s head on the “soft and easy and wholesome . . . pillow [of] ignorance and lack of curiosity” about all worlds beyond our world.

If the misleading certainty of Christianity is to be resisted, so, Montaigne tells us, is the equally suspect hope of logic. The deductive method is all “approaches, definitions, classifications . . . etymologies [and] quarrels . . . over words. . . . A stone is an object. But if you ask: And what is an object?—a substance—and what is a substance? and so on. . . . One [merely] replaces one word with another, that is . . . more complicated and less understood.” Such verbal gymnastics are then followed by

mixing and chopping . . . small questions [until] the world teem[s] . . . with uncertainty and argument. . . . Have you ever seen [children] trying to divide a mass of quicksilver into a number of parts? The more they press and squeeze it, and try to control it, the more [it] keeps dividing and spilling into disorder. It's the same here. Engaging in all these subtleties accomplishes little. . . . The purpose of philosophy is to calm us, to teach us . . . virtue, which is not, as the [logicians] say, to be found atop a steep mountain, craggy and hard to climb. Virtue rather resides on a fair, fruitful, and flourishing plateau, with everything visible below. . . . The way to this plateau is by shady, green, and sweetly flowered paths with a pleasant, easy, and smoothly ascending grade. . . . Because they are not familiar with this . . . virtue . . . which is a professed and implacable enemy to anxiety, fear, sorrow, and constraint, which has nature as her guide and good fortune and pleasure for companions, [logicians] have conjured out of their own weak imaginations their own ridiculous, querulous, unpleasant, spiteful, threatening image of it, and placed it on a rock apart, among thorns and brambles, to frighten people.

Flight from Abstraction

According to Montaigne, what both Christianity and logic share in common is a high level of abstraction, together with a wearisome habit of constantly drawing distinctions and rendering judgments. According to these two great faiths, life is analyzable, generalizable, categorizable, systematizable, simplifiable. Whatever question or problem arises, there is a commandment, a rule, a recipe, a methodology, or a theory to provide guidance. But, protests Montaigne, this is all a pathetic fallacy, a naïve confidence in explanations which on close examination explain nothing. The truth is that we operate under a veil of ignorance, both in general (“When I play with my cat, is she amusing herself with me, or I with her?”) and in the world of value judgments. In addition, the world is ambiguous, full of good that is evil and evil that is good, and “we cannot exist apart from this mixture.” Under these circumstances, moral evidence is concrete and personal, not abstract or organizable. Put differently, the proper course of action depends on the particular circumstances, and the best guide is always one’s common sense, defined as the ability to hold in one’s mind a variety of considerations all at once and then to arrive at a sound and experienced judgment.

Lessons of Sense Experience

The idea that there are no infallible teachers or theories, never have been and never will be, that each of us stands alone and must fashion his or her own destiny, might seem depressing to some. To Montaigne, on the contrary, it would be depressing if answers existed, for then life would consist of passively following someone else's blueprint rather than boldly and vigorously setting out on a uniquely personal and never-to-be-repeated adventure.

But how is this adventure to be conducted? Not, it must be emphasized, by falling back into gross sensationalism, or some form of anti-intellectualism. To reject Christianity, the religion of the book, or logic, the religion of deductive reasoning, is not to reject the mind or reason. What is needed is *empirical reasoning*—the patient, steady accumulation of facts drawn from personal sense experience, the constant opening of oneself to the evidence of one's eyes and ears, no matter how unexpected or uncomfortable this evidence may be, the deliberate opening of oneself to alternative ways of living and being. "Never rely on what [others] tell you," but always base your own opinion on as much information as possible, information that has been sifted with a critical, skeptical, and preferably humorous eye.

To get "the facts," ransack your own daily life—your family, friends, the immediate world around

you: “The most familiar and everyday events, were we to see them in [a fresh] light, would provide us with the most wonderful examples [of how to live or not to live].” Then amplify this experience with books and travel (both are important). Try not to let any of this raw data “slip by unobserved. . . . To avoid letting [even] sleep . . . escape me, I had myself awakened, so that I might catch it. . . . [If] I am moved by some [moment], I do not let it to be stolen by the senses; I focus on it. . . . I enjoy [life] twice as much as others, because enjoyment increases with the . . . attention that we give to it.”

Finally, and most important, look for heroes, paradigms, models that can be used, not as authorities to be blindly followed, but as options to be explored, imitated, tested, and—always—eventually discarded. As Voltaire said of Montaigne: “He bases his ideas on the ideas of great men. He judges them, he fights them, he talks with them. . . . Always (and I love that!) he knows how to doubt [them].”

Sense experience, especially intense sense experience, may be a great teacher, but to the extent that people open themselves to it they are often swept away by violent currents and end up either as Don Juan, a mindless voluptuary, or as Leporello, his score-keeping, nonparticipating servant, when the bare minimum goal is to participate and observe at the same time. As usual, Montaigne does not offer

any systematic advice for coping with this problem. In his oblique fashion, however, he suggests that certain attitudes, character traits, or (to use the old term) virtues are helpful, indeed may be essential, in order to experience life in all its raw power without losing one's footing. At the risk of systematizing the inveterate enemy of system, these particular cardinal virtues—pagan rather than Christian in inspiration and spirit—may be listed as follows:

Openness to Pleasure

On this point, Montaigne places himself entirely at odds with Christian fundamentalism. He is a man “who accedes to the propensities and desires of his body, who obeys appetites that are insistent,” who “hates that inhuman teaching which would make us despise and reject the . . . body,” who places no particular value on monogamy or marital fidelity, and who states that “I have never been harmed by doing anything that was very pleasant for me,” although he admits to “a few infections, both minor and fleeting” acquired by unwisely visiting prostitutes. The only real drawback to sexual pleasure as opposed to milder pleasures such as conversation, amusements, books, companionable friends, affection, is that it “withers with age” and, for that very reason, youth should pay no attention to older persons who have been forced into an involuntary repentance. Nor should one try

to dress up sex with a spiritual or intellectual fig leaf: “For love is principally a matter of seeing and touching; something can be done without the graces of the mind, nothing without the graces of the body.”

Tolerance

To be fully open to sense experience, one must give up the ingrained habit of condemning and criticizing and interfering with others: “I do not inquire if a footman is chaste [nor dismiss as] barbarous anything that is not [my] habit.” What is more difficult, one must cultivate a state of mind that actually welcomes criticism from others: “My mind constantly contradicts and condemns. Why should I care if someone else does so? Nor need I give his criticism any more authority than I choose.”

Avoidance of Pride, Pretense, Formality, Dishonesty

Such barriers against the world are a particular bane of the middle class, especially the churchgoing middle class. The very rich and very poor often dispense with them, although for quite different reasons (in the one case, complete financial security; in the other, nothing to lose). The middle class is always fearful of revealing itself too fully, of causing offense, and of losing what it has so laboriously accumulated; even so, “it is cowardly and servile to go about in disguise, wearing a mask, without the courage to show oneself as one is. . . . It is

not [of course] advisable always to say everything; that would be folly. But we should say what we think.” The very worst part of dissimulation and pretense is that it always leads to crippling inner conflict. By being one thing “inside” and another “in front of people,” we dissipate our energy and purpose, and lose our ability to “go forward [with] undivided strength.”

Avoidance of Rigidity, Eccentricity, Fastidiousness

Inflexibility is a prison to which many of the most independent minds consign themselves. Montaigne himself is not free of this vice, but

to ourselves tied and bound of necessity to one [habitual approach] is . . . not to live. . . . The bravest and best souls are pliant and open to variety. . . . A young man needs to toss the rules and give his energy scope. My advice is even to plunge into excess, otherwise any indulgence will overwhelm him and make him a poor companion. The worst quality in a gentleman is over-fastidiousness, too much delicacy, or too much concern about health. . . . I felt I honored a nobleman when I asked him how often he had got drunk while in Germany serving the king. He was glad to respond “three times” and told us some stories.

***Avoidance of Obsessions, Ambition, Hard Work,
Too Much Seriousness of Purpose***

Obsessions are “evil” and an “enemy of life” because they blind a man to all the rich detail and texture of the surrounding world (“When I walk alone in a beautiful orchard . . . if my thoughts wander to distant events, I bring them back . . . to the walk, the orchard, the pleasure of this solitude”). Ambition is particularly to be avoided, partly because it requires perjuring or obligating or even enslaving oneself to others to gain their support; partly because it is so frequently futile (“The highest places are usually taken by the worst men. . . . If you do succeed . . . you die and end of story!”); partly because even the most idealistic projects are rarely justified (“Statilius responded this way when Brutus invited him to join the conspiracy against Caesar; he thought the business just, but did not think that men were worth the trouble.”); above all, because it is based on a misapprehension of success:

“He has wasted his life [on nothing],” we say, and “I have accomplished nothing. . . .”
What! Have you not lived? . . . It is great and glorious to live properly. . . . The man who knows how to enjoy his existence has already accomplished everything. We only try for other things, to attain wealth, to create . . . because we do not understand what

we are here for, look outside ourselves because we do not understand how to live within ourselves. We can walk on stilts but must rely on our own legs. And if we sit on the mightiest throne, we still sit on our own bottom.

The case against hard work is similar, and just as vehement: “As for pummeling my brain over Aristotle [or putting my] mind . . . on the rack for fourteen or fifteen hours a day, or . . . addicting myself to some area of knowledge . . . that I have not done.” Although pure idleness is burdensome and not to be desired, “I am an enemy to constraint, too much work, or too much perseverance.” Moreover, the most dangerous hard work is specialized hard work because “our aim should not be to make a grammarian, or a logician, [or any other professional], but a gentleman.”

The worst feature of all these worldly obsessions is the way they persist, first in one shape, then in another, always adopting some new and clever disguise. When faced with their blandishments, the only remedy is to check one’s seriousness at the door, to reorder one’s priorities, to sup at table with “the amusing rather than the wise,” to remember to “choose beauty over goodness . . . in bed,” and “for serious conversation [to seek out] liveliness . . . combined with dishonesty.”

Detachment

Montaigne's first five virtues "open" a person who might otherwise be "confined and wrapped up" inside. But openness to life is an incomplete virtue; it must be moderated and disciplined in order to prevent a self-destructive orgy of sense experience—of too much sex or other pleasures or a total abandonment of work and ambition—leading to an eventual breakdown. The first and, in some respects, the most important moderating virtue is detachment. More than any other device, it is the ability to watch ourselves from outside, to see ourselves with the same cool impersonal gaze we turn on others, that protects us from an excess of mood or action. Without detachment, we "color" and "quake" from alternating reveries of greed and fear. As proof of his own efforts to achieve detachment, Montaigne attempts to refute the idea that sexual pleasure at its orgasmic peak completely obliterates consciousness. He reports that "it can be otherwise; one can sometimes, by sheer force of will, successfully focus one's mind at that very moment to other thoughts, but one must prepare and make a deliberate effort."

Self-discipline

In addition to detachment, Montaigne approves of old-fashioned self-discipline. This is not unlike Christian self-discipline in some respects, especially

in its underlying assumption about human nature. Whereas most Christians believe in a doctrine of “original sin,” that unredeemed human nature is inherently evil and sinful, Montaigne believes that no one, himself included, “is anything but a fool,” a difference more in tone than in substance.

On the other hand, this self-discipline is different. It does not entail dependence, submission, or conformity before a wrathful or loving God; nor deprivation of the flesh; nor the grave and majestic solemnity of ancient puritanism; nor the prim prudery of a bloodless and attenuated puritanism. It is a combination of personal training (thus resurrecting the Greek root of asceticism, which refers to “practice” and, indirectly, to games and sport), of refined good taste, and of ordinary good sense. A mature mind knows that “our desire for [worldly goods] is . . . sharpened by possession rather than scarcity . . . that too much is the enemy of pleasure, that temperance is what truly seasons it.” The best precaution to observe is a simple one: whenever desire becomes insistent, even commanding, pull back. Let a little time pass before indulging that particular appetite again. Montaigne even strikes a metal with the words *Que sais-je* (What do I know?) engraved on one side and *Je m’abstiens* (I restrain myself) on the other.

Self-reliance

To strive for self-reliance is yet another way to control oneself. Why? Because self-indulgence, in the form of impatience or too much pleasure or too much ease, invariably involves an imposition on others. When Montaigne faces a variety of worldly dangers, ranging from marauding bandits to court intrigues, he considers seeking help from a more powerful lord. But he quickly realizes “that it [is] safest to count on myself . . . to protect myself, [and so to strengthen myself] that it would take a heavy blow to knock me out of [the] saddle.” In this respect, a degree of personal misfortune is a positive good. It hardens us, keeps our passions and weaknesses in check, and helps us to maintain some order and sobriety in the face of limitless temptation.

Eight Virtues in One

Can all eight virtues be summarized in one? One might speak of being simultaneously open and closed; of being a lover but also an athlete of sense experience; of never commanding oneself but always relying on detachment, self-knowledge, and an easy, unserious, good-natured self-discipline; of being in harness, but loose in harness; of being successful and effective without any apparent effort. Although each of these formulations reveals something, they are still entirely too stiff to capture Montaigne’s designedly paradoxical

doctrine. A picture would be better—a picture, for example, of the younger Scipio, “first among the Romans,” who in the midst of planning his fateful military campaign against Hannibal in Africa, a campaign that would decide the future of the civilized world, takes time to “stroll . . . along the seashore, gaily engaged in the childish amusement of picking up and selecting shells, and playing ducks-and-drakes; or, in bad weather entertaining himself with the ribald writing of comedies, in which he reproduce[s] the most ordinary and vulgar actions of men.”

Objections to Montaigne

If one were sitting with Montaigne in his tower, enjoying the kind of civilized conversation that he loved, it would be interesting to learn what he thought about the following objections to his doctrine of relying on a highly cultivated and disciplined form of personal sense experience.

It Is Like a Library Without a Catalog

According to philosopher Bertrand Russell, Montaigne is “content with confusion; discovery is delightful and system is its enemy.” On the surface, this approach sounds appealing. Do we not learn more from wonder, search, ambiguity, inconsistency, disorder, paradox, irony, and nuance than from their

opposites? Besides, the rest of Montaigne's arguments possess an undeniable nobility: that each of us must find our his or her way, with only personal sense experience as a guide; that there are no true authorities, that dependency is self-destructive, whether on a God or on another human being; that there are valuable models to be studied and emulated, but only up to a point, and only insofar as they fit one's individual case; that one must immerse oneself in experience, in everyday life, in books, and in travel, all the while remaining aloof and detached and forming one's own unique judgment, taste, and character.

Appealing and noble these doctrines may be, but are they practical? Is a way of life designed by a sixteenth-century gentleman living in a remote corner of France even conceivable today? Since Montaigne's time, many millions of books have been published. The entire world has been opened for travel. Where is one to begin? Should one still regard Horace and Seneca and Plutarch and other ancient Romans as the place to begin in forming and testing one's personal evaluations and beliefs? What about the ancient Greeks? Merely reading the relatively few surviving works of the ancient world, together with all the books written about them, would consume a lifetime, leaving the moderns and all the limitless vistas of travel untouched.

One is reminded of the novelist Thomas Wolfe's gargantuan appetites, of how he tried as an undergraduate

at Harvard to read every volume in Widener Library, beginning at random with one stack, and proceeding book by book from there. It is not recorded where Wolfe abandoned the attempt, which was more symbolic than real. The point is that most library users rely on a catalog to guide them, and Montaigne not only eliminates the “catalog”—the direct teaching method of other “religions”—he despises it as an obstacle to our development.

Even Montaigne’s literary legacy, the essay form that he invented, tends to thwart the modern student of sense experience. For almost four hundred years, the prestige of the essay, with its charmingly unstructured, digressive, and conversational tone, has been immense. We see it everywhere, in newspapers, magazines, books, or, increasingly, transposed to radio and television. Reporters who have tired of recounting the news like to write short pieces on “loneliness” or “the relations of men and women” or similarly airy topics that mostly serve as a point of departure for unrelated observations or discursive autobiography, and whose contents are often immediately forgettable. The convention of the essay is so strong that even scholarly research articles in some fields are expected to follow the form, to convey new information not just simply and directly and precisely and economically, but with art and indirection. Because few researchers are artists, the result may be only squandered time, both the writer’s and the reader’s.

It Lacks a Goal or Purpose

In this respect, Montaigne's brand of high sense experience completely denies the basic outlook of the authorities of his day. For example, in Catholicism, even the church, God's representative on earth, is seen as only a means to the ultimate goal of God. In logic, deduction is the means to the goal of an irrefutable argument, a QED (*quod erat demonstrandum*) proof. In high sense experience, sense experience is both the means and the goal. In other words, truth is not something that we find at the end of a quest, it is the quest. This is a revolutionary idea in a purely theoretical sense and in a practical sense as well. Westerners have always been work-and goal-oriented. Yet here is a rather admirable man, Montaigne, who says that the work ethic is misguided; that goals are not important; that one goal, so long as it is disciplined and not an imposition on other people, is about as good as any other; that how you live is more important than what you accomplish.

It Is Selfish

To the observant Christian eye, something else is odd about this ethic of high sense experience. Although it strongly disavows the standard egoistic longings—to reign as a monarch, to win military triumphs, to gain immense riches—it nevertheless glorifies and cultivates the self. *Personal* sense experience, *self*-knowledge, and *self*-control are emphasized to the exclusion

of all else, even to the exclusion of unselfish and altruistic acts. Montaigne himself is so likable, so calm, so comfortable, so intimate, that it is easy to overlook this aspect of his doctrine. But it is there all the same, and freely admitted: "I am pleased not to be interested in the affairs of others, and not to be responsible for them." Toward his close friends, the noble seigneur is both protective and loving. Toward his wife and children and servants, he is protective if not particularly loving. Beyond this narrow circle of benevolence there appears to be only self-absorption and duty. Of course, Montaigne would argue that one must put one's own house in order before attempting to assist others and that assistance all too often creates dependency. If self-reliance and self-knowledge require all one's energies, no harm is done to others, which cannot always be said about more directly altruistic religions.

It Is Elitist

To say that a way of life assumes an unlimited leisure for its particular activities, that it eschews common purposes and goals, that it ignores the masses in favor of oneself and a select few is to say, in brief, that it is elitist. And this is, indeed, a central feature of what we have called high sense experience. It is a privileged way of life, symbolized not only by Montaigne's hereditary manor house with its famous tower library,

but also by the spires of Oxford and Cambridge universities, by the undergraduates' scouts (servants), by spacious suites and gardens, by a tutorial system that assigns a private tutor to each student.

Such elitist privilege is not to be confused with either snobbery or luxury. High sense experience is "open to all the talents" and likes nothing better than to find protégés among the ranks of the "natural aristocracy," the most gifted students of modest or even impoverished background. Nor is it especially enamored of worldly goods, other than beautiful objects of art, for which it has a decided fondness. But snobbery and luxury aside, Montaigne is concerned with the elect, not with the masses, and he does not share the idea that a doctrine must be suitable for the masses in order that it be suitable for the elect. When he endorses sexual adventure or leisurely reading at a fine university or foreign travel as an essential part of education, it does not occur to him that the masses might want or expect these things, or that his methods might eventually collapse under the sheer weight of numbers. It would indeed have been remarkable if he had foreseen any of this: high sense experience steadily gained in prestige for nearly four centuries, and only reached a kind of peak in the United States in the early 1960s. Shortly thereafter, the evidence of collapse became increasingly apparent: in PhDs who hoped to retire to their own tower but who could not

support themselves and ended up as insurance brokers; in the students who expected to find something of the Oxford and Cambridge experience at their state university but were unable to get close enough to a professor to engage him in conversation; in the hordes of would-be travelers who had to settle for being “tourists”; in the disappointed pioneers of free love and the sexual revolution—in other words, in all those people who naïvely trusted that high sense experience could be a mass phenomenon but who learned that in its purest form it was for the few, and the very few.

It Is a Status Symbol

For much of the 1960s and 1970s, high sense experience was anything but a status symbol. The effort to transform it into a mass phenomenon had failed; the PhD glut was a joke; students abandoned art, history, and literature in droves for economics and business courses; art museums and rare book libraries languished. Then, during the 1980s and 1990s, something rather unexpected happened. The newly rich, of whom there was an unprecedented supply, began to covet the domestic style and artistic furnishings long associated with people of Montaigne’s ilk. The reasons for this phenomenon were complex, but at least one factor was clear. If you had just made millions in a world awash with newly made millions,

money alone would not guarantee social standing or personal prestige. On the other hand, if you owned rare and irreplaceable objects, the kind of objects that Montaigne and others like him had always taken for granted in their households, some of the objects' value and uniqueness might rub off on you.

This transmogrification of high sense experience into high status was at once broadly and narrowly based. It was broadly based in that the newly affluent, often represented by young professional couples, not just the newly rich or newly super-rich, ardently competed as "collectors" or for places on museum committees. Yet it was also narrowly based in that favored objects and institutions had to be suitable for public display, not just private connoisseurship. For example, at the beginning of the twentieth century, truly rare books often sold for more than even the rarest paintings. By the end of the twentieth century, however, rare paintings sold for vastly greater sums, at least partly because they could be displayed on a wall, either in a private residence or in a museum.

A library without a catalog, aimlessness, selfishness, elitism, status seeking: these are harsh charges, and at least partially warranted. It is only fair, however, to listen to a rebuttal, a rebuttal implicitly offered by Joseph Alsop, an American who closely resembled Montaigne in his distinguished lineage, his immense learning and culture, his participation in the public life of his day

(as a leading newspaper columnist covering Washington during the post-World War II years of American paramourcy), in his enjoyment of all the civilized and uncivilized pleasures that life has to offer, and not least in the size and frequent use of his library.

Alsop in effect argued that what we call high sense experience in this book has become misunderstood and debased. High sense experience, he said, is simply what the English philosopher and statesman Lord Bolingbroke called “philosophy teaching by examples.” The goal of life is to find and follow the example that is right for you; the goal of education is to inculcate a variety of worthy examples from which to choose. Inculcation can be both extensive and luxurious, drawing on huge libraries, comfortable university reading rooms, fine collections and museums, and a long canon of exemplary works; or it can be plain and rough, as plain and rough and non-elitist as Abraham Lincoln educating himself with five or six dog-eared volumes. As Alsop pointed out in the *Washington Post*:

Lincoln’s texts . . . were first of all the Bible and Shakespeare. . . . He not infrequently recited the [Bible] or the great soliloquies, sometimes in the course of important policy discussions, and on a five-hour boat trip to City Point, after Appomattox . . . passed the time for his companions with

Shakespeare readings. It is interesting trying to imagine a similar journey by water with one of our last three presidents. After the Bible and Shakespeare, history was his main study. As a young man in New Salem, he read the whole of Gibbon and all of Rollin's history of the world . . . with . . . much space devoted to . . . Greek and Roman history. . . .

The first point that strikes you about the foregoing [list] of books [is that what] Lincoln read and learned is neither read, nor learned, nor even taught in any normal American school or university today. . . . I do not suppose as many as one university student in a thousand has ever read so much as a chapter of the Bible in the . . . noble . . . King James version, and I fear the same ratio of ignorance prevails among American university professors. . . . Lincoln, *per contra*, went through life without the slightest acquaintance with the social sciences, in happy ignorance of the brand of English favored by the Modern Language Association. . . . If all of us learned to [think and] express ourselves as Lincoln did—by all but getting by heart the King James version—we might even have the cure of the

gummy tide of jargon and pseudoscientific
pretentiousness which is spreading . . . today.

The Prodigal Alternative to High Sense Experience

High sense experience is composed of one part license and one part discipline, with a garnish of grace and refinement to render the discipline effortless, or at least invisible. Gradually lighten the discipline, eliminate it entirely, or take both license and discipline to fantastic extremes, and you have a very different approach to sense experience, an approach that in Walter Pater's famous phrase seeks "to burn always in [a] hard, gem-like flame, to maintain [an] ecstasy" of experience. Such an approach is no longer the way of Montaigne but rather the way of a prodigal son of Montaigne's, a son who has rebelled against the gentle restraint of the father just as the father rebelled against the severe restraint of Catholic Christianity.

This basic intergenerational quarrel between two related but very different doctrines, each based on sense experience but drawing quite different conclusions, may be illustrated by an episode from Thomas Merton's memoirs, *The Seven Storey Mountain*. Both of Merton's parents had died, and while he was studying at an English secondary school his godfather, a fashionable English doctor and an old friend of his

father's offered his London flat to Merton as a refuge during school holidays. The flat was luxurious, with beautiful antiques, a French maid, and every comfort, including breakfast in bed. Conversation at the dinner table or later over coffee in the drawing room was sophisticated, witty, worldly, derisory of Christianity and middle-class morals, preoccupied with new art, films, books, or the latest word on which English aristocrat was "thought to take dope." Tom breathed in this atmosphere like the purest oxygen and began to imitate his godfather's every taste and mannerism. Yet when he began to squander his allowance and got a girlfriend pregnant, this led to an irreparable breach: it was one thing to be free in conversation, quite another to be free in conduct. For as Montaigne had said, a gentleman might be "disordered," "unrestrained," even "depraved" in his "opinions," but not "imprudent" in his "appetites."

Merton did not long remain a prodigal son. By embracing the Roman Catholic Church and becoming a Trappist monk in Kentucky, he repudiated a religion of sense experience entirely, both his godfather's high version and his own wilder version. In any case, it is doubtful whether Merton was ever a complete prodigal because, although he was always attracted to rebellion, escapism, and fantasy, he never completely gave himself up to a biblical "wasting of substance." To be a complete prodigal, one must be determined to affront

the comfortable; to defy the respectable; to abjure “maturity” and “responsibility”; to repudiate seriousness, caution, decency, normalcy, and wholesomeness; to avoid a “normal” career, raising children, or participating in politics; to be rebellious and insolent, yet playful and lighthearted; full of brilliance, wit, extravagance and surprise; capable of shocking, dazzling, and charming all at once—in short, to retain all the superficial ease and polish and verve of the high religion of sense experience without any of the character building that is supposed to take place beneath the surface.

Although the traits just enumerated describe a similar approach to sense experience, there is no single, uniform way of life among prodigals. Even more than with high sense experience, which already abhors systematization or generalization, prodigality must be approached through specific individuals, all of whom are rebels, escapists, and fantasists, but who differ sharply in interpretation and degree. Only by separately scrutinizing their lives, beginning with the romantic escapism of the novelist Lawrence Durrell and ending with the profligacy of the playwright Tennessee Williams, is it possible to build up a collective portrait, to define the faith in concrete terms, to decide what prodigality really means, both for those who adopt it and for those who must live with those who adopt it.

The Romantic Escapist

At age twenty-three, poet and novelist Lawrence Durrell abandons industrial society “as serene and bland as suet . . . which dispossessed me of myself and tried to destroy in me all that was singular and unique.” With one completed novel, a new wife, and a \$20 per week allowance from his mother, he sets out for the Greek island of Corfu, a verdant gem set in the blue Ionian Sea (“Somewhere between Calabria and Corfu the blue really begins”) and discovers a world of sun, land and seascape, friends, work, love, physical pleasure, tastes, sounds, sights, smells, touch; a world of pure happiness, protectively bracketed against the intrusion of past or future. The description that follows is taken from a diary, kept between April 1937 and September 1938, later incorporated into *Prospero’s Cell*:

5-5-37

The books have arrived by water. Confusion, adjectives, smoke, and the deafening pumping of the wheezy Diesel engine. . . .

4-7-37

We breakfast at sunrise after a bathe. Grapes and Hymettos honey, black coffee, eggs, and the light clear-tasting Papastratos cigarette. Unconscious transition from the balcony to the rock outside. . . . Sitting here on this

spit we can see the dolphins and the steamers passing within hail almost. We bathe naked, and the sun and water make our skins feel old and rough, like precious lace.

The Naïf

If an island idyll in the Mediterranean represents one kind of rebellion, escape, and fantasy, another is simple naïveté, a childlike refusal to face the realities of adult life, as exemplified by Lawrence Durrell's description of his good friend and mentor, the novelist Henry Miller: "As for Henry, he was never there; he was always lost in his dreams. One day he even had the idea of taking a train to Berlin, so as to go and talk to Hitler for five minutes to persuade him to abandon his military ambitions!"*

* Eudora Welty offers this account of Miller's visit to her in Jackson, Mississippi (Welty was a largely unknown short story writer at the time):

Henry Miller! I don't think he knew where he was since he didn't know we took him to the Rotisserie for supper three nights in a row. He said, "Imagine a town like this having three good restaurants." He had written . . . he'd be coming to Jackson in a glass automobile [although he arrived with no car at all] and wanted to see me. My mother said, "Not in this house." she didn't give a hoot what he had written in his books, it was what he had written to me. He had offered, some time earlier, to put me [a young Southern lady] in touch with an unfailing pornographic market that I could write for if I needed the money.

The Aesthete

For the aesthete, rebellion, escapism, and fantasy are closely allied with a larger agenda of beauty and taste. To live well is to surround oneself and devote oneself to *objets d'art* and *objets de luxe*. At its worst, this approach is everything that Montaigne dislikes: a kind of hothouse “ladies-and-gents” mentality, that is, a passive and conspicuous fastidiousness, an elaborately self-conscious ritual of choosing the right wines, clothes, and interior decoration. Yet as the British-American writer Harold Acton demonstrates, aestheticism has a positive dimension as well, a dimension of genuine appreciation, style, and erudition. In Acton’s case, the style is cosmopolitan and gently nostalgic, reflecting passage through a variety of dying worlds, beginning (and ending) with a Florentine *palazzo*, but encompassing prewar Eton and Oxford, prewar China, southern Italy, and America:

In 1936 I celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Chinese Republic by moving into a perfect [Peking] mansion, with three successive courtyards and a side garden. . . .

Here I had ample space to hang all my pictures and arrange the old furniture I had collected. . . .

Thrust out of China by war and the Communist revolution, Acton turns his attention to the fading Bourbon aristocracy of Southern Italy:

The Princess of Trabia held a formal court of abbes who still took snuff. . . . Unfortunately I had no leisure to browse in the library which contained many rare tomes I longed to read.

A few years later, Acton visited his mother's closest friend, Florence Crane, who lived at "Castle Hill" on Boston's North Shore (the Massachusetts coast above Boston). The original structure on the site had been built by Mr. Crane as a surprise for his bride. When he asked how she liked it, she had responded, "I don't like one thing about it," and had then demolished it and built a "more classical residence of pink brick imported from Holland."

[The new mansion] was splendidly furnished in Queen Anne style, seven of the fifty-two rooms with paneling from Hogarth's London house. . . . The sporting and marine paintings interested me less, but I coveted Zoffany's portrait of Lunardi the Balloonist at Windsor. Sumptuous editions of the classics gleamed on the shelves of the library transported from Essex House.

[Mrs. Crane and her friends] were devoted gardeners.... Having sublimated or eliminated what is now generically called sex, they had settled down to cultivate “gracious living.”

The Decadent

A 1983 photo in *W* (the glossy periodical offshoot of the fashion newspaper *Women’s Wear Daily*) shows a tall, thin, mustachioed man standing beside various Art Deco objects in his house. The caption reads:

It’s inappropriate to call Richard Nelson, creative director of Neiman Marcus advertising, a collector of Art Deco. It’s his entire life style, from the vintage Howard Hughes-type printed sportshirts and pleated pants he finds in thrift shops to his 1936 Deco house, complete with a 1949 DeSoto in the garage.

“My favorite moments come when I fill the house with old records of Dick Powell and Fred Astaire, invite a few friends over, and forget we’re living now. My mother and father were like Ozzie and Harriet; and my name’s Nelson, so I grew up with apple pie,” he reflects. “Maybe that’s why I want to be decadent.”

As Nelson implies, decadence involves something more than a combination of rebellion, escapism, and aestheticism. It looks backward, toward an idealized and irrecoverable past. As French couturier Yves Saint Laurent says: "People think decadence is debauched. Decadence is simply something very beautiful that is [dead or] dying." It is also quintessentially passive in its attitudes. Ironically, decadents may be the very reverse of prodigal libertines: they may lead forgotten, hidden, covered-up lives with little travel, a routine job, few friends, few adventures, few beautiful objects. Yet pleasure and experience are still their gods, and the very sparseness of their existence, the unbridgeable distance that separates them from the past that they crave creates a kind of burning emotional intensity. The idea of loss, of love affairs living only in memory, of objects that might have been possessed but that are snatched away by a capricious and ungovernable fate, kindles the imagination and transmutes vanity, corruption, disillusion, cynicism, pretense, depravity, vice, self-deception, paralysis, fear, and irresolution, all the weary weakness of the flesh, into the highest and most esoteric form of art. Constantine Cavafy, one of Lawrence Durrell's favorite poets, the aging Alexandrian waterworks official who lived in a tiny upstairs flat in Alexandria, wrote in "One Night":

The bedroom was cheap, vulgar
 secret over a dubious bar.
 From the window you'd see the alley
 dirty and narrow.
 Some working-hands' voices
 came up from below.
 They were playing cards
 and having a party.

There in that common, low-class bed
 I had love's body, I had the lips
 voluptuous and rosy red of drunken
 rapture
 rosy red of such a drunken rapture
 that now as I write—after so many years—
 in my house by myself
 I am drunk with rapture again.

The Profligate

At the end of the downward spiral, with self-discipline positively scorned,* are the sexual and hallucinatory experiences of the playwright Tennessee Williams, as described in his *Memoirs*:

The other night I was feeling lively, so we
 took to the streets, here in New Orleans. I

* One thinks of a remark by the French author and film director (and quintessential prodigal) Jean Cocteau: "The tact of audacity consists in knowing how far to go too far."

whispered to my companion that I was “in heat,” so we went again to that delightfully scandalous night spot on Bourbon Street which features the topless and bottomless. . . .

Some time later, Williams describes a television interview in which he berates Richard Nixon for his “lack of . . . a moral sense.” This in turn reminds him of another incident:

On the subject of television shows, I was living, at a point in the sixties . . . in New York City. I was at that time under drugs, rather deeply, and did not know . . . that I had previously acquiesced . . . to a request by the TV commentator Mike Wallace to interview me in my apartment that morning.

Out I came stumbling in a pair of shorts from my bedroom. . . . I entered the blaze of television cameras. . . . A full TV crew had been set up. . . . I fell down flat on my face.

Based on the foregoing, it is obvious that prodigals share much in common. Although some carry both self-discipline *and* license to exaggerated extremes (treks to the North Pole followed by wild bouts of sexual promiscuity) and others are spurred by at least one of the three great conventional disciplines (family, chosen profession, or financial necessity), the general

idea is to abandon restraint and constraint, to overcome the massed enemies of stuffiness, convention, and pomposity, to attain a rarity and intensity, not just a quantity or duration, of sense experience.

Especially in their youth, prodigals are often immensely attractive. They may be charming and companionable, full of humor and delight. Rebellion, escapism, rootlessness, narcissism: these are almost necessary elements of youth and only add to the sense of overflowing life, of grabbing everything, seeing everything, investigating everything. Ask an accomplished young prodigal to draft a thousand-word essay on oranges as a literary symbol of California or the Mediterranean, two favorite locales; he will dash it right off the top of his head—and it will probably be good. Take the same golden youth on a romantic trek to the top of a mountain range; he will happily sleep with pack animals in the wilderness—and then complain of the scarcity of fine wines to choose from at a restaurant back in town.

Later, by remaining adolescent at heart, by refusing to grow up and adapt to reality, the prodigal will find the incomparable sense experiences that he seeks and transmute them into art (objects or works of art or life itself as art) or, more likely, he will not. In most cases, adolescent immaturity and irresponsibility, prolonged too long, prove self-destructive. By the late thirties, the average prodigal discovers that he is not

the great actor or artist of his dreams; he is, in fact, a waiter, a cab driver, or a sales clerk. By this stage, youth has become an addiction and reality a torment. Even for the most successful prodigals, middle and old age are often barely endurable.

A few kill themselves, either intentionally, like the German film director Werner Fassbinder, or unintentionally, like Elvis Presley. Others, like the film director Roman Polanski, make the best of a bad situation, but without much joy:

I'm afraid it's inevitable that the more experience you acquire, the more you lose your desires, your dreams, your fantasies. [For example] sex. I just don't enjoy it as much as I used to. It's getting a bit repetitious. . . . [But I] hate to become wiser. . . . Wise people are boring.

Some prodigals, on reaching middle age, recoil in horror from their "misspent" youth, experience a conversion, and set off in a totally new direction. Evelyn Waugh, for one, wrote a brilliant novel exposing the pitfalls of prodigality (*Brideshead Revisited*) after adopting a fervent Catholicism. Only a very few, battered but not bowed, cleave to the original faith. Tennessee Williams again:

It is now time for me to consider the question of whether or not I am a lunatic or a

relatively sane person. . . . I say *non contendere*. . . . Most of you belong to something that offers a stabilizing influence: a family unit, a defined social position, employment in an organization. . . . I am a fugitive. . . . [But] if you can't be yourself, what's the point of being anything at all?

Four

Value Systems Based on Logic

WE DEVOTED WHAT might seem to be an inordinate amount of space in chapter three to a variety of value systems based on sense experience. This is because sense experience is somewhat hard to pin down both as a source of value systems and as a kind of “religion” in its own right—hard to pin down because votaries of sense experience resist being categorized (may even claim, somewhat foolishly, that theirs is a doctrine of holding no values at all) and because votaries of sense experience by definition are individualists who think they are supposed to follow their own personal path and not copy anyone else’s too closely. Faced with this

somewhat hidden doctrine, it was necessary to draw it out, example by example.

Turning to value systems based on logic, we confront a similarly hard-to-pin-down situation. Like sense experience, deductive logic is first of all a way of thinking, believing, and knowing; second, a way of thinking, believing, and knowing about values; third, a dominant value judgment in itself (when we place more emphasis on logic than on sense experience or some other mental mode, we are making a crucial value judgment), one that precedes and colors all the other value judgments that we make.

But what exactly is logic? When we speak of using our senses, of seeing and hearing, the meaning of the phrase is immediately clear. Logic is different. Although we all use and rely on logic to some extent, we are often unaware of doing so. The term *deductive logic* is particularly slippery; although it is a technical term, it is commonly misused, or just used differently by different people. If we are going to talk about deductive logic, we are certainly going to have to define our terms, and it may help to begin with a specific example of how deductive logic can be used to solve a difficult moral problem.

Example of Logic as a Moral Reasoning Technique: Religion Class at Gonzaga High, as Reported by the *Washington Post*

On a gloomy day in mid-winter, Dick Christensen, a teacher at Gonzaga High, a Catholic parochial school in Washington, DC, asked his religion class to consider the following hypothetical moral dilemma:

Missiles [from a hostile power] are headed toward ten American cities and there is not enough time to stop them. About ten million Americans will die including the president. The president must first decide whether to launch a retaliatory attack that would kill at least 150 million citizens [of the hostile power].

If you were president, Christensen asked the students, would you order the strike?

Ten hands went up signifying yes. Who would not? Four hands crept upward. Two boys were undecided.

Christensen then told the boys who would kill 150 million people to sit on the right side of the room for the next several weeks

and those who wouldn't, to sit on the left. The undecided went to the middle.

On the second day [of the six-week lesson unit], David Costabile and Pat Ryan jumped from the undecided to the “no-nukers.”

“I felt like having revenge. . . .” Costabile, a Chevy Chase resident and star of the school play, explained nervously to the class that day. “But I went home and I thought about it, and I realized that it was absurd to think you could ever morally justify doing something like this.”

The students had eight days to prepare their final presentations, a five-minute speech defending their positions as if they were the president of the United States. . . . The final tally was ten “nukers” and seven “no-nukers.”

Although the students failed to realize it, their teacher, in presenting this particular moral dilemma, committed a logical fallacy. The question is: What is the fallacy? Can you, the reader, spot it?

At the simplest level, there are four tools of deductive logic that might be used to catch the teacher in his error. These are Socratic questioning, dialectic, syllogism, and cataloguing of common fallacies. We shall try each in turn:

Socratic Questioning

When asked who was the wisest man in Greece, the Delphic oracle replied that it was Socrates. Pressed about this judgment, Socrates agreed that the oracle was right: he was the wisest because he alone knew that he knew nothing. Continuing in this arrogantly modest vein, Socrates wandered about Athens refusing to take positions but always asking sharp questions. Using the same technique, which has come to be called the *Socratic Method*, the students could at least have forced the teacher to convert his moral dilemma into an assertion, that indiscriminate killing is wrong, and that if you accept this moral principle, then it is inconsistent to accept the idea of nuclear retaliation. Working with an assertion rather than a hypothetical situation should make it easier to find the fallacy.

Dialectic

Dialectic operates under the principle that heat produces light. One group is assigned to defend a proposition; another is assigned to oppose it. The spirit of competition supposedly ensures that all arguments are marshaled and weighed in the balance. In this case, the teacher encouraged a dialectical free-for-all between the “nukers” and the “no-nukers.” Each side worked strenuously to maneuver the other into a logical trap—a self-evidently false or inconsistent assertion (*reductio ad absurdum*) like talking about a

round square—that would end the game with a single knockout blow. Nobody succeeded. Nobody was persuaded by anyone else’s argument. And, of course, the teacher’s fallacy remained undetected.

Syllogism

Although the ancient Greeks are supposed to have invented the syllogism, a better case can be made for the ancient Indians. Consider, for example, the first three Noble Truths presented by the Buddha:

1. Human life is full of suffering.
2. Suffering is caused by desire.
3. Suffering can be eliminated by eliminating desire.

These three statements, formulated over twenty-five hundred years ago, comprise a classic *syllogism*, that is, a conclusion logically deduced from two premises. For purposes of syllogistic reasoning, it does not matter if the first and second premises are correct. What is being tested is whether the conclusion logically follows from the two premises or whether it is actually inconsistent with the premises. If the conclusion is inconsistent with the premises, then either the conclusion or the premises must (according to logic) be false. Most human statements do not fall into syllogistic form, but they can sometimes be adapted to fit. Fortunately, the teacher’s implied assertion about nuclear retaliation can easily be reinterpreted as a syllogism:

1. Indiscriminate killing is wrong.
2. Massive nuclear retaliation involves indiscriminate killing.
3. Massive nuclear retaliation is wrong.

Restated in this way, the teacher's assertion can be tested according to a variety of rules established by logicians beginning with Aristotle. For example, a syllogism is always false if a positive conclusion follows from two negative premises or if a negative conclusion follows from two positive premises. None of these rules, alas, seems to apply here. Having thoroughly tested the teacher's syllogism, we find that nothing appears to be wrong with it. If a fallacy is buried deep within, we will have to use another technique to dig it out.

Cataloging Common Fallacies

Not surprisingly, human beings tend to repeat the same logical errors over and over again. A few brave souls who have tried to count the most common errors have generally arrived at a very high figure. Philosopher, mathematician, and classicist Robert Gula, for example, author of *Nonsense*, counted 167 possible fallacies, including such examples as fustianism (impenetrable language like "definition predicates cognizance of intrinsic quiddity," loosely translated as meaning that you have to know what something is before you can define it); the fallacy of the worse

evil (thinking, like Pollyanna, that something is really not so bad because there could always be something worse); and the fallacy of the beard (because it is hard to say exactly when a few whiskers become a beard, the qualitative difference between a few whiskers and a beard is denied). After studying the 167 fallacies, however, we find that all the possibilities really boil down to just six: lack of order, organization, clarity, relevance, completeness, and, especially, consistency.

With these new tests in mind, we can now return to the teacher's central assertion:

1. Indiscriminate killing is wrong.
2. Massive nuclear retaliation involves indiscriminate killing.
3. Students who oppose indiscriminate killing but support massive nuclear retaliation are morally inconsistent.

Is this assertion orderly, organized, clear, relevant, complete, and consistent? On closer inspection, the answer appears to be no. The teacher's position is neither clear nor complete. The major problem lies in the third sentence of the teacher's syllogism (the conclusion). The words *massive nuclear retaliation* mask an all-important distinction between *actual* nuclear retaliation and the *threat* of nuclear retaliation. Although it would be inconsistent to oppose indiscriminate killing and still engage in nuclear retaliation, it would be equally inconsistent

to renounce in advance the use of nuclear weapons, if such a unilateral renunciation encouraged the other side to start a nuclear war.

Expressed as a counter-syllogism, this point of view might read:

1. Indiscriminate killing is wrong.
2. Nuclear deterrence prevents indiscriminate killing.
3. Unilateral renunciation of nuclear deterrence is wrong.

Or as Thelma Lavine, a philosophy professor at George Washington University, has stated the case: “The arguments against [nuclear weapons] are very nice arguments on behalf of peace and the dangers of nuclear war. But the rationality within the so-called madness of nuclear weapons is the deterrence value.” The point of this story is not, of course, about nuclear weapons or whether the teacher is *ultimately* right or wrong in his position. It is about the detection of logical fallacies, in this instance, Gula fallacy 136, also known as the “false dilemma.” Like other difficult-to-catch fallacies, the false dilemma may be impossible to beat on its own terms. Sometimes the only way to overcome it is by presenting a counter-dilemma (i.e., the morality of deterrence) in order to broaden the discussion and ensure that all the relevant issues are considered.

Logic as a Dominant Personal Value

As the story of Gonzaga High's religion class illustrates, deductive logic is a technique for clarifying thought and speech, a technique that employs Socratic Method, dialectic, syllogism, cataloging of fallacies, and other more advanced mathematical tools that are beyond the capacities of the average person. At the same time, deductive logic is much more than a technique, if we think of a technique as essentially value free. The technique of logic turns out, on closer inspection, to incorporate a whole series of underlying assumptions and values. One of these, for example, is that ultimate truth is not to be found in Church or Bible or even in crude sense experience, but rather in deductive reasoning. Another is that order and consistency are all important in human affairs (moral inconsistency was the charge that the teacher leveled against the "nukers" among his students). A third is that what appears ordered and consistent may not be, and must be continually tested by drawing finer and finer distinctions (it was just such a fine distinction between *actual* nuclear retaliation and the *threat* of nuclear retaliation that revealed that the teacher himself was guilty of inconsistency—or at least oversimplification—in failing to acknowledge the deterrence issue associated with nuclear weapons).

All these assumptions and values are controversial, even the emphasis on order and consistency. Although the desire for order and consistency may appear to be an inbred preference among human beings, it is often matched by an equal preference for disorder and inconsistency. In part, this is a cultural matter. Westerners have generally felt comfortable about defining, distinguishing, labeling (all the intellectual heavy labor that is required to create order and consistency in an often chaotic universe) because the Bible teaches—indeed, requires—this kind of mental attitude. God must be distinguished from the Devil, good from evil, believers from unbelievers. Once this categorizing and structuring habit of mind has been formed, it can easily be transferred from the old religion of Judaism or Christianity to the new deductive logic.

Among educated Japanese, by contrast, it was traditional to follow a variety of creeds—Shinto, Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, sometimes Christianity—without the slightest effort to distinguish one from the other or to reconcile the differences. Only after the Meiji Revolution of 1868 and the decision to compete with the West did the practice of drawing careful, logical distinctions and seeking strict consistency of belief begin to confer a certain prestige. In India, the very birthplace of formal logic, the logical mind is often thought to be an obstacle rather than

a road to illumination. As yoga teacher and author Richard Hittleman has said:

The [logical] mind, being a machine, has but one function: it creates and then goes about attempting to solve problems! It enjoys this game and will continue to play it as long as you allow it to do so, throughout your entire life if it can.

The traditional Japanese objection to logic is mostly practical: Why make such a fuss over all these distinctions? The Indian objection is more mystical: philosophical logic chopping is thought to obscure the underlying unity of the world and of all creatures. Other criticisms are harsher: that deductive logic is just a series of meaningless puzzles, as in philosopher Bertrand Russell's famous antinomy:

In a certain town there is a barber who shaves all those, and only those, who do not shave themselves. Does he shave himself? [If he does, he doesn't; and if he doesn't, he does.]

Or a series of circular word games, like the following exchange:

PHILOSOPHER 1: All men seek pleasure as their primary goal.

PHILOSOPHER 2: What about men who seek money, fame, power, or success?

PHILOSOPHER 1: These are just means to pleasure.

PHILOSOPHER 2: What about a miser? He clearly seeks money as an end in itself since he never spends any.

PHILOSOPHER 1: Yes, but for the miser, just having money is pleasure.

Or a series of endlessly spun-out conclusions precariously balanced on a single premise that may have little or nothing to do with the real world of common sense or of careful, factual observation. Hitler could be said to have been “logical” about the Jews, in the sense that his views and actions were consistent with his grotesquely warped initial premise. A terrorist who killed a twelve-year-old girl at the Rome airport in 1985 justified himself with a crude syllogism:

It [the El Al ticket counter] is Israel.

Israel is our enemy.

We kill Israel.

Given these important objections, the supporters of deductive logic as a royal road toward moral truth might be forgiven a degree of timidity. Yet, on the contrary, they remain entirely confident. Most of the criticism they regard as the purest nonsense—the very devil they are committed to destroy. In their view, the logical mind is humanity’s salvation, and it is only by giving this mind the freedom to explore, to note critical distinctions, and to follow these distinctions wherever

they lead, through a hundred or even a thousand deductive steps, always guided by the beacon lights of order and consistency, that humans may eventually find happiness. As a contemporary American logician has put it: “We like to imagine ourselves as paladins, riding the earth, always searching for error, confusion, mendacity, always ready to fight it to the death.”

Creating a Positive Religion of Pure Logic

In its earliest days, deductive logic was generally negative in its method. Socrates had sought truth, but only indirectly, by finding and eliminating error, just as we searched for error in the teacher’s moral dilemma at Gonzaga High. In theory, the patient elimination of error should eventually lead you to the truth (with all the error removed, whatever remains must by definition be true). In this way, logicians could eventually evolve from being critics, usually devastating critics, of other people’s values, toward being a source, a life-giving source, of proven values. To make this transition from critic to creator of values was not only inherently desirable (people like to hear suggestions, not just criticisms); it was in some sense necessary. Otherwise, if logic remained forever negative, it could itself be criticized for inconsistency! After all, logic in its purely

negative form, continually questioning everyone's most established and cherished beliefs in the manner of a Socrates or an Abelard or any of the other famous practitioners of the craft, inevitably sowed the seeds of social anarchy and relativism. And how could logic, which trumpeted the supreme value of order and consistency, justify its contributing to disorder and social anarchy?

To transform logic from a purely negative to a negative and positive force was certainly a worthy goal, but the obvious approach of eliminating all the bad thinking and seeing what is left is arduous, slow work. It is not only that there is so much logical error in the world. Worse, as soon as one error is refuted, a new one springs up to take its place. What is needed, therefore, is a shortcut, a way of developing good values from logic without relying on the laborious process of eliminating all the bad values first. At least initially, logicians did not see this as a very daunting problem. They agreed that if they could find an initial premise that was self-evidently true, they would be home free because they could deduce the rest (deduction means that each successive premise must flow out of and be consistent with its predecessors). One by one, philosophers stepped forth like Penelope's suitors to state a self-evident and therefore completely irrefutable initial premise and thus win the glittering prize. In retrospect, the supreme, certainly

the most inspiring, attempt was made by Baruch de Spinoza over three hundred years ago in Holland, the attempt against which all others have subsequently been judged, though, as we shall see, similar efforts continue today.

Baruch de Spinoza (1632–1677)

Spinoza's life, as well as his doctrines, reflects the possibilities of a pure "religion" of deductive logic, where "religion" is defined as a set of personal evaluations and beliefs and actions inspired by those evaluations and beliefs, not just a socially organized religion like Judaism or Christianity. A solitary bachelor, Spinoza moved from town to town to escape the time-consuming attentions of his devoted friends; an imperturbable boarder, he sometimes remained in his room for three months at a time, to the fond amazement of whatever family he was staying with; an expert lens grinder, he always paid his own way and gently declined the financial patronage of princes. As Spinoza explained the motive behind this unconventional existence, which some of his contemporaries viewed as a kind of extreme secular monasticism:

[From the beginning] I [observed that] the ordinary surroundings of life which are esteemed by men (as their actions testify) to be the highest good may be classed under the three heads—Riches, Fame, and the

Pleasures of Sense: with these three the mind is so absorbed that it has little power to reflect on any different good. By sensual pleasure the mind is enthralled . . . so that it is quite incapable of thinking of any other object; when such pleasure has been gratified it is followed by extreme melancholy. . . . The pursuit of honors and riches is likewise very absorbing, especially if such objects be sought simply for their own sake. . . . In the case of fame the mind is still more absorbed, for fame is conceived as always good for its own sake, and as the ultimate end to which all actions are directed. Further the attainment of riches and fame is not followed as in the case of sensual pleasure by repentance, but, the more we acquire, the greater is our delight, and consequently, the more we are incited to increase both the one and the other; on the other hand, if our hopes happen to be frustrated we are plunged into the deepest sadness. Fame has the further drawback that it compels its votaries to order their lives according to the opinions of their fellow men, shunning what they usually shun, and seeking what they usually seek.

When I saw that all these ordinary objects of desire would be obstacles in the way of a

search for something different and new—no, that they were so opposed thereto that either they or it would have to be abandoned, I was forced to inquire which would prove the most useful to me. But further reflection convinced me that . . . evils arise from the love of what is perishable, such as the objects already mentioned [while] love toward a thing eternal and infinite feeds the mind wholly with joy, and is itself unmingled with any sadness, wherefore it is greatly to be desired and sought for with all our strength.

[Even then] I could not forthwith lay aside all love of riches, sensual enjoyment, and fame. [But] while my mind was employed with [deductive logic], it turned away from its former objects of desire. . . . Although these intervals were at first rare, and of very short duration, yet afterwards, . . . they became more frequent and more lasting.

After persevering in this highly disciplined existence for many years, Spinoza concluded that the all-important initial premise, the logical key that would unlock a complete system of values, could be found in the concept of perfection. For perfection to be truly perfect it must be absolute; and to be absolute, it must exist. From this *a priori* argument (*a priori*

because it is thought to be self-evidently true), one may infer that God (another name for perfection) must exist, and one may then proceed, step by step, through definitions, axioms, and propositions laid out like Euclid's geometry, to a complete cosmological and ethical system centered on God.

Like Spinoza's modest life of humility and retirement, the Spinozan philosophical system might seem superficially compatible with traditional Jewish or Christian belief: it places God at the beginning of the reasoning chain. But unlike systems based on the cosmological argument for the existence of God (the observable phenomenon of cause and effect in the universe implies God as a First Cause) or the teleological argument (the organization of the universe implies God as an initial Organizer), Spinoza's ontological argument (to be perfect, God must be) does not necessarily assume a God like that of Judaism or Christianity. Indeed, Spinoza concluded that God was more likely to be the universe (pantheism) than the creator of the universe (theism), and this position led to excommunication from his synagogue, near assassination, and dismissal by a Christian acquaintance as a "wretched little man, [a] vile worm of the earth."

Eventually, Spinoza's ontological argument, together with its cosmological and teleological counterparts, was refuted by other philosophers, notably David Hume and Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth

century. Thereafter, these logical set pieces lived a kind of half-life, appearing and reappearing, revived, re-refuted, revived again. Even in the 1980s, some contemporary American scientists speculated about an “anthropic principle” that bears a close resemblance to the cosmological and teleological arguments, and toward the end of his life Einstein insisted, “I believe in Spinoza’s God.” Meanwhile Spinoza’s attitude, as opposed to his precise logical technique, has never lost its power to move. As Goethe wrote:

After I had looked around the whole world in vain for a means of developing my strange nature, I finally hit upon the *Ethics* of this man. . . . Here I found the serenity to calm my passions; a wide and free view over the material and moral world seemed to open before me. Above all, I was fascinated by the boundless disinterestedness that emanated from him. That wonderful sentence “he who truly loves God must not desire God to love him in return” with all the propositions on which it rests, with all the consequences that spring from it, filled my whole subsequent thought.

Mortimer Adler

For this American philosopher, the logical errors of Spinoza can easily be put right, along with the much graver errors of later philosophers. All that is required is to identify an initial ethical principle that, unlike Spinoza's first principle, really is self-evidently true, then combine this first principle with some readily observable facts about the world. For example, it should be self-evident that "we ought to desire what is really good for us and nothing else" or, put differently, that we ought to desire what we really need and not just what we might like to have. Combining this prescriptive statement with a factual statement such as "all human beings naturally desire or need knowledge," it should then be possible to deduce other "oughts," as, for example, "we ought to seek or desire knowledge."

Building on this foundation, Adler then proceeds to sketch and defend a specific moral philosophy, one that rejects "faith in an authority" as the basis of our moral life, that rejects the Judaic and Christian ethos, that places the individual first ("the happiness of the individual person is the one and only ultimate goal or final end in this life"), and that charges the government to secure for the individual, at a minimum, personal liberty, freedom from poverty, education, adequate health care, and social support—these being the essential "goods" that each of us must have and should desire in order to be happy.

In presenting all this, Adler has absolutely no doubts. Uncertainty, pessimism, subjectivism, relativity are just “philosophical mistakes, erroneous views, false doctrines.” Deductive logic is not only a source of true knowledge; it is “through [such] thought that we are able to understand everything else that we know [and attain] wisdom.” Unfortunately, the premises of Adler’s work, like those of the other philosophers he criticizes, are open to dispute. Take the all-important and necessarily self-evident statement, “We ought to desire what is good for us and nothing else.” What does this statement really mean? Is it not equivalent to saying, “We ought to desire what we ought to desire”—a version that clarifies its tautological nature. If the word “need” is substituted for the second “ought to desire,” does this distinction help? What exactly is a human need, and apart from a few basic examples (food, water, shelter), can it be clearly distinguished from a desire? Finally, is the alleged observation, “All human beings need knowledge,” factual in a meaningful way? What kind of knowledge? Are all forms of knowledge a need? Is specific knowledge of pornography or sadism a need? Was the serpent in the biblical garden correct that we should eat freely of the fruit of knowledge without discrimination?

Such questions could be multiplied, but their import is clear: whether one agrees or disagrees with

Professor Adler's personal values, the program of finding an initial moral premise that is self-evidently true and thus completely irrefutable and then parlaying this premise into a complete value system through deduction is still incomplete, still awaiting another more thoroughly convincing approach. In the absence of such an approach, deductive logic is not exhausted; it just has more limited, less utopian options. One option is to return to the old process of elimination, of continually searching for and refuting false arguments and values, on the assumption that the avoidance of illogical (bad) values may, after all, be just as important as finding logical (good) ones. Another option is to abandon a program of "pure" logic and instead try to blend logic with other mental modes. For example, if you stipulate that your initial premises will come from an external authority such as the Bible, you can indeed deduce an entire moral system. (This is what St. Thomas Aquinas and other Christian logicians have tried to do over the centuries.) Or, if you prefer sense experience or intuition as your starting point, you can deduce other kinds of value systems, as many modern philosophers have done. Or you can be less formal about the whole thing and simply incorporate logical techniques (such as the avoidance of logical fallacies) into value systems primarily based on other modes. The philosophy of cognitive psychology, for example, a psychiatric and counseling movement

described in chapter eight, includes logic very prominently among its several dominant values and has had a rapidly growing influence in contemporary psychiatric and mental health circles. Whichever of these approaches is adopted, it remains true that logic is a powerful and perennial form of moral reasoning, and at least for some, lies at the heart of their personal evaluations and beliefs.

Five

Value Systems Based on Emotion

B EING HUMAN, WE are greatly swayed by our emotions and no less so when we choose our values. Yet, ironically, many of us would probably deny that our personal values are based on emotion. This is primarily because the word *emotion* has acquired a somewhat pejorative ring. (We hear, all too often, “You are being too emotional about this,” or, “Get control of your emotions.”) If we rephrase the question by asking people if they consult their feelings about whether something is right or wrong, they will probably answer yes. At least for the present, the term *feelings* evokes a positive response in people, whereas the term *emotions*, for no good reason, sits under a slight cloud.

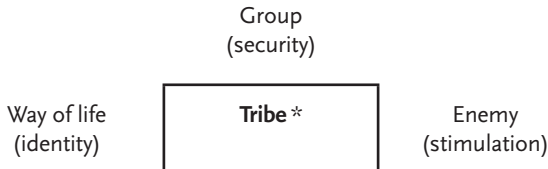
For example, when the previously mentioned wise man Obi-Wan Kenobi in the film *Star Wars* counsels his young protégé Luke to “trust your feelings,” we nod sympathetically. Not only do we approve of feelings; in addition, we know that this is not real life, where your feelings can get you into trouble, but rather a fable in which feelings will never lead you astray. In any case, whether we refer to feeling or emoting, there is no question that we commonly arrive at judgments and beliefs in this way, judgments and beliefs about the world in general but also about our personal values.

Once we have acknowledged that we do indeed “judge and believe” through our emotions, the next question is what emotions really are. On one level, they are our most primitive and compelling guidance system. They alert us to danger or opportunity, tell us whether to fight or flee, provide us with the chemicals and energy needed to do so, and also unite us with others who can help us survive and thrive. On a more abstract level, emotions simply attach and detach us from situations and especially people. Given this fundamental role of attaching and detaching, it is not surprising that the first thing emotions do is to attach us or detach us from emotions themselves. Thus, most of us become very attached to love and happiness, while a few of us eschew or de-value these emotions. Most of us do not especially like anger or fear, while

some of us like these emotions too well and become chronically angry (e.g., bullying) or fearful (e.g., withdrawn). When we do attach ourselves to anger, like a Hitler, or fear, like a recluse, we will develop all sorts of rationales for this, but we may simply be attracted to the depth and intensity of feeling that we get by chronically operating in an angry or fearful state, and in any case, we become habituated to these states and they come to seem perfectly normal.

Emotions do not, of course, just attach or detach us to emotions. They also tend to attach us to a particular group of people, a “chosen” people to use the biblical metaphor. Membership in this group automatically provides emotional security. In addition, they attach us to a particular way of life or a particular way of organizing society, belief in which provides an emotional identity. For example, most Americans identify themselves not just as Americans (members of a group) but also as defenders of an American “way” of democracy and free enterprise. At the same time, and as an integral part of the group attachment process, emotions also tend to detach us from an enemy, a “devil,” sometimes an enemy of all mankind such as a disease to be conquered, more often another group of people, frequently those people who oppose the way of life in question and are thus irremediably alienated from the “chosen” group. The combination of these two attachments and one detachment defines a tribe,

and in this limited sense emotional values, even the most refined, beneficent, and inspiring emotional values, are really tribal values, as illustrated by the following diagram:



At the very simplest level, tribal value systems emphasize the group over the other two dimensions, although all three are always highly interrelated. These simplest emotional value systems, what might be called value systems of blood, may center on any of the following:

- Family
- Work group
- Neighborhood
- Nation

To find examples of a simple emotional value system of blood, all you have to do is listen to the people around you. One day your sister-in-law says over

* If the term *tribe* strikes the reader's ear as negative or condescending, substitute the term *community*. On the other hand, in *The Different Drum*, Scott Peck persuasively argues that the word *community* should be reserved for a particular kind of tribe, one that has transcended selfishness and has come to express love, both within itself and in its relations with other tribes.

coffee: “You know, your brother lives and dies for his family, for me and the children. That is all he cares about. He doesn’t care about his job, except as a way to put a roof over the children’s heads and food on the table; he doesn’t have any other friends; he doesn’t have other interests; he doesn’t go to church. He just loves his family and works day and night for us.”

More exuberantly, a forty-two-year-old suburban Marylander writes in the *Washington Post* letters column: “I was married to a professional woman and on our dual incomes we Club Med’ed, sports-car raced, [and] alpine skied . . . our 14-year marriage into oblivion.” [So far, we can sense some prodigal sense experience values.] “I’m now remarried to a woman who gave up her ‘professional’ career to provide full-time care for our 1- and 5-year-old daughters. . . . Vacations are taken in our nine-year-old used pop-up camper, and dining out means ‘Hooray! Daddy’s bringing home a pizza from Piazamos.’ We’ve just started into the second round of what will be 100 readings of ‘Pat-the-Bunny’ for our 1-year-old. Happiness is my wife and two restless kids picking me up at [the airport] after a three-day business trip. We all cry, because we are so happy to be together again.” [Clearly the focus has shifted to emotive values based on a close family life, a change that has made the writer happier.]

On the other hand, a young single person, working together with a few friends to start a new company,

might admit that the group he cares most deeply about, the group that he would personally sacrifice for, that represents the be-all and end-all of his life, at least for the moment, is his co-workers at the office. This phenomenon is more common now in America than it was in the past, since young workers commonly take jobs thousands of miles from their family or old friends, and it is exemplified by the proverbial company that begins in a garage, quickly develops a distinctive, highly participative corporate culture (no ties, beards OK, creativity over conformity, informality, no or few titles, and so on), and has plenty of enemies (other competing companies) to provide emotional stimulus along with feelings of group security and identity.

Caring deeply about a neighborhood, in the same way that one might care about a family or work group, is at least in America less common today than in the highly ethnic neighborhoods of the past. But people still identify with and love their neighborhoods, still use neighborhoods to define “our group” versus “other groups,” “our way of life,” versus “other ways of life,” insiders versus outsiders. At its worst, we see this when urban geography shapes the identity of competing youth gangs on the streets of Los Angeles (if you’re from Irvine Street, I can shoot you on sight; if you’re from Jones Street, I have to treat you as a “brother”). But we also see the positive side when residents of a New York City block band together to rid themselves

of pimps, prostitutes, and drug dealers, and it is not unheard of for some individuals on the block literally to devote their lives to this communal cause.

From family or neighborhood to the nation is a large leap, but the underlying emotions are similar. Instead of devoting ourselves, heart and soul, to Astoria in Queens (where Greek Americans keep alive their ethnic heritage as well as the uniqueness of their neighborhood), we devote ourselves, heart and soul, to our country, or we devote ourselves heart and soul for a period of time. A veteran of World War II who fought at Iwo Jima: “I actually miss those times. It was a nightmare to lose so many close friends, but we were fighting the good fight, we were totally united, we were very together, and it gave life meaning. Life has never been as meaningful since.”

We are often reminded by commentators that national political campaigns are supposed to be about “issues,” issues such as whether we should or should not build a particular kind of expensive weapons system or nuclear power plant. But national politics is also about values, especially emotional (tribal) values. Geraldine Ferraro, the first woman chosen to run for vice president of the United States, emphasized this when she accepted the Democratic party’s nomination, by speaking of the “values that we hold in common—you know what they are—family, neighborhood, community,

country”; but most male politicians also base their campaigns on these and other “blood” values.

Because political values are largely emotive, especially at the national level, they are almost always suffused with an element of us-against-them thinking. Examples of this continually come and go, and are quickly forgotten, but to cite only one example, it was well understood during Ronald Reagan’s presidency that the ruler of Iran, the dreaded Ayatollah Khomeini, portrayed the United States as the “Great Satan” in order to unite his people against a common enemy and thus make them forget their internal hatreds. Less well understood was that Reagan himself, to a degree, used the ayatollah for the same purpose, along with other foreign “devils” such as Colonel Khadafi and his terrorist regime in Libya, the Cubans in Grenada, and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. However justified or unjustified the bombing of Libya or the invasion of Grenada may have been, both events helped to unite a majority of Americans behind Reagan. The only point at which Reagan seemed in danger of losing his majority support, and thus much of his power, came when he was caught not only talking to the foreign devils in Iran, but even sending them weapons.

Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms in the now vanished Soviet Union of the 1980s illustrate the same dilemma for politicians and, ultimately, for the

human race. In his 1988 speech before the United Nations, Gorbachev argued that the “old thinking,” in which nations defined and united themselves emotionally through their opposition to other nations, must cease. Yet in attempting to reorient the Soviet Union away from its longstanding enmity toward the United States, Gorbachev could not dispense entirely with the unifying power of us-against-them. In effect, he tried to substitute the previous regime in Russia, the Brezhnev era, the entrenched Communist party hacks, as the devil against which a majority of his people could be united in common struggle, and thereby forget, at least for a moment, their other squabbles and internal divisions. But, as the Gorbachev era unfolded, it became clear that this substitution would not work. An external devil, such as another country, is not only a more strongly unifying force than an internal devil; it is also politically safer, so long as enmity does not lead to a shooting war, and in the absence of a foreign devil, the Soviet Union collapsed.

Obviously, not all value systems based on emotion are as simple and tangible as family, work group, neighborhood, or even nation. Emotive value systems may also be centered on:

- Class (e.g., “family farmers”)
- Race (e.g., Ku Klux Klan or black separatists such as Louis Farrakhan)

- Some other defined group cause (e.g., feeding and sheltering the homeless in America's cities)
- Humanity (e.g., the nuclear freeze movement which seeks to halt any further testing or deployment of nuclear weapons)
- History (e.g., humanity projected into the future)

These value systems may be highly abstract: if you love and value and devote your life to the nuclear freeze movement, that is not quite like loving and valuing and devoting your life to a family that you can see and hold and hug. But even the most abstract emotional causes have a way of transforming themselves into a group, a tribe, a band of brothers and sisters who know and love and are committed to each other, who are united by the animosity or sometimes just by the indifference of outsiders.

Consider the late Mitch Snyder, for example, the successful advocate for homeless people in Washington, DC, and leader of the Community for Creative Non-Violence. At age twenty, he was living with a wife and two small children in a small Brighton Beach, New York, apartment, being honored as the Maytag "man of the month" for selling appliances. Then "I just literally woke up one day in a cold sweat and realized it was crazy. I was not going to spend the rest of my life doing what I was doing. That was not

what I was supposed to be. [My wife] wanted me to be like other people, and I . . . wasn't like other people."

Shortly thereafter, Snyder abandoned his family, who had to survive as best they could on welfare and family handouts, and came to Washington, DC, to become part of the antiwar movement. Twelve years later, during the 1984 presidential campaign, he began a fast to protest the federal government's refusal to turn over a dilapidated building for use as a shelter for the homeless. Fifty-one days into the fast and two days before the election, with Snyder's life in jeopardy and *60 Minutes* planning a segment for Sunday evening television, the White House agreed to provide the building and to help renovate it. When Snyder later appeared on *60 Minutes*, his ex-wife saw him for the first time since he had fled their home. What she saw shocked her: here was a man with long, unkempt hair wearing a uniform of donated army surplus jacket, faded jeans, and work boots, who had slept on the streets for two winters, otherwise slept on a mattress on the concrete floor of his shelter, who ate discarded food, frequently fasted to try to move the renovation of his building along faster, who took no salary whatsoever and drove to appointments in a decaying old Chevy. By his side was a new companion, Carol Fennelly, who had divorced her husband in California because "he wanted bigger cars and bigger houses and I didn't." The first wife just shook her

head and concluded: “[Mitchell] always told me he could love an abstract. It’s hard for him to love on a one-to-one basis.”

Snyder both agreed and disagreed with this assessment. As much as he regretted what happened in Brighton Beach and enjoyed an occasional visit with his sons again after so many years, he felt that he had a new family, one that extended beyond Carol, beyond the other members of the CCNV whose daily struggles he shared, beyond even the homeless of the nation’s capital: “All human beings are members of one family . . . and that dictates that we shouldn’t allow people to freeze and starve. I believe that a healthy family takes into account more than just a small group of people who share blood. . . . We’re essentially tribal creatures anyway.” At the same time, Snyder acknowledged that his first wife had a point: “I don’t consider myself a good person,” he said, “I tend to be very impatient, I tend to be very short, I tend to make heavy demands on people. I don’t have time or energy to give much one-on-one, and so I’m very hard on people around me. I take much more than I give. I give to people in the shelter, I give to people on the streets, I give to people who are suffering, but that’s got little to do with people who are around me. They pay the price.” In the end, however, this assessment, honest as it was, proved to be less than fully accurate. Despite the emotional strength

that Snyder gained from his community and its work, he eventually took his own life.

To reiterate, the word *emotion* often has a negative connotation, as if it were synonymous with childishness, unpredictability, or violence. In referring to value systems based on emotion, we mean something quite different: the human faculty for embracing certain emotions over others, for knowing by feeling, especially refined feeling; the kind of knowledge that people care deeply about, that they can not only use to build a way of life but also a community on, that they are prepared to defend, even to defend with their lives. In this sense, a “religion” of emotion—whether it is focused on family, country, an abstract issue such as world disarmament, or a surrogate family like the Community for Creative Non-Violence in Washington, DC—may be childish or violent, but it is just as likely to be magnetic, forceful, positive, full of life and action, even larger than life and action.

Criticisms of a secular “religion” of emotion like Mitch Snyder’s may be launched from many perspectives: Christians are occasionally harsh in their attacks because they sense, quite rightly, that some emotive value systems, especially those devoted to social activism, are “knockoffs” of Christianity—imitations that follow the Christian script in all respects save one. The difference—the all-important difference—is that although social activists may be as disciplined, as

doctrinally committed, as willing to become childlike and selfless as Christians, their paradise is on earth and will not be experienced by any but future generations, whereas the Christian paradise is in heaven and will be shared by all who take Christ into their hearts. Even on a purely emotional level, Christianity, which draws deeply upon emotion, may have a stronger argument here. How can any god of this world—whether family or the eradication of world hunger or anything else—be a true god? How much like the Tower of Babel are all these secular causes that we pledge our lives to, only to reconsider and pledge to something else? If there is some sort of test that we must pass before reaching utopia, some sort of fiery trial to be overcome, is it not more likely that the test or trial would be life itself, not some ephemeral devil such as (for Mitch Snyder) the Reagan White House or the capitalist system? If so, if Christianity is right, devotees of secular causes who rely on those causes—and solely on those causes—for meaning in their lives are making a tragic mistake: their hearts are not “fixed where true joys are to be found.”

The logical critique of value systems based on emotion, all such value systems, not just secular ones, is that they are often—well—illogical. In the first place, words are often used carelessly. Two people may spend all day talking about world disarmament without once talking about the same thing. When

words become confused and corrupted, they can be used interchangeably, as when communist nations describe themselves as democratic republics. The worst offense is when political leaders such as Hitler throw all sorts of disparate words into a pot—Jew, nation, history, revolution, socialism, greatness, freedom—to make a particularly noxious stew. The result cannot be confused with knowledge, even emotional knowledge—it is pure mood, nothing more, and the action it begets is almost always barbaric.

It would be nice, say the logicians, if one could combat this “virus” of misdirected emotions with critical analysis, but that is rarely possible. The situation is exactly as described by Dean Acheson, secretary of state under President Truman, who recounted in a speech how a philosopher friend had taken him to task for being too rational:

You are trained in law; I in philosophy. We are in a small minority. Most people associate ideas and hold them together by the strength of their wish to do so. Our colleague knows that the situation in which we [find] ourselves—let’s call it point A—is undesirable and possibly dangerous. He looks around and sees a vision of Point B, which seems

To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new.

But you with cold analysis and relentless logic prove that there is no road from A to B, and, that if there were, B is only a mirage which

Hath really neither joy nor love, nor
light
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help
for pain.

You leave him robbed of hope and have stirred his resentment at you as the robber. You cannot argue him into accepting a sounder and more practicable alternative, just as—to use Justice Holmes’s metaphor—“You cannot argue a man into liking a glass of beer.” You must associate your alternative with his desires. Your suggestion, let’s call it point C, must be pictured with even more charms than point B. In point C the sun is brighter, the girls are prettier, the fountains run with champagne, and even the Russians have good manners and are tractable.

The sense experience dismissal of value systems based on emotion is even more condescending and runs as follows. Montaigne taught that life is about living (ontology), not striving after phantom goals (teleology) that will ultimately never be realized. In this regard, a religion of emotion is just as bad as

Christianity: it whips people into an obsessive and fixated state of fear and hope that can only be released by some manic burst of violence. Since votaries of emotion generally define themselves and their loved ones in terms of opposition to some imagined hate figure (Manicheanism), suitable victims for the orgy of bloody activism are not hard to find. If you love your family, it is perfectly all right to make money by exploiting or cheating other families; if you love your country, you must hate other countries; if you want to help the homeless, you must picket and call the president of the United States a murderer. Within the sphere of emotive “religion,” everything is fight, fight, fight, pure animal spirits, and sheds no light whatever on the underlying question of how we ought to think and live—especially since this question can only be answered through the calm and patient accumulation of personal sense experience. If a “religion” of emotion seems to help us, it is only in the most twisted way. Consider the Russian fable about the peasant who told his priest that life was unbearable and that he planned to commit suicide. The priest advised him to move all his goats and chickens into his hut for several weeks, then move them out again. At the end of this time, the peasant found life much improved. In this view, Mitch Snyder’s fasting and sleeping on sidewalk grates is much the same thing: it makes the organism so miserable that any relief produces happiness.

Even so baldly stated, the various criticisms of a “religion” of emotion are powerful, very much worth listening to. But, as always, there is another side to the story. Although Hitler offered a value system based on emotion comprised of several parts German nationalism, racism, and street gang thuggery, Churchill was also a nationalist, a kind of chivalric nationalist, one who wanted to fight on the side of the angels, not just glorify and enrich his own people. Is not one Churchill, who helped save the world from barbarism, worth a thousand connoisseurs of a purely personal sense experience? Could even Montaigne see it any other way? Surely for every revolutionary terrorist, willing to slaughter innocents for a tawdrily abstract cause, there is a woman like Mary Breckinridge, who rode on horseback into the wild and remote “hollows” of the Kentucky mountains in the 1920s to bring professional medicine into that part of the world for the first time, or a Peace Corps volunteer, or an African famine volunteer, all of whom are answering an essentially emotional “call.” On balance, the “religion” of emotion cannot so easily be dismissed. The noblest as well as the most lurid human episodes fall within its long and spectacularly colorful history.

Six

Value Systems Based on Intuition

What is Intuition?

JOURNALIST ROBERT UPDEGRAFF on Dr. Frederick Grant Banting:

One night in October 1920, Frederick Grant Banting, a young Canadian surgeon [and teacher], was working over his next day's lecture. His subject was diabetes. Hour after hour he pored over the literature of this dread disease, his head a whirling maze of conflicting theories, case histories, accounts of experiments with dogs. Finally he went wearily to bed. At two in the morning he

got up, turned on a light, and wrote three sentences in his notebook: "Tie off pancreatic duct of dogs. Wait six to eight weeks for degeneration. Remove residue and extract." Then he went back to bed and slept. It was those three magic sentences which led to the discovery of insulin. Banting's conscious mind had come to grips with one of the most baffling problems in medical science; his subconscious mind finished the job.

Ferris Alger, one of three people with a documented intelligence quotient (IQ) of 197 out of a possible 200 (Stanford-Binet test), on his working method as a weapons researcher and inventor during World War II:

I would take [any] problem, study it carefully, store it all away in my head, and forget it. The following morning, I would go back to work, and the problem would be solved. [I could mentally check the reasoning backward to be sure I had the right answer.] But if I tried to push it along forward, I would get confused.

Philosopher Bertrand Russell on preparing a lecture:

When I was young each fresh piece of serious work used to seem . . . beyond my

powers. I would fret myself into a nervous state from fear that it was never going to come right.

The most curious example of this... occurred at the beginning of 1914. I had undertaken to give the Lowell Lectures at Boston, and had chosen as my subject "Our Knowledge of the External World." Throughout 1913 I thought about this topic. In term time in my rooms at Cambridge, in vacations in a quiet inn on the upper reaches of the Thames, I concentrated with such intensity that I sometimes forgot to breathe and emerged panting as from a trance. But all to no avail. To every theory that I could think of I could perceive fatal objections. At last, in despair, I went off to Rome for Christmas, hoping that a holiday would revive my flagging energy. I got back to Cambridge on the last day of 1913, and although my difficulties were still completely unresolved, I arranged, because the remaining time was short, to dictate as best as I could to a stenographer. Next morning, as she came in at the door, I suddenly saw exactly what I had to say, and proceeded to dictate the whole book without a moment's hesitation.

Economist John Maynard Keynes on Sir Isaac Newton:

In the eighteenth century and since, Newton came to be thought of as the . . . greatest . . . rationalist, one who taught us to think on the lines of cold and untinctured reason . . . but [this was] not, I am sure, his peculiar gift. . . . I fancy his pre-eminence is due to his muscles of intuition being the strongest and most enduring with which a man has ever been gifted. . . . I believe that Newton could hold a problem in his mind for hours and days and weeks until it surrendered to him its secret. Then being a supreme mathematical technician he could dress it up, how you will, for purposes of exposition, but it was his intuition which was pre-eminently extraordinary. . . .

Economist A. E. G. Robinson on John Maynard Keynes:

[Keynes's] economic thinking [which seemed so brilliantly logical] was, in reality, intuitive [and] impressionistic.

Mitch Kapor, founder of Lotus, a leading producer of computer software in the US, and thus a company specializing in logical applications, on himself:

An intuitive style of decision-making lets the entrepreneur make a creative leap.

All six of these individuals—Banting, Alger, Russell, Newton, Keynes, and Kapur—are known for their powers of direct observation and logic. Yet they all readily admit their most fundamental and creative way of tackling a problem is intuitive. What exactly, then, is intuition? In our ordinary language we use words like emotion, instinct, and intuition as if they meant the same thing. For example, in *Tropic of Cancer*, novelist Henry Miller writes that “Nichols is a . . . man of feeling, of intuition, [a] childman.” Clearly, this is wrong. Emotion and intuition may both be aspects of the unconscious mind, and therefore beyond our conscious control. But emotion *is* childlike, indeed animal-like, whereas intuition is a highly developed and powerful mode of purely abstract mental processing, one that synthesizes masses of facts and theories with extraordinary speed. We all rely on intuition to form at least some of our beliefs about the world in general; equally, we rely on intuition to form some of our most personal judgments and beliefs, our values.

The Eight Steps

Since intuition is a form of abstract and speculative thought yet still largely an unconscious reflex, the question arises: How can we stimulate what Keynes called our “muscles of intuition,” our ability to use all of our mind and not just the small part that controls conscious thought?

At the simplest problem-solving level, the secret seems to lie in not trying too hard. As the German physicist Hermann von Helmholtz, wrote: “Happy ideas come unexpectedly without effort like an inspiration. They have never come to me when my mind was fatigued or when I was at my working table.” To which Robert Updegraff adds: “Any place, it seems, other than at the desk!”

On the other hand, some kind of preparation is definitely required. As Updegraff continues:

One rule always holds good: you must give your problems to your subconscious mind in the form of definite assignments, after assembling all the essential facts, figures, and arguments. The cooking process must first be started by focusing our minds on this material long and intently enough to get it thoroughly heated with our best conscious thinking. [Then] go fishing, golfing, or motoring, or if it's night, go peacefully to bed.

So much for the rather simple case of intuitive problem solving. But what if you want to become a highly intuitive person in general, without reference to any specific problem? The first step seems to be to quiet the emotions. If the subconscious mind is inflamed by strong passions such as fear, anger, ambition, desire, or sexual love or, conversely, drained and

exhausted by such passions, there is little chance for the still, quiet stirrings of intuition to be heard. To unblock the intuitive powers, you must make every effort to attain emotional equilibrium, calm, detachment, openness, flexibility. Then, as a final paradoxical step, you must dispense with even the effort to attain these desirable states so that body and mind rest together in an alert but thoroughly relaxed fashion. In other words, to use the jargon of popular psychology, Type B behavior is required, not Type A—where Type A is defined by impatience, anger, turbulence, fear, a chronic state of fight-or-flight readiness. Over millennia, various human cultures have developed a series of specific practices to control this condition, practices that have appeared again and again on different continents and at different times but that have been thoroughly systematized in the eight steps of classical yoga.*

* Yoga is a Sanskrit word that, like humanism or liberalism in the West, has been used in so many different ways that it has come to mean almost anything. Translated literally, it means “yoke,” which is variously interpreted as discipline or union. Uncapitalized, the term yoga usually refers to a series of social, physical, and mental exercises that may be used by anybody regardless of religious or philosophical beliefs. The capitalized term Yoga traditionally refers to the combination of these exercises with any specific set of religious and philosophical beliefs but especially with Yoga-Samkhya, one of the six orthodox schools of classical Hinduism.

Step	Practice
1. Tolerance	Emphasize nonviolence , avoid conflict with people: moral beliefs aside, these disciplines tend to quiet the emotions.
2. Self-restraint	<p>Avoid or limit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • alcohol • tobacco • drugs • sweets • meat • overeating • sex • materialism <p>—all of which are thought to jeopardize health as well as mental calm. Extreme abstinence, “mortification of the flesh” and the like, however, is not recommended.</p>
3. Physical exercise	<p>Stretch the body. (Hatha yoga exercises are designed to unlock tight muscles and relieve tension).</p> <p>Relax the muscles. (For example, lying on your back, tense each muscle group in your body in turn, one by one, for five seconds, then let them fall limp, imagining that you are breathing out through the specific muscle group instead of breathing out through your lungs.)</p>
4. Breathing	Breathe deeply. (Hatha yoga pranayama—also designed to relieve tension and fuel the mental faculties.*)

* Frequent running, although not a specifically yogic discipline, potentially combines three of the above stages: self-discipline, physical exercise, and deep breathing. Running, however, tightens muscles unless accompanied by stretching, and may become “violent,” “pounding,” “competitive,” and “agitating,” rather than “graceful,” “easy,” and “calming,” especially if the day is hot, the runner is in poor physical condition, or is in competition.

5. Detachment	<p>Retreat from the world for a few hours, a few days, a few months, however long, either in a monastery or on the proverbial mountaintop (passive detachment).</p> <p>Observe yourself in the course of everyday affairs from the outside, as if you were another person (active detachment).</p>
6. Concentration	<p>Quell mental noise by concentrating on a thought, a prayer, or an object. Repeat each day.</p>
7. Meditation	<p>Meditate (using any of innumerable techniques), or simply evoke Dr. Herbert Benson's "relaxation response": At a minimum, sit comfortably; close eyes or, if in public, ignore outside stimuli; breathe steadily, deeply, and slowly; repeat a word (for example, "One") on each exhalation or count each exhalation up to ten, then repeat (never go over ten); let distracting thoughts pass gently without paying attention to them, and either stop when completely relaxed or when distractions break your concentration, usually after ten or twenty minutes. With daily repetition, induction (falling into meditative state) comes easily.</p>
8. Trance	<p>Meditate deeply (self-hypnosis). While in a state of maximum receptivity, review desirable changes in habits or instruct yourself to suppress physical pain or other unwanted physical symptoms.* Then clear the mind to receive innermost intuitions.</p>

* Even without self-hypnosis, mind and body sometimes respond to auto-suggestion. On the physical level, for example, studies indicate that the act of smiling, even if forced, tends to evoke happy emotions, whereas pretending to be angry brings forth the actual emotion of anger.

The Way of Pure Intuition

The central problem—or paradox—of intuition is that it is nonverbal. Once intuitive insight is translated into language, it sounds like something else: logic, experience, or emotion. One way to transcend this problem is to say, with the Indian sages Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, that religious doctrines are equally true and false, because they are just shadows of an underlying, incommunicable truth. Another way is to refuse to verbalize one's insights—to take the position that religion is nonverbal and has nothing to do with evaluations or beliefs *per se*.

To see how this latter method works in real life, we may turn to the Sawan Kirpal Ruhani Mission, based in New Delhi, India, with 150,000 followers worldwide and five thousand in the United States. To be a part of the Mission, one need not give up Christianity or Buddhism or any other faith into which one has been born. One need not give up one's job or family or pledge allegiance or donate money—donations in particular are never requested. All that is required is sincerity; abstinence from drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and meat; and a willingness to explore one's "inner space" through daily meditation ("When you slowly withdraw the feeling from feet, and knees, and waist, and so on . . . the soul actually withdraws from your body [and] you go into inner space").

Instruction on meditation (but never on religious beliefs or values per se, which are thought to be entirely inexpressible and personal) are given by staff members trained by the Mission's founder, the late Darshan Singh (all Sikhs bear the common name Singh, which means "lion"). Darshan Singh was a kindly man who characteristically insisted on keeping his job as a deputy secretary in the Indian government even after founding the Mission, but who is now remembered in India as a "living Master," a person of "oceanic calm" in whose presence one felt neither excitement nor electricity, only total relaxation and openness. After retiring from the civil service, the master finally became free to travel, visited the United States twice, and quietly enrolled people in his movement, people such as a professor of international relations at Rhode Island University ("I've studied most of the world's religions and this is a way to bring them together") and a Phi Beta Kappa member of a US senator's staff.

Darshan Singh was intensely humble (his followers say that if you had rolled out a red carpet for him, he would not have walked on it) and refused to be glorified or to let anyone follow him slavishly:

Masters come and go. All of them have spoken of love. But the 'religions' they found became [full of themselves], and instead of love they preach hatred. . . . So masters

have to come again and again. This time let us hope and pray that the message will spread. We are like the lotus blossom, which has its roots in muddy water, yet it blooms into a beautiful flower. We must live in this world, but have the ultimate aim of knowing ourselves.

The Sawan Kirpal Ruhani Mission advises us to live fully and actively in the world, albeit with daily ventures into “inner space.” Another viewpoint, however, says that the Mission is right to regard religious truth as totally intuitive, incommunicable, inexpressible, but wrong to remain rooted in the world of maya or illusion. Our real goal should be absolute extrication from this world through the most persistent practice, the deepest, truest, most continual trance, with as little time as possible devoted to the distractions of eating, drinking, and sleeping (mostly eating and drinking since trance largely replaces sleeping). As human beings, we naturally hesitate: it is distasteful or worse to detach ourselves from all that we know. To use Aldous Huxley’s metaphor, it is like staring at the surface of the sea, watching its gleaming radiance and wanting to explore the bottom, the divine truth “as it is eternally in itself,” yet being afraid of its dark “depths,” hidden “to the analytic mind,” and refusing to take “the final, necessary plunge.”

There are several techniques available to help us anesthetize the conscious mind, and thus end its power to hold us back from attaining salvation, here and now, through the unlocking of our inner powers of intuition. One technique is simply to repeat, over and over: “What am I? Am I my mind? Am I my body? Am I my senses?” This is the self-questioning of the great Indian mystic Ramana Maharshi. It is meant to baffle, to stupefy, and finally to force the mind into submission, into a readiness to abrogate itself, to seek out the truth of deep trance, to fold itself into God. Another similar technique is to reflect on paradoxical statements—for example, the paradox of the Tamil mystic, Manikkar Vasagar: “You are everything that is and you are nothing that is.” Or to engage in *mondo*, a rapid-fire exchange of questions and answers between two people, so fast that the conscious mind cannot keep up and abdicates. Or to try to answer a koan, a nonsensical question such as: What is the sound of one hand clapping? (These are both Zen Buddhist techniques.) Or to study an argument until, in Thomas Merton’s words, you see “that on both sides of every argument there is both right and wrong [which] in the end . . . are reducible to the same thing.” This is a Taoist technique, and when “the wise man grasps this pivot . . . of Tao . . . he is in the center of the circle, and there he stands while ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ pursue each other around the circumference.”

And what exactly lies within the pivot, at the nucleus of the circle, at the point where the conscious mind finally sees everything (in the words of St. Thomas Aquinas) as “straw,” gives up its lordly dominance over the soul, and defers entirely to our innermost intuition? Because intuition is nonverbal, no one can say, although the Indian saint Shankara gives us this report from an imaginary spiritual sojourner:

I have been in union with Brahman [God].
 All I know is bliss, but not its extent or limits. What I [know] cannot be described.
 Just as a hailstone falls into the sea, so I am merged into this vast ocean of joy. The world has gone. That which I perceived exists no more. I am indifferent to everything, and only know I am Atman, pure consciousness, pure joy.

I have achieved my object; the goal of all life and existence. I have found the Atman. I am without attachment, and without body. I am sexless and indestructible, calm, infinite, and without strain.

I am neither doer nor enjoyer, without change and without action. I am neither this nor that, neither within nor without. Like space I go further than thought. Like a mountain I am immovable. Like the ocean

I am boundless. I am the Atman, Self-illuminated and infinite.

There are those who regard intuition as a kind of nonsense, although if they consider the matter carefully, they will come to see that important insights are often intuitive at first, before assuming the garb of reasoning. Others respect intuition highly but see it solely as a catalyst for the conscious mind, a precursor of formal observation and logic, whether observation and logic applied to the physical realm or to the moral realm of personal value choices. But is this limited view the correct one? Or will intuition carry us farther, if we give it the right environment of self-discipline and detachment? Will it take us all the way to ultimate truth, albeit an inexpressible and anti-intellectual truth, or are these extremes of intuitive training just so much neurotic masochism? The great mystic masters all agree—no one can provide you with the answer; there is no substitute for self-effort; to find out what awaits you at the end of this particular rainbow—whether dross or gold, vacuity or complete enlightenment about the world, yourself, and the riddle of human values—you must follow the path yourself.

Part Three

Two of the Most
Important Synthetic
Mental Modes and the
Value Systems Associated
with Them

Seven

Value Systems Based on Authority

AS NOTED IN Chapter Two, we are social creatures and, as such, often utilize an indirect mental mode that allows us to rely on someone else or on something else to draw our conclusions for us. On the other hand, in order to accept the outside authority as valid we must first come to trust it, and in order to trust it we must become convinced of its reliability by some combination of our own sense experience, logic, emotion, or intuition. In this sense, authority is a synthetic mode because it draws upon some or all of the basic interior modes.

Although authority is synthetic, it is very important to all of us. In our efforts to learn about the

world, we do not just occasionally rely on an external authority to tell us how to evaluate and what to believe. This is one of the most common ways that we form our evaluations and beliefs, and not merely as children, when we treat as gospel truth anything that our parents or teachers tell us, but even as adults, when we rely on “experts” of all kinds.

Of course, there is an important difference between the faith of a small child in what a parent says and the faith of an adult in what the experts tell us about a host of everyday matters. In the first instance, the faith is unconditional; in the second instance, it is conditional, even skeptical. If a researcher tells us that a disease is caused by a particular bacterium or virus, we accept that person’s authority in the matter on faith, but only as a matter of convenience. We are impressed by the researcher’s educational degrees and credentials and acknowledge the authority those credentials confer. Beneath this attitude of respect, however, we are as ready to disbelieve as believe, would not be too surprised to hear from another researcher that the first researcher’s account of the disease is wrong, and comfort ourselves that, if we cared enough, we could use our own sense experience, logic, and intuition to perform the necessary experiments ourselves, form our own judgments, and thereby dispense with this particular authority entirely.

On this mundane, everyday, secular level, most people agree that authorities should be used as a convenience, and thus treated provisionally without excessive respect, especially when authorities start telling other people what to do. We identify with the frontiersman's boast that "men like me and General Jackson and Colonel Davy Crockett always demand our rights, and if we don't git 'em, somebody else is might liable to git hell." On another, deeper level, however, people are sharply divided about authorities. A very large number, perhaps a majority, think that a skeptical, conditional stance based primarily on sense experience and logic is fine for everyday affairs, but no way to approach God's throne. For these people, emotional and/or intuitive modes lead them to accept that Jesus' injunction, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God," should be followed as literally as possible. The first step is to open one's heart in the manner of a small child. The second, equally crucial, step is to find an earthly spiritual adviser of unimpeachable authority, one that is truly worthy of an unconditional faith and that can absolutely be counted on to lead an unburdened and childlike soul in the right direction.

In actual life, of course, people who form an emotional or intuitive bond with an unconditional earthly authority do not necessarily agree on the identity of that authority. Some choose another living person, an in-the-flesh leader, for their spiritual

quest; a larger number (especially Orthodox Jews and Protestant fundamentalists) choose a sacred text, the Bible, as a direct source of God's word undefiled by the interpretation of any mortal; and an equally large number of Roman Catholics place their faith in the guidance of an institution, the institution of the Catholic church as it has come down through millennia of time.

The Johannine Daist Communion: An Example of Unconditional Faith in the Higher Authority of Another, Living Human Being

Although many people find the idea of pledging absolute obedience to another human being to be strange or downright abhorrent, dismissing groups formed for this purpose as “cults,” there has always been a wide variety of such “cult” groups to choose from. To offer only one, albeit distinctive, example, there is the Johannine Daist Communion of Northern California, founded by the “God-Realized Spiritual Adept” Da Free John (formerly Franklin Jones), who says of himself:

That one enjoys this Unconditional Awakening . . . is a great opportunity for all others. . . . The Power of it is available for the

Transformation of others, if people will enter into right relationship with me. . . . Both men and women must make the great feminine gesture of self-transcending surrender.

With shaved head, full face, and rather portly frame, Da Free John makes an incongruous savior, although his followers readily compare him to Jesus and the Buddha. An issue of *Laughing Man* magazine, the Johannine Daist house organ, reports that the Communion has finally purchased the Master's beachfront retreat in the Fiji Islands, where he lives

undisturbed by the troubled activities of secular society and free of the demands of beginning practitioners. . . . However, a God-Realized Spiritual Master is not only Transcendentally Free, he is also free of the conventions of human behavior, including the conventions he creates. To everyone's surprise . . . Master Da announced that he would come to the Communion's northern California Sanctuary, The Mountain of Attention . . . and that he would be arriving in four days!

During [Master Da's] ten-day stay, many students were graced by his Initiatory Regard. . . . He . . . would walk among the

gathering, touching or hugging a few familiar people, talking to one or two others.

At this time, John also gave a somewhat admonitory talk about the governance of the California Sanctuary:

You do not consult one another about the spiritual process. You consult me. . . . Ultimately, everyone is involved in some sense in this cooperative activity, but you could not call it a democracy in the sense that you are on your own, left to think independently about what to do.

Protestant Fundamentalism: A (Very Different) Example of an Unconditional Faith in the Higher Authority of Biblical Scripture

The Johannine Daist Communion (like any other close-knit community led by a single, living spiritual “master” of unchallengeable authority) lies at the farther fringes of contemporary life. By contrast, Protestant fundamentalism (which condemns the enthronement of any living human being, no matter how wise or spiritually “advanced”) is in the mainstream of at least American life, yet is no less controversial for being so. For example, the *Washington Post* or

Newsweek reporters have referred to, or quoted others referring to, Protestant fundamentalists as “bigoted, often illiterate Bible-thumpers,” “religious red-necks,” “hate-filled anti-intellectuals,” “apostles of ignorance” who “pervert faith by using it to smother the mind,” “fanatical cultists who prey on the isolated, the inexperienced, and the uneducated,” pathological addicts who should be guided into appropriate “therapies” such as Fundamentalists Anonymous, or guileful hypocrites who use “the name of Jesus to defend . . . perceived [economic or political] interests [and] unload onto all of us . . . the values of a particular subculture.”

What exactly is Protestant fundamentalism, and why is it so threatening to many people? On one level, the name derives from a group of pamphlets, the *Fundamentals*, published between 1910 and 1915, which tried to define the irreducible core of Christian doctrine. On a deeper level, however, the movement is the true heir of the Reformation of Luther and Calvin and Knox and the Pilgrim Fathers, and, as such, it reflects central tenets little changed for over four hundred years: first, that God is a completely personal God (“The God of Genesis who walked in the garden in the cool of the evening and called to Adam and his wife who had hidden themselves behind a tree”); second, that human beings participate in an immense historical drama, one beginning with the creation of the world, swiftly descending into human treachery, failure, suffering,

and death, reaching its pivotal point in Palestine just under two thousand years ago, and concluding with the “Rapture”—the prophesied ascent of true Christians, living and dead, directly into the “New Jerusalem” of heaven. For those who accept the factual basis of these events, who wholeheartedly accept Christ as their savior, all doubt, uncertainty, weakness, and loneliness are removed. For those who reject this drama, or even for those who reject parts of this drama, heaven will be replaced by an eternity of torment in hell. As Billy Graham has said on television during a crusade in Southern California:

Is Christ the only way? The only way? That is what He says. I don't understand it all. There are many things that I don't understand. But I don't have to understand. All I have to do is believe. Anybody can believe. The old, the young, the deaf, the blind, anybody can and must believe.

For some of Graham's much more strongly fundamentalist colleagues, the imperatives are stricter. Acceptance of Jesus as savior may not be enough—the Christian must be “born again” in a “Bible-believing” church to be redeemed. Accordingly, a prominent television evangelist has remarked, “None of the things that [the late Roman Catholic nun and ministrant to the dying] Mother Teresa does will add

one thing to her salvation; she is in danger of hell.” In response to Jewish complaints about an alleged attack on their faith, the same evangelist explained that whenever an individual “does not accept Jesus Christ, he takes himself away from God’s protection [and] places himself under Satan’s domain.” Few fundamentalist pastors would endorse these extreme positions. But the doctrine of exclusive salvation, first enunciated by the early church and later reaffirmed by the founders of the Reformation, still means exactly what it says: people who reject Jesus as their savior will be forever condemned to hell.

The third tenet of the fundamentalist faith—the absolute inerrancy of the Bible, the literal truth of each and every event found therein—is most surprising to outsiders and most clearly distinguishes fundamentalist from non-fundamentalist forms of Christianity.

Yet it is only in this century that fundamentalists felt the need to articulate this doctrine. It is true that Luther had warned, “If you wish by your own thoughts to know your relation to God, you will break your neck,” and had criticized efforts to allegorize scripture as a “beautiful harlot,” but neither he nor his immediate successors faced the “historical-critical” method of biblical exegesis or the wholesale attempt to reinterpret scripture.

By the 1920s, however, the president of the World Christian Fundamentalist Association felt compelled

to warn against taking some of the Bible and leaving the rest, presenting the Bible in one light for the devout masses and another light for the educated “elite,” and especially against “that weasel method of sucking the meaning out of words, and then presenting the empty shells in an attempt to palm them off as giving the Christian faith a new and another interpretation.”

Sixty years later, the battle lines were drawn even more firmly. In 1985, a candidate for president of the Southern Baptist church stated that he not only believed that a whale had swallowed Jonah, he would believe that Jonah had swallowed the whale if the Bible said so, and he was then rejected by his convention for being too “liberal.” Although factors other than biblical inerrancy contributed to the vote, supporters of the winning candidate stressed, “If there are errors in the Bible, then we cannot know anything for sure.”

On these three pillars—an all-powerful personal God, exclusive redemption through Christ, and especially the absolute and unconditional authority of an unerring Bible—the Protestant fundamentalist faith rests. At the same time, faith in a purely passive sense is not enough. Faith must be actively defended. The fundamentalist appraisal of a human, even a reborn human, is cool and dark. People in their original state are weak and depraved, not much better than Adolph Hitler or other villains of history. There is no atrocity, however horrible, that they have not committed

or would not commit again in the future. Their souls harbor raging torrents of desire for health and survival, money and power, recognition and fame, sex and love; each emotion conflicts with others and is moderated, if at all, by the passivity of laziness and escapism. Such wayward impulses will never be controlled except through the experience of Christ as Lord and Master. Even after this experience, this cleansing and rebirth, Christians must continually discipline themselves and zealously guard against temptation.

To the always-practical fundamentalist, self-discipline is not to be confused with the asceticism of Simeon Stylites, the fifth-century Christian who lived for twenty years atop a pillar, or of one of the other athletes of mystical religion. Ordinary comforts—good food, a nice home or car, worldly success—need not be feared. If earned honestly by hard work and avoiding the sin of idleness, they should be welcomed as a sign of God's grace and favor. Pleasure, on the other hand, whether in the form of alcohol, drugs, sensational entertainments, or sex, but especially sex, must be relentlessly reined in.

Maintaining right beliefs and avoiding the pitfalls of pleasure carry us most of the way toward salvation, but not the whole way. We also need Christian institutions to guide and bolster us and pick us up when we fall. Families and family surrogates, such as neighbors and schools, are especially important. At least in

America, however, these most basic Christian institutions are further buttressed by larger and even more pervasive institutions: the economy and the national government. Entrepreneurial capitalism, the essence of the American economic system, is really an expression of the religious spirit, “a recognition,” in conservative social commentator George Gilder’s words, “that beyond the . . . opacity of our material entrapment is a realm of redemptive spirit.” Our national government is a divinely ordained instrument for combating the forces of darkness throughout the world. In effect, all American institutions have assumed a special destiny. As Jerry Falwell has said, “I believe that God’s role for America is as catalyst, that he wants to set the spiritual time bomb off right here.”

The problem with America’s special destiny, of course, is that it brings special obligations. One of these is an unrelenting spiritual vigilance. As fundamentalist theologian Francis Schaeffer has explained, America’s original Protestant Reformation heritage, the foundation of our greatness, has been under continual attack, first by waves of non-Protestant immigrants in the second half of the nineteenth century and then by secular humanists and atheists in the twentieth. In recent years, he goes on to say, this attack has increased in intensity and made unprecedented headway in the courts: prayer in school has been banned, pornography and abortion have been legalized. Congress has interfered

with and threatened to cut off funding for Christian schools, weakened our national defenses, discouraged the work ethic, and subsidized permissiveness. Other governmental bodies have passed women's rights and homosexuals' rights legislation and have allowed drugs to proliferate. The national news and entertainment media have fouled the movies and television with violence and sex and sensationalism, always ardently competing with one another to reach a lower level of taste. Faced with all these trends, the Protestant fundamentalist sees himself, in Falwell's words, "as one to stand in the gap and, under God, with the help of millions of others, to bring the nation back to a moral standard."

Roman Catholicism: An Example of Faith in the Higher Authority of an Institution

Although it is not widely recognized, Protestant fundamentalism is only one of two great Christian fundamentalisms. The other is the Catholic church, which also believes that traditional Christianity is under attack by the modern world and must be strenuously defended; that basic beliefs such as the personhood of God, the immanence of the supernatural in everyday life, and exclusive salvation through Christ must be restored; that discipline must be reestablished in morals; that the artificial separation of church and

state must be bridged so that government may be reclaimed as a moral agent. But even when we acknowledge all these important affinities between Protestant fundamentalism and the Catholic Church, it must be emphasized that the Catholic version of Christian fundamentalism is different; it is older and deeper. Indeed, to Catholic eyes, Protestant fundamentalism is hardly fundamentalism at all. Although it pretends to espouse the old-time religion, it has actually sold out to the modern world by embracing the three heresies of modernism, capitalism, and nationalism.

Heresy 1: Modernism

On the face of it, the Catholic charge that Protestant fundamentalism is just a disguised form of modernism—where modernism is defined as the abandonment or “reinterpretation” of the most anciently revered Christian principles—might seem preposterous. Protestant fundamentalists consider themselves to be the most inveterate foes of Christian modernism on earth. The Catholic position, however, is that the beginning of Christian modernism must be dated to Martin Luther’s attack on the mother church and on what Thomas Merton called the “powerful unanimity of Catholic Tradition from the First Apostles, from the first Popes . . . down . . . to our own day.”

According to this view, any doctrine that upholds the Protestant Reformation and rejects the authority

of the Catholic Church is modernist to the core. As Merton states the case: “[As Christians we must] check the inspirations that come to us in the depths of our own conscience against the [truth] that is given to us with divinely certain guarantees by [a Church which] speak[s] to us in the Name of Christ and as it were in His own Person.” Walter Lippmann then summarizes the argument:

From the point of view, then, of the [older] fundamentalism [the Catholic church] the error of the modernists is that they deny the facts on which religious faith reposes; the error of the orthodox Protestants is that although they affirm the facts, they reject all authority which can verify them; the virtue of the Catholic system is that along with a dogmatic affirmation of the central facts, it provides a living authority in the Church which can ascertain and demonstrate and verify these facts.

Mixed in with the denial of church authority is a lesser but related problem: the introduction of democracy into church affairs. About political democracy, the Catholic hierarchy no longer harbors dark suspicions. Toward church democracy, it remains implacably opposed. As Cardinal Malula of Kinshasa said, when co-head of the Catholic Bishops’

Synod: “[We are] a mystery of communion. You cannot introduce democracy [into a mystery].” To which Cardinal Ratzinger, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, formerly the Holy Office of the Inquisition, adds: “There is one truth . . . this truth is definable and expressible in a precise way . . . and this truth is not reached by voting.”

Schism and church democracy should be quite enough to hurl at Jerry Falwell’s head, but there are other charges as well. In the area of faith, Protestant fundamentalists are criticized for de-emphasizing Mary, the saints, ceremony, liturgy, mysteries all excised in the name of reform, but actually accommodating “skepticism” and the “scientific mind.” In the area of morals, even the strictest Protestant churches are judged to be insufficiently strict. There is the matter of remarriage after divorce, for example, which Jesus appears to forbid (Mt 5:32) but which Protestant churches allow, although even Catholic practice has of late become looser here, and the number of permitted annulments has increased. There is priestly celibacy (for which there is no clear biblical basis), and there is the prohibition against artificial birth control. The latter perhaps typifies the difference between Protestant and Catholic fundamentalism. A Protestant might challenge the Catholic church to consider the plight of a Philippine prostitute who refuses to use birth control because “it is a mortal sin,” or at least to take

pity on all the homeless, malnourished children picking their way through the refuse heaps of the world. Catholicism responds that God's commandments cannot be bent, not even to save humanity from the consequences of its own wicked indiscipline and folly.

Heresy 2: Capitalism

Protestant fundamentalism has always regarded capitalism as God's instrument on earth. It diverts human energies from military conquest; it rewards honest hard work; it creates wealth for all, not just the rich; as wealth permeates a society, individual human rights, worth, and dignity become more respected. The Catholic Church, from its perspective of two thousand years and almost every imaginable economic system, gazes searchingly at this happy vision and pronounces it a fraud. In its view, capitalism is based on the love of money, self-interest, greed, disregard for the poor, and economic inequality—all explicitly or implicitly condemned by Jesus. The task for Christians is not to extol capitalism, but to redeem it.

Catholic economic theology begins with Jesus' injunction to the rich young man to "go your way, sell whatever you have, and give to the poor" (Mk 10:21). Faith, as Pope John Paul II has said, "leads us to see earthly life as a preparation for spiritual life, like gold purified by fire." Money and "consumerism" are obstacles and the desire for ever more money is a

“sin.” To find Jesus, you must look for him in a homeless schizophrenic, in an old woman huddled over an urban steam vent to protect herself from the bitterest winter cold, in a fatherless family struggling to feed and clothe itself in a roach-and rat-infested slum.

In one version of this argument, capitalism fails because it teaches selfishness rather than sharing. A society built on these values tolerates, in the words of the pope, “scandalous” poverty and unemployment in the midst of plenty, a “disproportionate distribution of goods,” a “horrifying abyss between the richest and poorest.” In another even darker version favored by some Catholic bishops, capitalism actually causes poverty by allowing the few to “amass . . . an imperialistic monopoly of economic and political supremacy at the expense of the many” by “institutionalizing starvation . . . all over the world” and by “dehumanizing” human beings in order to “enslave them to machines.”

Whatever version of the indictment is offered by Catholic bishops, the proposed solution is the same: political action. For example, the first draft of the *Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the US Economy*, issued in 1984 by the US National Conference of Catholic Bishops, urged the American government to:

- Set wages on the basis of “comparable reward” for “comparable contributions”

- Increase the minimum wage by 33 percent
- Provide public service or publicly subsidized jobs for all who want them
- Provide generous federally mandated welfare assistance without “workfare”
- Tax away all income over a predetermined level
- Tax away all wealth over a predetermined level

Most American commentators were critical of the bishops’ letter. One ridiculed the very idea of Catholic bishops pouring over volumes of Adam Smith, Keynes, and Galbraith and consulting 156 other economic “experts” in order to provide “the correct Christian position on soybean subsidies.” Another argued that “socialist remedies” like those proposed by the bishops created dependency, not justice, and had been tried and failed before, especially in Europe. Another cited the parable of the servant who invested his master’s money (Mt 25:14–30) as evidence that Jesus understood and approved of the essential capitalistic method of compounding one’s assets. Another objected that although Archbishop Weakland of Milwaukee, the primary author of the letter, had spoken of an “appeal to the generosity, goodwill, and concern of all US citizens,” the bishops had said nothing about individual acts of private Christian charity but had instead proposed to rely on crude political

power: “Jesus preached the renunciation of wealth, not the expropriation of it.” Another noted caustically that “the bishops do not argue that A may reach into B’s pocket in order to help needy C, for the commandment does not read, ‘Thou shalt not steal except for a good cause.’ Rather, they argue that A and D and E and so forth, using the political process, may reach into B’s pocket.”

What all these outraged pundits, many of whom were Catholic, seemed to miss was the utter fidelity of the bishops to millennia of Catholic tradition. The Catholic Church throughout its history has regarded capitalism with suspicion; has sought to work out problems through community rather than individual action; has adopted paternalistic and sometimes coercive methods; and has treated government either as a useful ally or, preferably, a useful subordinate in its struggle to maintain God’s law on earth.

Heresy 3: Nationalism

Just as Protestant fundamentalism has always been comfortable with capitalism, it has also been comfortable with nationalism. Protestant denominations have often been identified with a specific country. In America today, fundamentalist preachers often speak of the United States as a second “chosen people” with a special God-given destiny. The Catholic Church, however, remains resolutely internationalist and continu-

ally warns Americans against sins of pride, arrogance, militarism, and lack of charity toward poorer nations. Through varying means, including papal homilies, the US bishops' 1982 *Pastoral Letter on War and Peace*, and the later *Pastoral Letter on the US Economy*, the church has asked for the following:

- A concerted effort to close the “widening gap between rich and poor countries” by increasing foreign aid, forgiving Third World debts, reducing trade barriers to Third World goods, and investing overseas in ways that neither “create nor perpetuate dependency”
- An end to American military involvement in Central America and the Caribbean
- An end to American arms sales abroad
- A nuclear freeze that would halt the testing, producing, and deploying of all nuclear weapons
- A termination of space weapons programs

Although Catholicism has never been a “peace church” in the sense of the Quakers (war may be “just” under certain circumstances), its current leanings are increasingly pacifist. Leroy Matthiesen, retired bishop of Amarillo, Texas, suggested that Catholic defense workers should think about seeking other employment. Thousands of Catholic parochial schools all over the US use social justice and religion classes to

warn students of the temptations of American power, the tendency of imperialism to hide behind a mask of patriotism, and the horrors of nuclear war.

In all these many ways, Catholic fundamentalism is different from its Protestant counterpart. It is not just older or even more uncompromising; its entire world outlook is made of different stuff. Against overt external enemies, the bulwarks of an ancient faith, an immemorial tradition, an unimpeachable authority in the church itself, provide an invincible shield. Confronted with hostility or persecution, whether from Southern Baptists in the old South or from Communist authorities in post-war Eastern Europe, it grows steadily stronger. Like all fundamentalism, it thrives on challenge and struggle. But within its own ranks, a different reality—utter confusion—perpetually reigns.

In Africa, black prelates complain to the pope that the “Christian style of [monogamous] marriage does not work.” In France, a nation honored as “the eldest daughter of the Church,” only about 6 percent of a largely Catholic population attend mass. In South America, some priests espouse violent revolution and were admonished by the former secretary general of their Bishops’ Conference, Bishop Hoyos Dario Castrillon of Colombia, “If I see a church with a machine gun, then I can’t see the crucified Christ in that church.” In the United States, many Catholics are liberals who support the ordination of

women and are appalled by the pope's response that "no women were present at the Last Supper." Others are Pentecostals who speak in tongues and practice faith healing. Almost all American Catholics are a little disoriented by the demand to work with right-wing political groups against abortion and then with left-wing political groups for affirmative action and against armaments or by the church's encouragement to question every authority except its own. An assistant to the archbishop of Washington, DC, keeps a memento in his office from his social protest and activist days—a sign reading "Question Authority" in bold letters—yet serves one of the most authoritarian institutions on earth.

If we listen to all these cacophonous voices within the Catholic church, we might conclude that the hour of dissolution has arrived, that the vast superstructure that survived the demise of the classical and feudal worlds as well as all the depredations of science is finally about to come crashing down. Nothing would be further from the truth. One is reminded of a story about an Alsatian Benedictine monastery during World War I. The choirmaster "was chanting the Magnificat with his confreres, when suddenly a French shell crashed through the roof and exploded in the nave of the church. . . . The smoke thinned and the Magnificat continued." This is the quintessential Catholic attitude, impossible for others to grasp

or completely emulate. Despite all the turbulence, despite all the incessant chaos of sinful men, the church remains rooted in one spot. As the late Bishop John May of St. Louis, former vice president of the US Bishops' Conference, said: "The church is not free to accommodate itself . . . to the modern world. It is not free to change." And precisely because it cannot change, its critics should not expect its extinction but rather, in the words of Catholic essayist G. K. Chesterton, "look first for the coming of the comet or the freezing of the star."

Eight

Value Systems Based on “Science”

THIS SECOND CRITICALLY important synthetic mental mode also draws on the four basic modes. It relies on emotion to give us the energy to begin investigating something, although the role of emotion is usually unacknowledged; on sense experience to collect the observable facts; on intuition to develop a testable hypothesis about the facts; on logic to develop the test (experiment); and on sense experience again to complete the test. It is also much more formal in the way it draws upon at least two of the basic modes (sense experience and logic) and, over the years, has developed a more and more exacting set of rules governing its operation.

For much of modern world history, these two leading synthetic mental modes, authority and science, have

been locked in an uncomfortable but still symbiotic embrace. At times, they have fought with each other tooth and nail for dominance over peoples' minds. At other times, they have sought to respect and accommodate each other by carving out separate spheres. Most tellingly, the boundaries between the two are more fluid than they seem, especially since some scientists set themselves up as imperious secular authorities, both about matters scientific and nonscientific, and many scientists are treated by the public at large as shamans. As the following story illustrates, the border between science and pseudo-science is often thin.

The Saga of the Jogging Pigs

Was the following experiment, reported in *Smithsonian Magazine*, scientifically valid? If not, can you spot the flaw?

Recently several dozen jogging pigs gave their all for science in an unusual health experiment at Arizona State University. The animals were . . . put on different diets [then] required to run nearly a mile around an oval track every morning. . . . Early on . . . it became apparent that the pigs were no more enthusiastic about running laps than the average person is. Consequently [the researchers] had to prod the bulky creatures around

the track. . . . At the end of five months all . . . were slaughtered for laboratory analysis. The results indicated that a well-balanced diet is more important than moderate exercise when it comes to preventing heart disease.

In order to determine the scientific validity of the experiment, we need to define further what we mean by the term *science*. As noted, it is procedurally an amalgam of three familiar elements: sense experience, intuition, and logic. To solve a scientific problem (such as the effect of diet or exercise on heart disease), one is supposed to:

1. Gather all the available facts (sense experience).
2. Immerse yourself in the facts until a solution flashes in your mind (intuition).
3. Think through all the *logical* implications of the proposed solution (if A is true, B and C must also be true).
4. Devise an experiment to test the validity of B and C against the same facts. For the experiment to be completely successful, it must also satisfy a number of very stringent conditions:
 - The facts must be clearly and objectively stated (no hidden bias).
 - The key research variables (e.g., diet or exercise) must be independent (not all mixed together with other variables).

- Experimental procedures must be measurable and repeatable (anyone following the same steps should get exactly the same results).

Based on this composite definition of science, it should be evident that the experiment of the jogging pigs was only partly successful. In theory, the researchers had isolated a single research variable—diet—by ensuring that all the pigs had exactly the same exercise, the same housing, the same weather, the same everything except diet. In fact, the reluctance of the pigs to jog, together with the researchers' prodding them around the track, meant that another variable—stress—had unwittingly been introduced. Conceivably, some pigs might have been more adaptive, better able to handle the stress, than others; if so, this factor might have influenced the condition of their hearts and arteries. We can therefore conclude that diet is *probably* more important than moderate exercise in preventing heart disease, but the point is not *proven* for pigs, much less for human beings.

Is there a larger lesson—about the nature of science and the relationship of science and religion—to be learned from the saga of the jogging pigs? There may be. The story of the pigs should help us distinguish between three entirely different modes of truth-seeking, modes that are often confused:

Exact science	Meets all the stringent conditions just outlined.
Inexact science, quasi-science, or “science”	Generally emphasizes a combination of experience, intuition, and logic but falls short of meeting all the conditions of exact science.
Pseudoscience	Pretends to be scientific but is not even completely factual or logical. Hence a confused or even fraudulent attempt to wrap itself in the prestige of exact science.

Viewed in these terms, it must be obvious that neither a religion nor a “religion” (i.e., neither an organized religion like Christianity nor a set of personal values) can ever be scientific in the exact sense. Religious “facts” are rarely clear and never free of bias; neither God nor the good life can be defined in a clear and unbiased way. Nor are religious variables ever independent; the good simply cannot be separated from the beautiful or the just. Above all, religious truths cannot be tested by measurable and repeatable experiments, certainly not by controlled laboratory experiments. The sociologist Max Weber concluded rightly when he said that science cannot be used to discern the “big picture,” cannot be used to find “a way to God.”

At the same time, religions can be “scientific” in the more limited sense of relying on a synthetic combination of experience, intuition, and logic over other modes of truth seeking. Even if exact science and religion do not

mix, we can still approach “religious” questions—how and for what one ought to live—by trying to gather as many relevant facts as possible, even unclear and biased “facts”; we can still intuit solutions; we can still insist that the intuited solutions be consistent with the facts as stated and internally consistent—that is, not logically self-contradictory. Solutions that pass these two minimum consistency tests will not be definitive in the sense that exact science is sometimes definitive within its own terms. Two quite opposite solutions for the same problem may both fit the facts and be internally consistent; there may be no obvious basis for claiming that one is superior to the other. But quite a few proposed solutions will fail to pass even these minimum tests. And in this limited, exclusively negative sense, one may speak of a cumulative knowledge of “religion,” even a “scientific religion,” a “religion” that must be equally distinguished, on the one hand, from exact science and, on the other, from pseudoscientific nonsense or fraud.

The Way of “Science”

The single most persistent thread running throughout value systems based on “science” is an emphasis on “hidden knowledge.”* Such knowledge is the key

* As Karl Marx wrote: “The final pattern of relationships as seen on the surface is very different from, and indeed quite the reverse of, their inner but concealed essential pattern.”

to the good life—the problem is to obtain, organize, and manipulate it through a series of disciplines—chiefly psychology, sociology, economics, biology, and medicine. These disciplines do not in themselves represent or define specific faiths. But what they tell us about the nature of the world or of human beings may be subtly transformed into advice about personal beliefs and actions, and thus into a personal creed. In this chapter, we will explore a limited number of “scientific” disciplines that have either immediately or gradually, often imperceptively, transmuted into specific value systems. We will begin with one of the most dominant value systems of the twentieth century, Freudian psychology, a value system whose foundation was at first regarded by many as science, then as time went on as “science,” and finally as pseudoscience, although its true nature is still hotly debated by some.

Freudian Psychology

On the most popular level, Freudianism has always been a battle cry against the massed conventions and institutions of society: Down with the repressive state! Down with the repressive church! Down with the repressive family! If only sex were free and guiltless for all, humanity would say goodbye to police, courts, prisons, armies, and wars. As psychologist Wilhelm Reich summarized this viewpoint: “[Once] the indispensability of genital gratification” is recognized, the “moral straitjacket

drops off . . . and . . . the organism regulates itself.” If for some reason the organism does not regulate itself, it is because of easily correctable childhood traumas. For example, a developmental neuropsychologist testified before the Maryland General Assembly that American males’ aggressiveness could be curbed if they were given two and a half years of breast-feeding as babies instead of the average three months.

Freud himself, it should be noted, had little in common with this kind of millenarian Freudianism. His characteristic hope was merely to raise people “from the depths of neurotic despair to the level of general unhappiness which is the lot of mankind,” although he did believe that at least some sex was necessary, that its absence would produce “illness,” and that breast-feeding was a good idea. As a medical doctor, Freud’s real ambition, indeed his obsession, was to be seen and judged as a research scientist. Yet it is precisely on this technical level that his reputation has suffered the most damage in recent years. A Harvard course description (Philosophy 161), for example, lists psychoanalysis along with astrology as “failed attempts to be factual.” A professor at Berkeley calls it “little more than a collective contagious delusional system.” A British psychiatrist dismisses it as “metapsychological claptrap” that is “irrelevant where not actually dangerous,” a “talking cure industry” that earns billions by “milk[ing] the unhappy of a fast

buck.” An American colleague adds that psychoanalysts are “phony experts [who] have no meaningful tools to do what we think they can do.”

Are these critics right? It is not quite that simple. Although much of Freudianism seems to be pseudo-scientific, some of its doctrines, especially the “defense” theory elaborated by Freud’s daughter Anna, may be “scientific” in the limited sense of being simultaneously empirical and logical. These doctrines, updated and reformulated by Dartmouth psychiatrist George Vaillant in his book, *Adaptation to Life* (an account of several hundred graduates of a prestigious Eastern college both during and after schooling) are by now quite familiar, at least in pieces, to most of us, and may be summarized as follows: we respond to life’s anxieties with unconscious coping mechanisms or defenses, and these defenses tend to follow a recognizable pattern. Freud was only concerned with what he called negative defenses or “repressions”—Vaillant and others use the term “defense” in a broader sense to include positive as well as negative adaptations and habits. Some undesirable defenses are thought to be normal and adaptive at a specific age (for example, infancy or adolescence) but, because of their unconscious nature, are often carried into adulthood. Vaillant’s complete scheme, including four levels and eighteen defenses, may be set forth as follows:

Psychotic Defenses (normal for children up to age 5)	
Delusional projection	Paranoia, persecution complex: "They are after me."
Denial	"I am not in a mental hospital."
Distortion	"I am Napoleon, or maybe God."
Immature Defenses (normal ages 3–15, conflicts manifested on the outside with others, not inside the self; often referred to as "character disorders" if observable in adults)	
Projection	Blaming others; attributing one's own feelings ("I hate myself.") to others ("They hate me.").
Schizoid fantasy	Incapable of human intimacy. Repel- lently eccentric.
Hypochondria	Imaginary illnesses (although symp- toms may be real).
Passive-aggression	Manipulating others by making them feel guilty or by being inactive, unre- sponsive, or passive to the point of self-destruction. Stubborn and willful but dependent.
Acting out	Always giving in to impulse, no matter how self-destructive. Fighting, drink- ing, nonstop sex, drugs, and the like.
Neurotic Defenses (conflict mostly inside self, very exhausting emotionally)	
Dissociation	Chronic desire to escape (change cit- ies, change jobs, change lovers).
Reaction formation	Overcompensation. If you have a prob- lem with sex, you become a monk.

Repression	Selective amnesia. Whatever bothers you doesn't exist. Repression combined with dissociation (escape) sometimes causes hysteria.
Intellectualization	Hiding; lots of projects to hide in; need to keep control (extreme case: never leave the house); rigidity (everything has to be done one way and one way only!).
Displacement	Substituting, for example, a big house or car (materialism) for what you really want; or books for real life. Combined with intellectualization, can produce obsessive compulsions: (“I must have that car.”) or phobias: (e.g., fear of cats that really masks more basic fears).
Mature Defenses	
Humor	Provides detachment, perspective, emotional release.
Altruism	Forgetting your fears by helping others.
Sublimation	Throwing yourself into useful work, being creative, achieving.
Anticipation	Looking ahead, anticipating future problems, taking corrective steps now.
Suppression	Toughness, stoicism. Unlike repression, you don't kid yourself, just accept things as they are.

Vaillant's schema is interesting, but is it truly “scientific” in the minimal sense of being empirical (a factual description of human behavior) and logical (not

internally self-contradictory)? Although it does have a familiar ring to it (to choose a far-fetched example, the former Soviet Union throughout the decades-long Cold War period appeared to be “character-disordered” in its response to the United States, and the United States, conversely, somewhat neurotic in its response to the Soviet Union), the theory is a little slippery. First, there is a tendency to dress up old ideas in new words. Sublimation, to choose one example, seems to be no different than old-fashioned, goal-oriented hard work. Second, the terminology is vague, with the result that everyone defines “defenses” a little differently or feels free to emphasize different aspects. Third, the concepts are endlessly manipulable, sometimes degenerating into a nutty-fruity game: might Vaillant’s analysis of defenses be just an intellectualization on his part?—to which he replies: “Bravo. You are learning.”* Fourth, defenses are by definition

* In the same spirit, an analyst of defenses might evaluate the “nonscientific” value systems described in this book as follows:

Value systems based on experience	Acting out, repression, intellectualization, displacement
Value systems based on logic	Intellectualization
Value systems based on emotion	Psychotic, immature, masochistic fantasy, projection, acting out, reaction formation, repression
Value systems based on intuition	Intellectualization, repression, reaction formation, displacement, dissociation, passivity, fantasy
Value systems based on authority	All the same defenses as emotion

unconscious (if adopted consciously like Gandhi’s or Martin Luther King’s passive-aggression, they are no longer defenses), but how can a therapist be certain of what is genuinely unconscious? Fifth, many defenses seem to be similar (repression–suppression; intellectualization–sublimation). Is the only difference here the individual therapist’s degree of approval or disapproval? Does the therapist’s approval depend on context, on the individual? What are the evaluative rules, how are they derived, how applied? Is it brilliant sublimation to start a business that is highly successful, but fantasy, dissociation, displacement, or intellectualization to start a business that immediately flops? Is it all, in the end, just a question of success? And who or what defines success?

As the foregoing suggests, the theory of psychological defenses is not entirely “scientific” even in the limited sense of being factual and logical. Some elements are both non-empirical and less than perfectly logical (ill-defined words) and other elements are illogical (normative judgments about what constitutes a “good” or “bad” defense are not really logical because, as the philosopher David Hume pointed out, an *ought* cannot be deduced from an *is*, whether the *is* describes the physical world or the world of human behavior. (For more on this, see Chapter Fifteen). Yet despite all these caveats, defense theory does have a bedrock factual basis, which may be expressed as follows:

- We develop and rely on unconscious habits or coping mechanisms
- There appear to be at least three of these habits, namely:
 1. Denial^{*}
 2. Escape[†]
 3. Externalizations[‡] (blaming or helping others)
- These three basic defenses may be expressed either positively or negatively, depending on the situation and one's particular normative values

Thus stripped to its bare essentials, Vaillant's updated Freudianism is both a "scientific" discipline *and* a value system, a value system that offers survival, adaptation, and maturation (the process by which we adapt and survive) as the highest observable goals of life; that teaches the desirability of reducing conflict with others and within the self as a means of adaptation; and that regards maladaptations, such as immature or neurotic defense mechanisms, as problems to be overcome with the right kind of technical knowledge.

* Including psychotic denial, hypochondria, passive-aggression, reaction formation, repression, intellectualization, suppression.

† Including distortion, schizoid fantasy, acting out, dissociation, displacement, humor, anticipation, sublimation.

‡ Including delusional projection, projection, altruism.

Cognitive Psychology

Freud observed that his patients’ mental disorders appeared to originate deep in the unconscious mind and were therefore exceedingly difficult to diagnose and treat on a conscious level.

Working with their own patients in the 1950s and 1960s, psychologists Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck began to observe something quite different: that mental disorders such as depression or a severe inability to get along with others began in the conscious mind, with extremely negative thinking, which then led to emotional disturbance. As Beck’s student and colleague David D. Burns has written: “Unpleasant feelings merely indicate that you are thinking something negative and believing it.” Moreover, most of the time the negative thinking is not just negative; it is also unfactual and illogical. For example, a person may think, over and over, that he or she is a complete failure as a lawyer, accountant, clerk, husband, wife, parent, and so on. Not surprisingly, the person becomes depressed. Exaggeration, however, is by definition unfactual and illogical (see Chapter Four—“Gula fallacies”—for the major logical fallacy involved), and once the facts and logic are straightened out, the patient is often considerably improved, sometimes even spontaneously cured.

Ellis’s and Beck’s techniques, which build on earlier work by psychiatrist Karen Horney, are both simple

and sophisticated. We all know that the conscious mind incessantly chatters (the internal dialogue); this dialogue very often takes the form of a debate with a severe “internal critic”: “I’m not such a bad person”—“Oh, yes you are, you are the worst! You did this, you did that, you failed to do this, etcetera.” Or this same internal acidity is silently turned on another person: “My husband/wife never listens to me, ignores my feelings, is not behaving as I have a right to expect, etcetera.” To change this unpleasant internal dialogue, which often takes the form of a broken record played obsessively over and over again, one is simply supposed to talk back to oneself: “No, I am not so bad as all that (he/she is not so bad), etcetera.” Cognitive psychology is effective. If you tell depressed persons to stop being negative, they will ignore the advice; after all, their negativism, to them, is just seeing the world in its true colors. But if you tell depressed persons that their negative statements are unfactual and illogical, it makes an impression; and if the thinking changes, the feelings tend to follow. This does not necessarily prove that unconscious feelings are caused by conscious thinking rather than the reverse. It is possible that the conscious and unconscious minds maintain a two-way commerce, and that both Ellis and Beck and Freud are right. Even so, Ellis’s and Beck’s therapy works, and often works rapidly, whereas Freudian therapy works slowly, if at all.

Like Freudian psychology, cognitive psychology is supposed to be a technical discipline, not a value system. But there are all sorts of values embedded in the therapy, values that together define a particular approach to life. First, the emphasis on factuality and logic is itself a value choice, as we have already shown in prior chapters. Second, cognitive psychology emphasizes personal stability, which is another value choice, and some of the movement’s critics wonder if it does not unduly truncate feelings, thereby robbing life of its color and drama. A depressed person will not, it is true, see the color and drama of life, but if one avoids the valleys by continually monitoring one’s inner dialogue for factuality and logic, will one also miss the heights?

Finally, cognitive psychology is thought by some to place too great a value on positive thinking. Some cognitive therapists appear to be arguing that negative thoughts are always unfactual and illogical, which is itself an illogical position. For example, in his excellent exposition of basic cognitive techniques, *Feeling Good*, Burns tells a mother who repeatedly refers to herself as a “bad mother” that “the term ‘bad mother’ is an abstraction; there is no such thing as a ‘*bad mother*’ in this universe.” Although this response is undoubtedly useful in a therapeutic sense (and thus consistent with a scientific emphasis on getting results), many people would question its factuality.

The term *bad mother* is an abstraction, also an essentially emotive word, but most people would agree that bad mothers do in fact exist, even evil mothers, and that phenomena such as physical child abuse provide *prima facie* evidence of it.

Psycho-Neuro-Immunological Medicine

The “scientific” research discipline that doctors refer to as *psycho-neuro-immunological* medicine occupies the zone where mind and body interact. Among its relevant research findings:

1. The body has two physical defense systems. The first system, controlled by the most primitive portion of the brain, alerts the body to physical danger (an approaching grizzly bear) and produces the fight-or-flight response by pumping adrenaline (now called epinephrine) and other chemicals. The second system, the immune system, guards against invading pathogens (viruses, fungi, unwelcome bacteria) or runaway cells (cancers). The key finding is that these two systems are inversely linked: when the full fight-or-flight mechanism is triggered, the immune system is suppressed and vice versa. The body does not seem to be able to mount a full defense on both fronts at the same time.

2. A corollary of this is that chronic fight-or-flight behavior (so-called Type A behavior) is potentially injurious to health. If triggered by minor threats and prolonged over days, weeks, and months, it can cause serious, chronic illness.
3. Type A behavior is not the only problem, however. The opposite of Type A, so-called Type C behavior (passive, depressed, adrenaline in a state of chronic depletion), or a continual alternation between A and C, is alleged to be just as bad for the immune system. The key to long-term health is therefore supposed to lie in finding the middle way, that is, so-called Type B behavior.

A good diet, enough vitamins, moderate use of coffee and alcohol, aerobic exercise, meditation, avoidance of drugs, and the like are all thought to strengthen one's ability to lead a Type B lifestyle as well as contributing to health in other respects. In general, we seem to have all the tools necessary for a completely positivistic “science” of life. You want to survive and be healthy—right? Then live this way. Mom, your minister, your psychiatrist, and your doctor are all saying the same thing.

There is really no doubt that these kinds of “tools”—summarized by the impressively “scientific” standardized test in which everyone's life expectancy

is statistically derived (smoke heavily: deduct 24 months; happily married: add six months; satisfied with sex life: add nine months)—provide many people with their most cherished personal values. As Gregory Pence, a philosophy teacher at the University of Alabama's School of Medicine, wrote in *Newsweek*: "I practice a secular religion of body and health whose orthodoxy decrees that exercise and preventative medicine will help me live." Yet there will always be nagging questions about the underlying rationality, the underlying "science," on display here. As newspaper columnist Ellen Goodman writes:

In California, members of a family cut back on sugar in the decaffeinated coffee they drink in their house—on the San Andreas fault. . . . In Maine, a woman rides to aerobics class—on her motorbike without a helmet. . . . A friend of yours, mine, ours decides that . . . he will fly only in emergencies. He explains this earnestly, while chain-smoking cigarettes. Another friend drinks only bottled water these days, eats only meat untouched by steroids, and spends weekends hang gliding. . . . Watching parents demonstrate against one school and then another for allowing an AIDS victim into their building, I couldn't help wondering how many packed up their picket signs in

the back seat, their children in front, and drove away without buckling the seat belts.

This kind of irrationality amidst rationality is not the only problem. Another is the way in which psycho-neuro-immunological data is generated. Accept for a moment that so-called Type A behavior really does suppress immune response. Has this behavior been adequately defined in a physiological sense? How do we know that we are dealing with Type A's in these studies? Is the diagnosis made by an observer?—that's not very impartial. By a questionnaire—how precise or impartial is that? To what degree is it all wish fulfillment—the idea that being “better, nicer” people will also make us healthier? What if the “science” changes, and it turns out that aggressiveness-hostility-mistrustfulness-impatience are actually more healthy? Will we then follow this new advice?

That neuromedicine offers a valuable real-life discipline need not be disputed. At the same time, one thinks of the young Thomas Merton's account of being told to eat ice cream (now forbidden because of high fat and cholesterol content) as a palliative for what may or may not have been an ulcer:

The whole result of this diet was to teach me this trivial amusement, this cult of foods. . . . It made me think about myself. It was a game, a hobby, something like psychoanalysis had

been. . . I was reduced to . . . worrying about a lot of imaginary rules of health. . . If I eat this, I may go out of my mind. If I do not eat that, I may die in the night.

Socio-Demo-Anthro-Eco-Enviro-Techno Model Building

Not all “scientific” research disciplines focus directly on the individual or on his personal life. What is called by its practitioners *socio-demo-anthro-eco-enviro-techno model building* (yes, that’s what it’s called) is concerned with the very big picture, the future of humanity. For example, Jay Forrester, an MIT professor who is a leading computer modeler, as well as a creative economist, developed a model of American social and economic behavior that is capable of incorporating 250 years’ worth of data and providing population, energy, resources, capital investment, pollution, and other forecasts for more than a century. Based on his work, Forrester foresees a world of rising population, increasingly constrained growth, correspondingly reduced standards of living, and the possibility of sophisticated new social controls (for example, the right to live in a particular city might be denied, or sold to the highest bidder).

Such predictions may be important for planners or politicians, but what, one wonders, do they have to do with personal values? To answer this question,

we need only listen to one of Forrester’s eager and devoted students:

I was brought up as a Catholic. . . . This weekend I listened to a priest talk about having hope for the future [and how that was] related to our ability to worship Christ. . . . It may well be. But an even greater hope for the future is our ability to understand the forces and behavior of our system as it is.

In other words, models are valuable because they identify the central problems. Once we know the problems, our personal value choices should be easy because good values will contribute to solving the problems whereas bad values will exacerbate them.

The student continues:

Professor Forrester [observes] that [traditional] religion doesn’t present us with [a] framework for the kind of value change we’re heading into as things become scarce and limited. . . . I have had to re-examine my own beliefs. My church for a long time advocated such things as food relief [or] subsidized low-income housing. But in the long run [low-income housing] may hurt those it’s designed to help.

A second student adds that protecting the earth may be more important in the future than protecting human beings, and a third concludes that “altruism may in the last analysis be just another luxury, [an] economic luxury [that] we may not be able to afford.”

Does this brave new world of model building actually lead to a positivistic and problem-solving ethic, a path that humanity must follow in order to save itself? Forrester and other pioneers are quick to deflate such immodest expectations. The models that are supposed to give us our values, however indirectly, are hardly value free to begin with: they reflect the biases of their creators. If you look for personal values from this source, you will probably just find the values that you already had, perhaps without ever quite knowing it.*

Sociobiology

Sociobiology as a Research Discipline

Sociobiology as a scientific research discipline is not controversial. The general idea is to study animal behavior as a means of learning more about human behavior.

* Another problem is that the explanatory variables used are not sufficiently independent, nor are conclusions testable by experimental method. In other words, the models are “scientific” (simultaneously empirical and logical) rather than scientific in the exact sense, and, as such, can be manipulated to defend a wide variety of quite different theories. In effect, the models are a descriptive language, a rigorous method of presenting a theory rather than a prescriptive means of testing alternative theories.

Sociobiology as a Religion

The specific “religion” that devolves out of the research discipline of sociobiology is another matter. It includes the following beliefs:

1. Much, perhaps even most, human behavior is biologically determined (built into us, like eating and sleeping, and thus beyond our conscious control).
2. All human behavior has a single goal: to help the individual survive and reproduce.
3. People may be viewed as “throwaway survival machines” used by “selfish” genes to perpetuate themselves.
4. Even altruistic actions, unselfishness, heroism, love, devotion to higher ideals, and appreciation of knowledge or art are ultimately explained by genetic evolution, which is guided by natural selection, which in turn has the aim—the sole aim—of gene survival through reproduction. For example, an individual cannot survive and reproduce unless the group on which he or she depends also survives and reproduces—hence the inherited tendency to help others, not just compete.
5. The inescapable urge to spread one’s genes as widely as possible spells unending trouble and conflict—thus effectively limiting the potential for altruism in society.

Some otherwise lucid and realistic observers have hailed the religion of sociobiology as “an exact science” that is “testable . . . by empirical data.” This is obviously false. Most sociobiologists admit that “in the chaste idiom of scientific discourse, we are permitted to conclude only that the evidence is consistent with the proposal,” or in other words that the religion of sociobiology is “scientific” in our sense rather than scientific in the exact sense, that is, simultaneously empirical and logical but not testable. In fact, however, the religion of sociobiology is not even empirical or logical. The assertion that all behavior serves the purpose of survival and reproduction, for example, is, in Harvard biologist Stephen Jay Gould’s fairly charitable phrase, “unsupported.” Many other sociobiological assertions are clearly illogical:

1. “Only hard-won empirical knowledge of our biological nature will allow us to make optimum choices among the competing criteria of progress.”

Question: If the behavior in question is biologically determined, it is either completely fixed, or, at least, very hard to change. If so, how are we going to be free to make optimum choices?

2. “If the decision is taken to mold cultures . . . some behaviors can be altered experientially without emotional damage and loss of creativity. Others cannot.”

Question: Is this what is meant by biologically determined behavior—behavior that cannot be altered without “emotional damage and loss of creativity”? If so, the “selfish” genes do not seem to have a very firm grip on us. Who wouldn’t be willing to accept some “emotional damage and loss of creativity” in order to avert the possibility of nuclear war?

3. “We are going to need a planned society on a global level. It can’t originate from the invisible hand of the laissez-faire activity of billions of humans.”

Question: Why would social planners be less subject to negative biological drives than masses of humans?

The underlying problem with sociobiology (the “religion,” not the underlying technical research discipline) is not just its apparent lack of fidelity to the facts or its logical deficiencies. Nor is it simply a case of oversimplification, although sociologist Robert Nisbet is right to point out that finding common acquisitive instincts among jackals, gazelles, and people will not necessarily contribute to a study of “the economy, education, international [relations], or the business cycle,” and others are right to point out that oversimplified biology has been used to justify Nazism, racism, sexism, or other forms of aggression. The core problem with the “religion” of sociobiology is that it sometimes claims to be scientific when it is

not always even “scientific” in the loose sense, and is thus at least sometimes guilty of intellectual confusion at best and of pseudoscience at worst.

Behavioral Psychology

Behavioral Psychology as a Research Discipline

Like the research discipline of sociobiology, the research discipline of behavioral psychology is straightforward and uncontroversial. If you have a physical or emotional habit (learned behavior) that is causing distress, you should be able to unlearn it by applying a “conditioning” technique. For example, assume that you have a very strong drive to smoke cigarettes. Since eating is an even stronger drive, you might stipulate that smoking is permissible, but each cigarette must be followed by a 24-hour fast. After you have experienced intense hunger for a few days, an aversion to smoking may be quickly established. If, on the other hand, the undesirable habit takes the form of avoidance rather than indulgence (fear of airplanes or elevators rather than smoking or drinking), desensitization techniques (imagining and then gradually confronting the feared object) may be applied. Although behavioral techniques will not tell us why or how to live, they provide a direct, hopeful, “scientific” way to pursue a given end.

Behavioral Psychology as a “Religion”

The “religion” that devolves from behavioral psychology is a mirror image of the religion that devolves out of technical sociobiology: that is, it agrees that human behavior is determined (free choice rarely if ever exists), but the determining factors are environmental or cultural, not biological or genetic. In the view of behaviorists, individuals are born with few predispositions (genes almost never control behavior) and may be guided in almost any direction, for good or evil, by wise or malevolent mentors. If one is conditioned to be criminal, one will be criminal; no one, however, needs to remain criminal as a permanent condition. What has been programmed can be reprogrammed; intractable thugs may be reconditioned into the most exemplary citizens.

The most famous exponent of this kind of behavioral determinism was B. F. Skinner. Skinner thought that human beings, like rocks or other forms of inanimate matter, are moved by external forces and only by external forces. As he put it:

Aristotle argued that a falling body accelerated because it grew more jubilant as it found itself nearer home. . . . All this was eventually abandoned, and to good effect [by the physical sciences], but the behavioral sciences still appeal to comparable

internal states. . . . Every issue of . . . a daily paper [or] professional journal [supplies] examples. . . . We are told that to control the number of people in the world we need to change attitudes . . . overcome pride . . . build some sense of responsibility . . . that wars begin in the minds of men. . . . Almost no one questions . . . this staple fare. Yet there is nothing like it in modern physics . . . and that fact may explain why a science and technology of behavior has been so long delayed.

This is heady stuff, both wildly optimistic in its hopes for the world (“man’s genetic endowment can be changed only very slowly, but changes in the environment of the individual have quick and dramatic effects; our culture has produced the science and technology it needs to save itself”), and frightening in its vision of massive social control (“if [society] continues to take freedom or dignity, rather than its own survival, as its principal value, then [it may] find [it]self in hell”). Yet on closer inspection it simply dissolves in vagueness, semantical confusion, and tautological reasoning. What did Skinner mean by “determined” behavior? How did he propose to isolate cultural from genetic influences in the real world? If we state that a Christian is not actually devout but is rather moved by external contingencies, have we

really said anything different, anything useful, anything measurable? Or have we just indulged in a form of empty verbal gymnastics? As with the “religion” of sociobiology, the indictment against the religion of behavioral psychology is a subtle one: It is not primarily that Skinner’s philosophical speculations were nonempirical or illogical, although they were. It is rather that Skinnerism claims to be what it is not—namely, exact science, or at least “science” in our special sense, when it is actually closer to pseudoscience.

A Composite Religion of “Science”

One need not, of course, be solely a Freudian, cognitive psychologist, psycho-neuro-immunologist, socio-eco-enviro model builder, sociobiologist, or behavioral psychologist. One might choose bits and pieces from each of these disciplines, or from many other research disciplines, and combine them into one’s own personal “religion” (value system) based on “science.” Whatever particular amalgam is chosen, however, a few underlying assumptions are likely to be present: that life is about *problem solving*; that problem-solving requires good *management* and an effort at *self-improvement*; that management and self-improvement demand *realism*, that is, looking squarely and logically at the facts; that by studying the facts “scientifically,” one can penetrate the *secrets of nature* and thereby come to possess a degree of *power*

and control; that, as a shortcut to this *hidden knowledge*, it is wise to consult *experts*; that experts must have the right *credentials*; that, even more important, experts must have the right *technique*; that the most powerful techniques are probably new, only *recently discovered*; that powerful techniques are usually *complex*, rarely simple; that to make new techniques work requires an *openness to change*; that *change is healthy*, usually for the best; that with hard work and relevant *technical knowledge* we can *transform the world*, make it a very good place to live.

The list of underlying assumptions could go on and on. As previously noted, the emphasis on “experts” is a bit ironic, since it seems to come uncomfortably close to “science’s” chief antagonist, authority, but in any case these assumptions are already quite familiar, because value systems based on “science,” as we have defined it here, are part of the very air that we breathe. All of us, even those who might deny it most strenuously, even the most devout fundamentalist Christians, for example, have absorbed at least some of its distinctive and all-pervading essence.

Part Four

Variations on a Theme
(Including Other
Examples of Synthetic
Value Systems)

Nine

The Cross-Fertilization of Values

SO FAR, WE have looked at four basic mental modes and two of the most important synthetic mental modes that we use in sorting out and choosing values, each of which represents an important value choice in itself, as per the following chart, which illustrates movement from the general to the specific:

Four Basic Mental Modes

1. Sense Experience

Central approach (Gaining direct knowledge through our own five senses: “I know it is true because I saw it, I heard it, I tasted it, I smelled it, or I touched it myself.”)



Central approach to values (Gaining moral knowledge by directly seeing, hearing, etc.)



Dominant personal value judgment (“My own personal [sense] experience is very important to me.”)



Type of value system (“My value system is based on personal [sense] experience.”)



Generic evaluations and beliefs illustrative of this type of value system (“You only live once; make the most of it. You should not be too concerned with specific goals; experience is an end in itself, not just a means. Do not accept anyone else’s values: develop your own uniquely personal path through contact with teachers, friends, books, and travel. On the other hand, do pay close attention to the accumulated standards, taste, and wisdom contained in the cultural treasures—great works of literature, great art, etc.—handed down from the past, the common currency of all civilized people.”) [In one variant—high sense experience—all this education and freedom must be tempered by strong self-discipline; in another variant—prodigal sense experience—the discipline is mostly eliminated.]



Specific evaluations and beliefs illustrative of this type of value system (High sense experience: the personal

evaluations and beliefs of Eudora Welty . . . or of Montaigne; prodigal sense experience: although no one individual is fully illustrative, Lawrence Durrell, Henry Miller, Harold Acton, Yves St. Laurent, Elvis Presley, Tennessee Williams, and many others suggest the multifaceted possibilities.)

2. Deductive Logic

Central approach (Subjecting evaluations and beliefs to the variety of consistency and other tests that underlie deductive reasoning. “Since A is true, B must be true, because B follows from A.”)



Central approach to values (Subjecting moral beliefs to logical tests.)



Dominant personal value judgment (“Logic is very important to me.”)



Type of value system (“My value system is based on logical thinking.”)



Generic evaluations and beliefs illustrative of this type of value system (“Order in life is essential. Different people’s views need not always agree, but at the very least, should be orderly, organized, clear, relevant, complete, follow first principles, and be internally consistent.”)



Specific evaluations and beliefs illustrative of this type of value system (The philosophy of Spinoza . . . or of Mortimer Adler.)

3. Emotion

Central approach (Feeling that something is right: although we do not necessarily associate feeling with judging or believing, we actually judge and form beliefs through our emotions all the time: “I feel that this is right.”)



Central approach to values (“I feel that these values are right.”)



Dominant personal value judgment (“Feelings are very important to me”—not always acknowledged.)



Type of value system (“My value system is based on my feelings.”)



Generic evaluations and beliefs illustrative of this type of value system (“To live fully, one must commit oneself and one’s feelings to a cause [a purpose larger than oneself] and a group [cause and group are actually synonymous]. What counts are shared objectives, shared way of life, shared struggle against common enemies.” Of course, this does not prevent the group from being a projection of oneself, as Hitler

regarded Germany, or a pretext for identifying other groups as enemies.)



Specific evaluations and beliefs illustrative of this type of value system (At its best, love of family, of neighborhood, of nation, of humanity, as exemplified by people as disparate as Winston Churchill or Mitch Snyder, social activist and radical advocate for the homeless in Washington, DC.)

4. Intuition

Central approach (Unconscious and very powerful mental processing that is not emotional. It may be helpful although fictitious to think of the mind as if it were in three parts: the conscious mind; the emotions, that is, the hypothalamus or primitive brain; and the unconscious-but-not-emotive intuitive mind. Both the conscious mind and the unconscious-intuitive mind are highly sophisticated, but the unconscious-intuitive mind is much more powerful than the conscious mind, just as a supercomputer is more powerful than a microcomputer. Hence most creative discoveries are intuitively derived and only later “dressed up” by logic, observation, or some other conscious technique: “After struggling with this problem all day, I went to bed confused and exhausted. The next morning, as I awakened, the solution came to me in a flash, and I just knew it was true.”)



Central approach to values (Drawing moral knowledge from the inner wellsprings of intuition.)



Dominant personal value judgment (“My intuition is very important to me.”)



Type of value system (“My value system is based on intuition.”)



Generic evaluations and beliefs illustrative of this type of value system (“The conscious mind, with all its desires and conflicts, is often a snare and an illusion. What counts is not what you accomplish or what you have, but what you are; to know what you are, you must unblock and develop your intuitive powers by learning to be calm, peaceful, immune to the storms of life.”)



Specific evaluations and beliefs illustrative of this type of value system (The personal evaluations and beliefs of Darshan Singh . . . or of the Indian saint Ramana Maharshi . . . or of Zen Buddhism, which paradoxically often include a distrust of evaluation.)

Two of the Most Important Synthetic Mental Modes

5. Authority

Central approach (Developing confidence—through experience, logic, intuition, or in particular emotion—in an authority, especially a higher authority, and then placing one’s faith in that authority.)



Central approach to values (Having faith in a higher moral authority.)



Dominant personal value judgment (“Having faith in a higher moral authority is very important to me.”)



Type of value system (“My value system is based on faith in a higher moral authority.”)



Generic evaluations and beliefs (“The rules for a successful life are known. The difficult part, the challenge, lies in opening up our hearts, putting aside our wayward impulses, not only following the rules that we have been given but making them part of our being.”)



Specific evaluations and beliefs illustrative of this type of value system (Protestant fundamentalism and Roman Catholicism.)

6. “Science”

Central approach (A synthetic and often highly formal approach that relies on emotion to motivate and provide energy, although the role of emotion is usually unacknowledged; on sense experience to collect observable facts; on intuition to develop a testable hypothesis about the facts; logic to develop the test [experiment]; and on sense experience again to complete the test. “I tested the hypothesis experimentally and found that it was true.”)



Central approach to values (Although exact science is as nearly as possible value-free, values may nevertheless be said to be “scientific” in a more limited sense if they are based on careful, empirical observation and are internally consistent.)



Dominant personal value judgment (“A ‘scientific’ approach is very important to me.”)



Type of value system (“My value system is based on ‘science.’ ”)



Generic evaluations and beliefs illustrative of this type of value system (“Life is a series of problems to be solved, objectives to be achieved, by developing and applying the right kind of technical knowledge.”)



Specific evaluations and beliefs illustrative of this type of value system (Freudianism, especially the contemporary Freudianism of a George Vaillant; cognitive psychology; philosophies of “body and health” based on psycho-neuro-immunology; philosophies based on “socio-anthro-eco” modeling, socio-biology, behavioral psychology, or other social science disciplines.)

As summarized here, the four basic mental modes and associated value systems stand separate and apart. Even the two synthetic mental modes and associated value systems treated so far have always been either so familiar and habitual to us (in the case of authority) or have become so familiar and habitual to us (in the case of “science”) that we usually regard them as unique modes of perception, not merely a blending together of different elements, and thus also standing alone. But in real life, nothing ever stands alone. In real life, the tidy boxes our logical minds try to create are never lined up neatly, each separate and distinct, and people combine mental modes and value systems in unpredictable and sometimes wild and startling ways.

One person may be attracted to logic but also to sense experience, notwithstanding the acute differences between these two approaches, and somehow—human beings operating as they do—a highly personal, perhaps unspoken, perhaps even unconscious accommodation is reached. For example, a devout Protestant fundamentalist embraces an emotive

nationalism, even though there is nothing in the Gospels to support nationalism and there is even some explicit advice from Jesus about not investing temporal institutions like the state with spiritual authority. To be sure, some combinations are less likely than others. For example, as we have noted the basic method and attitude of authority is harder to reconcile with “science” than with emotion. On the other hand, there are any number of highly intelligent and skilled thinkers who have tried to reconcile authority (even in the form of fundamentalist Christianity) with “science,” for example theologian-sociologist Harvey Cox (*The Secular City and Religion in the Secular City*). An even more surprising combination (much beloved by humanistic psychologists and other New Agers) is “science” and intuition, usually a blend of psychology and Eastern religion (as in Swami Ajaya’s *Psychotherapy East and West*, written by an American of Jewish background who became a celibate Hindu monk).

The important point to emphasize, in thinking about these or other complex composite faiths, is that all human beings without exception are multidimensional in their personal evaluations and beliefs. Everybody is influenced at least to some degree by experience, logic, emotion (emotion especially!), intuition, authority (if not the authority of church or Bible, then some other authority), and “science.” Whereas many people weave these strands together

in artful and coherent ways, others—like the lesbian, feminist, Zen, Roman Catholic nun mentioned in Chapter One—are clearly less coherent.

Ten

Four Highly Personal Synthetic Value Systems Closely Linked to Traditional Religions and Grounded Either in Emotion or Sense Experience: Barth, Einstein, Gandhi, Meir

The Nonfundamentalist, Nonmodernist Christianity of Karl Barth

(An attempt to create a Christian faith that reconciles authority and emotion with intuition, sense experience, and logic while avoiding both a more fundamentalist version of authority and “science”)

WORKING AS A young Swiss Reformed Church pastor before World War I, Karl Barth concluded that both “modernist” Christianity (also referred to as “liberal” Christianity) and fundamentalist Christianity were

fatally flawed. Modernism had abandoned the supernatural and tried to find heaven on earth. Fundamentalism had pretended that it had a direct pipeline to the Almighty. Both were essentially guilty of impatience, of wanting to find shortcuts and easy answers.

Initially, Barth was much more hostile toward Christian modernism. In his view, it had committed at least five cardinal sins. The first was to make an idol of human reason, to believe that God might be discovered through a syllogism or located in an experiment, to forget that “reason sees the small and the larger but not the large,” to forget that Christianity must always be “an embarrassment” and a “grotesque contradiction of the facts,” to forget Luther’s warning that “I do not know it and do not understand it, but sounding from above and ringing in my ears I hear what is beyond the thought of man.” The second was to abandon reason in a fit of disillusion in favor of the “whole melody of anti-intellectualism” and “mysticism.” The third was to attempt to pacify the “cultured despisers of religion” by constantly changing doctrine as if “this meant anything more than the turning over of a sick man in his bed.” The fourth was to try to find in frenetic good works what could not be found in faith; to put all the emphasis on Jesus’ ethics; to “build community houses, push [a] young people’s program, organize discussion groups, [erect] donors’ tablets, attend committee meetings, [observe] twenty-five year anniversaries, and

[take] countless mutual bows.” The fifth was to suffer disillusion over good works and to turn to romantic notions of Marxism and violent revolution. What all these various sins shared in common was a “disastrous . . . dim-sighted[ness] in regard to the fact that man as man is not only in need but beyond all hope of saving himself; that the whole of so-called religion, and not least the Christian religion, shares in this need; and that one cannot speak of God simply by speaking of man in a loud voice.”

After thus surveying modernism and finding it totally wanting, Barth turned to Christian fundamentalism. The original fundamentalism, the Catholic church, had sinned in his view by putting itself—its “history and . . . traditions, [its] intelligence and [its] capacity for grace—in the place of God.” It had failed to see that the church’s true role was “as a witness, a quite earthly reflection, of a lost and hidden order—and as such [in]capable of sustaining any special sacredness”; it had forgotten that “in the heavenly Jerusalem of *Revelation* nothing is more . . . significant than the church’s complete absence: ‘And I saw no temple therein.’”

On the other hand, Barth said, Protestant fundamentalism may have committed an even greater sin by putting religion itself in the place of God:

Religion forgets that she has a right to exist only when she continually does away with

herself. Instead, she takes joy in her existence and considers herself indispensable. . . . Jesus had nothing to do with religion.

In developing his own theology, Barth sought to steer a middle course that would be neither modernist nor fundamentalist. He began by stating that God is “*Totaliter aliter* [wholly other]. ‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit.’ There are no transitions, intermixings, or intermediate stages,” no step-by-step approaches, only a “radical break with everything [we know].” Man is completely isolated from God and thus walks “upon a ridge between time and eternity that is narrower than a knife-edge” and that ends “before the closed wall of death.” Within their own lives, “people are tolerably well adjusted,” but they know that only “eternal life can . . . be called and really be ‘life.’” Moreover, they fear that evil may be the strongest will in life, that they had better make peace with it, accept that “the world is a hell, and conform!”

Despite this temptation, man thinks that “there must still be a way from there [the divine supernatural world] to here [the finite, empirical, scientific world].” And with this “must” he discovers “the miracle of the revelation of God” through Christ. In Christ, there is a truly “new element in the midst of the old, a truth in the midst of error and lies, a righteousness in the midst

of a sea of unrighteousness, a spirituality within all our crass materialistic tendencies. . . . The resurrection of Jesus . . . is the appearance . . . of a ‘wholly and utterly other.’” The many miracles of the Bible “are only illustrations of this, the miracle. . . . *It is beside the point even to ask whether they are historical and possible. . . .*”

To approach this transcendent “new time” and “new life,” it is not necessary, according to Barth, to subscribe to any one dogma or reading of the Bible. All human beliefs and human documents are, by definition, suffused with error. It is necessary, however, to deflate ourselves, to become genuinely humble. We must stop “flinging out accusations which [have] not [been] first applied in their full weight to our own selves.” We must see the Apostles and God’s chosen ones in their true light as “distraught, humanly unsatisfactory figures, uncertain of their souls and of their practical success, the direct opposite of heroes, their life stories uncompleted, their life work unfinished. . . .” We must avoid all the usual religious pitfalls of “fanaticism,” “conceit,” “Pharisaism,” and “Titanism.” We must learn to be simple and silent. If we do all these things, an innermost voice will tell us that “God is righteous” and that we should believe. We will put away our fears and doubts, be reborn in hope, and experience a “childlike peace and joy.”

Although Barth is not a dogmatist, he emphasizes the absolute necessity of belief (“One can only believe . . . or not believe. . . . There is no third way.”)

and defends the Apostles' Creed, despite "its hardness," for its underlying "truth" and "depth." In no sense is he a modern relativist (Shall we conclude that everyone is equally "right"? . . . Or is it more likely that everyone, whatever their views or variety of worship is "wrong"? This, he suggests, is the right direction in which to look for an answer.) Nor is he modernist or liberal on moral matters or timid about Christian "witnessing" ("[One must not] whisper and mumble [or] hint [or] leave Him somewhere in the background, but [rather] disregard the universal method of science and place Him in the foreground").

Has Barth achieved his ultimate purpose? Has he formulated a Bible-based Christianity in the tradition of Jeremiah, St. Paul, Luther, and Calvin, which is neither fundamentalist nor modernist? It might seem so. Christian fundamentalists attack Barth as a modernist who has removed all real authority, whether church or biblical, from Christian life, substituting in its place a paltry and unreliable inner intuition. Christian modernists dismiss him as a conservative, a supernaturalist, a believer in ghosts and hobgoblins and miracles. Yet perhaps because of the singularity of his vision, Barth remains an isolated figure: no one church embraces him; his works, though prestigious, lie mostly unread; and his unique message of "humility" and "hope" commands neither numerous adherents nor organized support.

The Judaism of Golda Meir

(Combines a dominant strain of emotion with lesser elements of authority, sense, experience, and logic)

Historically, Judaism has been a religion of authority, especially the authority of Scripture. For some ultra-Orthodox rabbis such as Israeli Shalom Rabin, Scripture is simply everything: “When God gave us the Torah to run our lives by, he gave us everything we need to know.” Despite this point of view, Judaism has also been a religion of logic, equally famous for the logical mastery of the great medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides and for disputatious rabbis who may argue for hours on a street corner about whether it is logically consistent with Scripture for them to share a cab ride home. Yet to many Jews, neither authority nor logic lie at the heart of Judaism. For these Jews, Scripture, theological fine points, dietary and other rules of conduct, traditional holidays, rites, rituals, and symbols are all secondary if not irrelevant, mere means to an end: an end of simply feeling Jewish, of participating in a basically emotional fellowship, of joining a close-knit and lifelong community that simultaneously embraces, protects, nurtures, stimulates, and inspires its individual members.

Golda Meir (prime minister of Israel 1969–1974) exemplified this essentially secular Judaism. It was not that she was overtly atheistic or nonobservant. She kept

her beliefs about God mostly to herself (although she successfully fought to strike the words “our Redeemer” from the initial proclamation of the state of Israel) and was at least minimally observant. For example, she wanted a civil marriage (in Milwaukee, when she was still an American citizen) but reluctantly acceded to her mother’s pleading for a traditional *chuppah* (bridal canopy and ceremony). Years later in 1946, when she was publicly fasting to protest the British refusal to permit full-scale Jewish immigration into what would become Israel, the Chief Rabbi suddenly proclaimed that all Jews must end their fast to observe Passover with a proper Seder and she again acquiesced, but only to the extent of eating a single piece of matzo (bread) “no larger than an olive.” Meir’s solution to the problem posed by the Chief Rabbi was typical: she was a woman of strong emotional drives who was nevertheless intensely practical. As she wrote in her memoirs: “Nothing in life just happens. It isn’t enough to believe in something; you have to have the stamina to meet obstacles and overcome them, to struggle.” This emphasis on believing in something, on joining together with others in pursuit of a common goal, on sacrificing and struggling for the group with little or no concern for one’s own welfare or wishes, both underlay and defined Meir’s particular style of “Jewishness.”

Throughout her life, Meir embraced and served a wide variety of groups and causes. In addition to her

core identity as a Jew, she was also a Jewish mother (to her two children, five grandchildren, and, it sometimes seemed, everybody else), a Jewish American (even after giving up her American citizenship, she remained in close contact with the United States), a Jewish socialist, a Jewish feminist, a Zionist, a member of a kibbutz, and, of course, a founder of Israel. Of all these myriad roles, membership in a kibbutz seems to have provided the most unalloyed happiness despite an unpromising beginning, in which her husband's and her application for a place in the Kibbutz Merhavia was rejected by the admissions committee on the grounds that American Jews were too "soft" for the harsh rigors of pioneering life in the early 1920s. After this initial hurdle was overcome, Meir joined a settlement of seven women and thirty men located in a mosquito-ridden and pestilential swamp in the Jezreel plain where "there were no orchards, no meadows, no flowers," communal privies and showers, clothes made of rough cloth with holes cut for head and arms, "dreadful" meals, incessant ideological and quasi-ideological debates (for example, over whether oatmeal for breakfast or cookies twice a week were too profligate for kibbutz life), no funds whatever to buy anything (only one fork or spoon per person and at one point only three table glasses to be shared by all), recurrent plagues of dysentery or malaria, hard physical chores from before dawn to late at night, and chronic threats from nearby Arabs. All

these rigors notwithstanding, there was also a uniquely satisfying experience of community, of belonging, of intimate friends who shared “almost everything—problems, rewards, responsibilities, and satisfactions.”

What Meir liked best of all at Merhavia was “sharing a midnight snack with the boys coming back from guard duty and staying on in the kitchen for hours to hear their stories.” Later, throughout a career that brought some supremely exhilarating moments (watching sixteen- and seventeen-year-old Jewish boys and girls jumping into the waves to greet the boats carrying survivors of Hitler’s death camps immediately after World War II and carrying the older people ashore on their strong, young shoulders, the military victories against the Arabs, the capture of old Jerusalem), her thoughts always returned to the kibbutz, and to the uniquely communal life that could be lived there: “One of my great disappointments has been that I [could not return].”

The Neo-Buddhism of Albert Einstein

(Combines sense experience and intuition)

A contemporary scientific writer, Boyce Rensberger, states that “modern biology confirms the view that all the phenomena that together constitute life can be understood in the purely materialistic

terms of physics and chemistry.” Albert Einstein, on the other hand, the preeminent physicist of the age, rejected the notion that physics was purely materialistic, at least in intent. As he wrote:

The cosmic religious feeling is the strongest and noblest motive for research [into physics] Those whose acquaintance with [physics] research is derived chiefly from its practical results easily develop a completely false notion of the mentality of the men who, surrounded by a skeptical world, have shown the way to kindred spirits scattered through the world and the centuries. . . . In this materialist cage of ours . . . serious workers [in physics] are . . . profoundly religious people.

That Einstein himself was profoundly religious is beyond dispute. But of what was his religion made? The answer, somewhat surprisingly, is that he was a kind of neo-Buddhist, and to probe his thinking, one must leave Einstein for a moment and delve deeply in time, to the very roots of Buddhism.

Original Buddhism (Sixth Century BCE)

The early life of Gotama, the founder of Buddhism, provides a classic illustration of the workings of human intuition. Born into a princely Indian family, at age

twenty-nine he abandoned wife and newly born son, along with what G. K. Chesterton called the “luxury and pomp” of an oriental court, to become a wandering beggar and religious seeker. At first, he tried to find a guru, but after living with one and then another without finding satisfaction, he continued his journey, stopping occasionally to listen to the reasoning and debates of various religious teachers, eventually throwing himself into a life of such complete fasting and self-mortification that he almost starved to death. When at last he concluded that austerity was useless as a path to spiritual enlightenment, he arose from the forest bed where he was lying, bathed, put on fresh clothes, began to eat normal meals, and rested. At this very moment, when he had put his obsessive spiritual quest out of mind, at least temporarily, his powers of intuition were rekindled, he fell into a deep trance and, on awakening, finally possessed the truth that he was seeking.

And what was this truth? Put simply, it was that all traditional religions of authority, whether God centered or guru centered, all traditional conceptions of God, all techniques and value systems based on logic were equally empty and worthless. To be reliable, value systems must be based on direct observation and experience, not experience in its everyday, chaotic, and confusing form, but experience that has been focused and filtered by the highest powers of intuition. Nor should experience be of

the simpleminded, reductionist, so-called realistic type, which holds that God does not exist simply because we cannot see, hear, or touch him. Many issues simply cannot be addressed by experience, and should be left alone. Religion should, instead, concentrate on questions of human relations and psychology, down-to-earth questions that are within our powers and whose solution will make a difference in our lives.

Such a message is so modern, so Western in tone that we must immediately ask ourselves—did the Buddha really say this? Is it possible that he formulated this philosophy over twenty-five hundred years ago, half a millennium before Christ, at a time when Europeans were painting their naked bodies blue and dancing around fires? A close reading of the Pali Canon—the earliest recorded teachings of Gotama—suggests that he did teach thus. But the Pali Canon is short; its words are ambiguous; they were not recorded for four hundred years after they were allegedly spoken. Moreover, over the course of the years, Buddhism has developed into dozens, even hundreds, of different religions, many of which emphasize authority or logic. Under the circumstances, any reconstruction of original Buddhism must be speculative, but even so the Pali Canon seems to be teaching something remarkably similar to philosopher David Hume's eighteenth-century Scottish skepticism.

As this summary suggests, the Buddha's most startling contribution was his philosophical method. But his actual doctrine—the fruit of his method—was equally original for its time or any time, and may be summarized as follows:

- The main, perhaps the sole, lesson of experience is that we cause most of our own unhappiness by endlessly agitating ourselves with cravings for this and that, endlessly creating wants and trying to satisfy these wants, endlessly imagining problems and creating solutions for these problems, when the only real solution, the only hope for happiness and relief, is simply to shut off the mind's clamor, to stop wanting so much, if possible to stop wanting anything at all *for ourselves*.
- The problem is not that life is hard, that most of our desires will never be fulfilled. Even if all our immediate desires were fulfilled, they would just be succeeded by others. As Thomas Merton has written: "The truth that many people never understand, until it is too late, is that the more you try to [gain security], the more you suffer, because smaller and more insignificant things begin to torture you. . . ." Or as a Los Angeles Hatha yogi says about his clients: "Three billion

people in the world wondering what to eat, and for them, they get a couple of little ruts in the road in front of their house and it's a big disaster." The Greek philosopher Epictetus summed it up approximately five hundred years after the Buddha: "Man is not disturbed about things, but by his opinion about things."

Gotama thought that the identification of personal desire with suffering was self-evident, something that, once stated, would be apparent to everyone. On the other hand, this "self-evident" truth runs contrary to several thousand years of popular Western tradition, beginning with Callicles' statement in Plato's *Gorgias* that "he who would truly live ought to allow his desires to wax to the uttermost [and] when they have grown to their greatest . . . have the courage and intelligence to minister to them and satisfy his longings"; or as Aristotle's later disciple Mortimer Adler puts it in *Ten Philosophical Mistakes*, albeit in a very different and much more moderate vein: "Contentment . . . cannot signify anything other than the psychological state that exists when the desires of the moment are satisfied. The more they are satisfied at a given moment, the more we regard that

moment as approaching supreme contentment. . . . Happiness [as opposed to mere psychological contentment] can then be defined as a whole life enriched by the cumulative possession of all the real goods that every human being needs and by the satisfaction of those individual wants that result in obtaining apparent goods that are innocuous.” In other words, personal and selfish desires are just fine so long as they are rational, do not go too far, and do not harm others.

- If, according to the Buddha, personal and selfish desires are actually and always a source of misery, how can they be avoided? First, by following the advice of one of the founders of American psychology, William James: “Refuse to express an emotion, and it dies. . . . We feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and not that we cry, strike, or tremble because we are sorry, angry, or fearful. . . . If we wish to conquer undesirable emotional tendencies, we must assiduously go through the outward movements of those contrary dispositions that we prefer to cultivate. The reward of persistency will infallibly come!” Stated differently, it is not enough to try to avoid personal and selfish desires. Because “nature

abhors a vacuum,” personal desires must be replaced with impersonal desires, such as for the welfare of others, of humanity, or of other creatures. And to assist in this endeavor, the Buddha left “three” aids behind: his order of monks, which visitors were encouraged to visit for periods of spiritual refreshment; his eightfold path, a series of social, physical, and mental disciplines (*dharmā*) similar to the yogic eightfold path laid out in Chapter Six of this book; and last (least in his own eyes), his own spiritual example.

- The emotions are a great obstacle to a life of impersonal and unselfish desire, but the greatest obstacle of all, paradoxically, is our conscious mind, the instrument that reigns so imperiously over all our actions. The mind is both clever and treacherous. It persuades us that it is trying to control our emotions and work for our security and welfare when it is really only creating problems to have the pleasure and prestige of “solving” them. It sinks us into endless argument and conflict; convinces us that the immediate world we see around us, which is mostly a product of our own imagination, is the only true reality, and a most solid and permanent reality at that—while everything is actually in a state

of total impermanence, constantly changing and passing away before our very eyes. It is not surprising that we mistake our conscious mind for our very soul, our inner selfhood. But whatever the conscious mind is, it is not to be mistaken for the self.

- If the conscious mind is not the self, what is? Here the Buddha becomes Sakya Muni, the Silent Sage, the teacher who refuses to teach what he does not and (in his opinion) cannot know. Stripped of body and mind, the human self would appear to be a void, *anatta*, nothing. If so, one should not worry about it. Nor should one try to answer any of the following “unanswerable” questions, each of which were posed to Gotama, and each of which he silently turned away as being “not tending to edification”—that is, beyond either intuition or experience—despite the curiosity of his followers, all of whom would have eagerly accepted the Master’s word as law on any subject:

- Is there a God?
- Is the universe eternal?
- Is the universe finite (in size)?
- Can life exist without a body?
- Does a Buddha (an enlightened one) exist after death?

The Buddha particularly refused to discuss or dispute these matters, or indeed any matters, with other religious teachers.

Nor was he impressed by reputed miraculous powers or siddhis associated with other faiths. When informed that one of his own followers had just levitated, he gently replied, “This will not help convert the unconverted or aid the converted,” then returned to his prior conversation.

Western critics, even after studying the Pali Canon rather than contemporary Buddhism, have often concluded that the Buddha’s doctrines were grim, pessimistic, completely passive, based on a notion of life as a kind of hell and a desire to anesthetize oneself. Though it is always possible that this is a correct interpretation, that Buddhism represents the teaching of a disappointed and recessive personality, there is no evidence to support it. It seems more likely that the Buddha wanted his disciples to be active in life (even if following his own monastic way of poverty and chastity); wanted them to have a will to live and a purpose to live for, albeit a disinterested and unselfish will and purpose; thought that human beings could be motivated, not by teaching drive, ambition, and desire, but rather by removing the blockages of anxiety, fear, depression, and anger that hold everyone in bondage; and hoped (unsuccessfully, as it turned out) to avoid founding another religion of authority, but rather to point out a

path for all people, Brahmins and lowly untouchables alike, that would emphasize realism, modest expectations, self-reliance, and service.

Einstein's Personal Religion

Whether Einstein ever read the Pali Canon of early Buddhism is unknown, but seems likely. Although he was attracted to the logical “religion” of Spinoza (Chapter Four), his own “religion,” as formulated in his later years, clearly followed the tenets of early Buddhism. This was manifested, first, in a rejection of personal desire (“I am happy because I want nothing from anyone. I do not care for money. Decorations, titles, or distinctions mean nothing to me. I do not crave praise”); second, in an espousal of disinterested desire (“A person who is religiously enlightened appears to me to be one who has, to the best of his ability, liberated himself from the fetters of his selfish desires and is preoccupied with thoughts, feelings, and aspirations to which he clings because of their super personal value”); third, in a rejection of both logic and simple experience (“This . . . aristocratic illusion concerning the unlimited penetrative power of [logical] thought has as its counterpart the plebian illusion of naïve realism, according to which things ‘are’ as they are perceived to us through our senses. . . . But the real nature of things, that we shall never know, never”); and fourth, in the power

of intuition to provide religious and moral answers to guide everyday life (“One must not attempt to justify [religious truths] but rather to sense their nature simply and clearly”).

Mohandas Gandhi’s Neo-Hindu Doctrine of “Detached Action”

(Combines emotion with intuition)

At first glance, a value system that combines emotion and intuition as primary, coequal factors might seem to be paradoxical, even impossible. Although it is a largely unconscious mode of thinking, intuition is highly cerebral and requires a certain distance from the world. All the exercises designed to evoke it (e.g., the yogic eightfold path) emphasize detachment. How, then, can intuition get mixed up with emotion, the mental mode in which we are least cerebral and detached, in which we are moved by dark and powerful drives, drives for survival (along with its second derivative, personal power); drives for reproduction; more subtle but no less compelling drives for identity, stimulation, and security (all of which are realized through participation in a tribe or community, either a blood community such as family or nation, or a community based on certain shared ideas such as liberalism or revolutionary communism)? Yet the *Bhagavad-Gita*, perhaps the central

text in the Indian religious tradition, written between CE 200 and 500, says that intuition may be combined with emotion, that it is possible to maintain complete detachment and freedom from selfish desires while actively serving your family or nation, even, to take the *Gita's* somewhat gory example, while killing your nation's enemies on the battlefield. It is not only possible to do this: it is our *dharma* or duty. From time to time we may leave the world and retreat to a monastery or mountaintop. But most of the time we must live in the world and find a way to reconcile our emotions, the wellsprings of motivation, drive, and action, with a higher spiritual way of detachment and disinterested service.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* directly inspired Mohandas Gandhi, the father of Indian independence, and this one man best illustrates the possibilities of a religion of emotion-intuition, of "detached action." Gandhi was himself a welter of personal contradictions. He was married with children, yet at age thirty-six decided to practice chastity. Later, he turned his back on material possessions (although one of his wealthy supporters joked that it cost a fortune to keep him in poverty). Even as he withdrew from the "world" he kept agitating, through his unique nonviolent method, first for minority rights in South Africa and then, after his return to India at age forty-five, for Indian independence. He was clearly a holy man, a man who

practiced severe self-restraint (including some very odd self-restraints such as sleeping naked with his teenage grandniece to “test” his chastity) together with love and tolerance, but he was also, in his own words, a *banya*, a crafty trader who was always ready to bargain, to make a deal. The aristocratic Indians who paid for Gandhi’s crusades (people like Motilal, Jawaharlal Nehru’s father and the founder of an Indian political dynasty, a thoroughly Europeanized Indian who shipped his shirts to Paris to be laundered) thought they could easily control such a saintly revolutionary, but it was the backers who were controlled. The British underestimated Gandhi for the same reason—his incomprehensibility, his contradictory mix of sainthood and slyness—and he made use of their puzzlement at every turn. To maintain detachment, Gandhi practiced meditation. When this was not possible, when he was surrounded by surging humanity or being presented to the King of England, he relied on the next best thing, humor. An Englishman protested that wearing a loincloth to Buckingham Palace in 1931 was disrespectful. “The King,” he replied, “was wearing quite enough for us both.”

In the Indian tradition, Karma yoga, the life of selfless action, of emotion and intuition, is usually considered a lower yoga, suitable for spiritual beginners rather than adepts. Yet the Karma yoga of Gandhi, combining revolution with nonviolence, intense

nationalism with an equal regard for the moral development and happiness of one's adversaries, is so difficult that its habitual practice would seem to be a very high attainment indeed. Even Gandhi by his own admission fell short of the ultimate ideal of this kind of yoga, in particular by neglecting the needs of his wife, who was barely consulted about the decision to undertake a life of chastity, and of his children, who saw little of their father.

Eleven

Why Values Get So Complicated

AS THIS ENTIRE book illustrates, values are a confusing subject, one of the most confusing subjects we know of. In addition to the confusion represented by so many different levels of moral discourse (value systems based on four basic, two key synthetic, and additional synthetic mental modes, with all their combinations and permutations), there are other confusions as well, confusions introduced by the tendency of human beings to dissemble about their true evaluations and beliefs, form makeshift moral alliances, or change their evaluations and beliefs (sometimes as dramatically as Saul/St. Paul).

The “Mendacity” of Values

One thinks of the story of Jean Meslier, a priest leading an obscure life tending the souls of two small rural parishes in early eighteenth-century France, rising each day to comfort the sick, counsel the troubled, teach the faith, perform masses, christen and marry the young, bury the dead. Even this exemplary life did not satisfy everyone. The church was said to lack a proper confession box; keeping a pretty young cousin of twenty-three as a housemaid was causing gossip; commoners were sometimes seated in nobles’ stalls. But these few lapses, regrettable as they were, could not be considered characteristic of the man. The *curé* was a pious religious man who almost never left his little flock in the country. On a rare visit to Paris, he confronted a wayward young man at a friend’s house and vigorously tried to restore him to the Catholic fold.

Back in the privacy of his home, however, surrounded by books and solitude, quite another *curé* emerged. Deep into the night, he poured his hatred, his seething, rancorous scorn, his bitter contempt for Christianity into a book that was to be published after his death. The notion that God had a son was “indecent and ridiculous,” the doctrine of the Holy Spirit “pious jumble,” the resurrection of the flesh an “absurdity.” Studying the Bible revealed a host of contradictions, prophets who

were “liars and impostors,” and above all an “unjust, cruel, and merciless” God, a fantastic wizard who performs trivial miracles for a chosen few while the mass of mankind is perpetually mired in suffering, evil, and oppression. “If God were capable of all this . . . such a God would deserve to be hated, despised, and cursed. . . . He would be crueler than the cruelest tyrants who ever existed or whom one could imagine existing.”

In defense of such “childish” doctrines, Christianity had committed every conceivable “atrociousness”: “Wherever one looks, [Christians] persecute each other with fire and blood to defend their ridiculous beliefs. . . . There is no evil or wickedness that they have not practiced against one another.” The pious *curé* concluded, deep in his secret book, that theology had only three branches: “prejudice, ignorance, and fanaticism”; the Church was the root cause of virtually all the injustice and misery of the world; and humanity could only be saved by “hanging and strangling with the bowels of the priests all the nobles and rulers of the earth.”

Makeshift Moral Alliances

Even when people openly reveal their beliefs, some strange alliances may be formed:

Example: Is Russian novelist and moral philosopher Alexander Solzhenitsyn a Western liberal or a fascist?

Answer: Because he was allied with Western liberals against Soviet repression, he appeared to be a liberal, but he actually favored authoritarianism (so-called Christian, not Marxist authoritarianism) and condemned democracy.

Example: Are teachers of science and teachers of the humanities (history, English, and so forth) (1) natural rivals, or (2) natural allies?

Answer: It depends. For much of the twentieth century, the two were locked in a battle for control of the school curriculum (*vide* C. P. Snow's 1959 book about the "two cultures" and the unbridgeable gap between them). More recently, teachers of science and the humanities have banded together against a resurgent threat to both of them: fundamentalist Christianity, especially the fundamentalist teaching of "creationism." At the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, New Jersey, some of the most distinguished professors of science and the humanities in the United States raised a storm of protest against the appointment of a sociologist of religion (it was bad enough that he was a sociologist, a soft, perhaps even a pseudoscientific field, but a sociologist of religion!).

Example: On what subject did Francis Bacon, one of the founders of modern science, and St. Francis, perhaps the most complete Christian since Christ, entirely agree?

Answer: On the horrors of a religion based on deductive logic. Francis: “Logic is satanic.” Bacon: “The [logical] mind cannot be trusted.” Yet if any two men would have found each other incomprehensible, it would have been the selfless Francis and the schemingly corrupt Bacon.

Example: “Religions” of sense experience are often bitterly opposed to “religions” of deductive logic. Why, then, do popular textbooks lump together these two opposites in speaking about an alleged eighteenth-century Age of Reason?

Answer: Because the two were making common cause, temporarily, and only temporarily, against a hostile Christianity.

Example: “Religions” of either sense experience or of intuition tend to dismiss “religions” of emotion because the latter fill the mind with fervors and passions rather than calm and detachment. But if asked why this calm and detachment is desirable, what do religions of sense experience and intuition reply? So that the unimpassioned wisdom of the conscious mind may be heard, say advocates of sense experience. So that you can escape the wiles, lies, and addictive games of the conscious mind, say advocates of intuition.

Migration of Values/Conversions

Whether hidden or revealed, standing alone or in strange alliances, human values always migrate. In Western history, some popular migrations may be identified in the following vastly oversimplified scheme:

Period	Themes
Pre-modern	Authority (e.g., Christianity)
17th–19th century	Deductive logic (We have to find a post-Christian way to save morals, put them on a firm footing, or chaos will engulf us.)
18th–20th century	Sense experience (Logic is a failure, but experience will show us how to cope.)
19th–20th centuries, especially early 20th	Emotion (Experience is a disappointment, but we can find refuge in a series of secular Christianities: faiths like socialism that are supposed to create a “heaven” on earth.)
20th century, especially 1960s and 1970s	Intuition (Faiths like socialism have proved stressful and disillusioning; we need to retreat from the world of raging emotion to find inner peace and bliss.)
19th–20th centuries, especially late 20th	“Science” (Meditating for sixteen hours at a time is boring; I need to become more realistic, get an advanced legal, business, or scientific education, earn enough money to take care of myself and my family and to pay all the other experts I’ll need to consult in the process.)

In this context, the personal story of Pat Robertson, the Christian evangelist, entrepreneur, and presidential candidate, is especially relevant. Raised in rural Virginia, with its bedrock Christian fundamentalism, he was nevertheless son of a US senator, graduate of Yale Law School, an acquaintance of the young senator John Kennedy and the “dizzy-looking brunette” who became Kennedy’s wife, an habitu  of sophisticated New York nightclubs. As a well-connected and personable expert in the legal field, he could expect to attain whatever he sought (value system based on “science”). When that was not enough, he tried to find larger purpose and meaning in law (emotive legalism), but found no “noble cause,” only “emptiness.” Finally, he accepted Jesus Christ as his savior and enrolled in New York Theological Seminary. While his Ivy League friends forged ahead in the world, he learned “to kneel on the floor with others and weep, to speak in tongues, to pray for cures.” At the urging of an inner voice, and somewhat against his wife’s better judgment, he sold all their possessions and moved into a rectory in the New York slums.

In the end, of course, Robertson did not entirely abandon all worldly accomplishment and success. He simply turned it inside out by founding the Christian Broadcasting Network (with a weekly television audience that eventually reached 28 million and annual revenues in the hundreds of millions), as well

as by becoming a successful for-profit businessman and a candidate for president. “God sent me,” he said, “that’s how . . . it got done.”

Robertson, as much as anybody, represents the complexity, misalliances, and changeability of human values. For every choice that is made, many more must be denied. For every door that closes, many more open up. No matter what is lost through circumstance or poor judgment, new possibilities always arise. It is a fascinating and truly inexhaustible process.

Part Five

Values in the Classroom

Twelve

Teaching Directly about Values

THE PRIMARY PURPOSE of creating a framework, in this case the framework of mental modes with their associated value systems and their innumerable variations and confusions, is never to circumscribe, to reduce, or to caricature. It is rather to provide a kind of catalog for the library of life, so that people can quickly see where they are going, where others would like to lead them, and where they can choose to go if they wish. If nothing else, the framework should give us some bearings and save us some time: in a world of too much information, too many options, too many would-be prophets and teachers tugging us this way and that, it is helpful to be able to establish our bearings, on our own as quickly and confidently as possible.

The framework of mental modes, value systems, and their innumerable variations can also be used to sort through a variety of social issues—for example, the way in which values should or should not be taught in the classroom, the general problem of moral education in schools. Although this entire issue, taken as a whole, would require another book to treat, we might usefully focus on just a few key questions, all of them perennially in the news:

Should elementary and secondary school teaching be “value-neutral”?

On one side of this issue we have Gary Bauer, conservative leader, proponent of family values, former under-secretary of education and candidate for president, who wrathfully condemns the experimentation with a “value-neutral” curriculum that began in the 1970s or even earlier, and who says that “our schools must drop the ridiculous notion that it is possible to teach without teaching values.” On the other side of this issue, we have Richard Cohen of the *Washington Post*:

Will . . . the teaching of values in the schools . . . remedy much of what ails the nation? My school-day recollections say otherwise. I was taught values. The day began with a prayer. We pledged allegiance to the flag and sang “My Country ’Tis of Thee,” including the more religious of the

verses. Once a week we had . . . singing of patriotic songs. The boys wore ties, the girls white blouses and blue skirts, and we were segregated by sex to be taught shop or cooking. We were given no classes in sex education [and] told to eschew drugs. . . . We had a class called “civics” in which we learned . . . about the communist menace and the wonders of our own democracy. . . . We were taught, as I said, values . . . and yet we were the generation that first turned to drugs in a big way . . . that secured abortion as a right . . . that lived together without benefit of marriage and that now provides those awful statistics on divorce and extra-marital sex. . . .

Ours should be called the Placebo Generation. To fight everything from drugs to premarital pregnancies, we choose antiquated weapons and battle on a field of nostalgia. . . . Drugs are a problem, but for the addict not the only one. So is helplessness, despair, poverty—a bleak future in which the instant gratification of drugs (or a child) may amount to the only gratification. . . . Our appalling divorce rate (the world’s highest) was not produced because we, of all the world’s peoples, lack values,

but by economic and social circumstances that rendered them less relevant.

It is certainly not difficult to see what is going on here. Cohen would seem to be an exponent of a value system based on “science” in our special sense of the term. Hence he feels comfortable with the idea that life may be viewed as a series of problems, including drugs and fatherless welfare children, that are situational, social, or economic, that are not responsive to “antiquated” appeals to values, but that can and must be resolved with the right technical tools. What Cohen and other “scientists” of this sort fail to see or acknowledge is that their “value-free” world represents just a set of values, a set of values that are all the more powerful and all encompassing for being somewhat hidden. What is really transpiring between Gary Bauer and Richard Cohen is not an argument over education with values versus education without values, but rather an argument over the kind of values to be taught. Bauer, in the words of his former boss, William Bennett, author, secular preacher, and former secretary of education, wants to teach “the Judeo-Christian tradition . . . patriotism, self-discipline, thrift, honesty, respect for elders . . . that there is a moral difference between the United States and [authoritarian countries].” Cohen may not actually disagree with these values as stated, but he regards them as easily manipulated

by fanatics; masking other, more objectionable values; trivialized by teaching in a civics class; or in any case not representative of his particular ethos and view of what makes the world work. Once it is clear that we are dealing with two contending sets of values, that values of one kind or another always have been and always will be taught in the schools, either directly or suffused through the general curriculum, we can then get on with the real issue, which is forming a political consensus, imperfect as this consensus always is, on what should and what should not be taught in public schools and how it should be taught.

Are primary and secondary schools teaching “godless” humanism?

Margo Szews, writing in the *Washington Post* letters column, makes the case as follows:

Barbara Parker of the People for the American Way reportedly said that trying to define [secular humanism] is like trying to nail Jell-O to a tree. [Your] readers deserve more honest and accurate information. The objective ideology of contemporary secular humanism is clearly outlined in the “Humanist Manifesto II,” which was printed in the September/October 1973 issue of the *Humanist* magazine, the

publishing arm of the American Humanist Association. This creed, an update of the 1933 manifesto, provides a formal statement of beliefs and goals.

In the preface, magazine editor Paul Kurtz states that traditional theism, especially faith in the prayer-hearing God, assumed to love and care for persons, to hear and understand their prayers and to be able to do something about them, is an unproven and outmoded faith. The document further states that promises of immortal salvation or fear of eternal damnation are both illusory and harmful.

The secular humanist's rejection of God invalidates Christian absolutes and dictates moral relativism in the areas of ethics and sexual morality. The Humanist Manifesto II specifically states that Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no theological or ideological sanction.

Although it is true that very few teachers, administrators, and school board members are secular humanists, it must be remembered that books and curriculums used in the classroom come from publishing houses that are greatly influenced by the

“progressive education” philosophy put forth by John Dewey and his present-day advocates. It is highly significant that atheist John Dewey was one of the 34 signers of the 1933 Humanist Manifesto I.

Informed Christian parents, knowing that the Humanist Manifesto II promotes moral relativism, complete sexual freedom, and the “individual’s . . . right to suicide” have to wonder. Are the recent increases in teen pregnancy and teen suicide a mere coincidence, or are we simply reaping the rewards of this “new faith” being taught in our public schools?

A student, John J. Dunphy, further fuels the battle between the old and “new” faith by writing a much-quoted 1983 essay for the *Humanist* stating: “I am convinced that the battle for humankind’s future must be waged and won in the public school classroom by teachers who correctly view their role as the proselytizers of a new faith.” The article continues: “The classroom must and will become an arena of conflict between the old and the new—the rotting corpse of Christianity, together with all its adjacent evils and misery, and the new faith of humanism.” The magazine later prints a disclaimer that the young author’s views are “extreme and irresponsible.”

So is there a new faith called “secular humanism” and is it being foisted on the young? The framework of mental modes and value systems we have presented argues strongly against such an assertion. When one ventures beyond the boundaries of Christianity, there is not just one opposing viewpoint; there are many other basic viewpoints, and really an endless multiplicity of viewpoints. Moreover, at least in contemporary America, no Christian, not even fundamentalist Jerry Falwell, is just a Christian. Almost everyone incorporates and expresses some elements of “science” because it is so much part of the air we breathe, and surely no one is immune to the group loyalties and feelings—for family, friends, or country—associated with emotion.

If colleges and universities want to teach directly about values, how should they go about it?

All schools transmit values, which are omnipresent in human subjects, whether or not they choose to “teach” about values per se. Over the past decade, however, most colleges and universities, including the most illustrious, have made a conscious decision to teach about values, or rather, how to think about values, since there is no intention to indoctrinate students, but rather to show them how to arrive at reasonable and moral solutions on their own. In

effect, American higher education, after the traumas of the 1960s, has come to agree with critic Cleanth Brooks that “it’s always taken for granted . . . that any fool knows what ‘the good life’ is. I think that is the great lie that has been foisted on all of us, that you can leave values and the purposes of life to take care of themselves.” Or as Henry Rosovsky, former dean of arts and sciences at Harvard, said in formulating a new core curriculum for the college in 1976: “An educated person [must] have some understanding of, and experience in, thinking about moral and ethical . . . choices.”

The number of college and university courses on “moral reasoning” has doubled and redoubled and redoubled again—to as many as 15,000 by one reckoning. From one perspective, this is an extraordinary achievement, the virtual redirection of American higher education; from another perspective, it is not quite satisfactory: the effort is certainly there, but the élan and self-confidence are largely missing. Irksome questions remain: What exactly is being taught? Using what methods? Are students learning to make better moral choices?

To answer the first question, we might look at a Harvard course catalog detailing the new core curriculum. Under the heading moral reasoning, we find the following:

Course Type	Number Offered
Deductive [logical] ethical theory	1
Philosophy of law	2
Applied deductive ethical reasoning	2
Political philosophy	2
Specific examples of deductive ethical theories	2

In other words, Harvard, committed to teach moral reasoning rather than specific moral precepts, chose to concentrate on three subjects—moral logic, legal logic, and political logic—all of which are characterized by an emphasis on the logical, deductive method. The intention was clear enough: to be objective, to avoid the mistake of offering up a specific religion. But, as we saw in Chapter Two, modes of moral reasoning such as deductive logic are not completely objective, cannot be completely objective, inevitably carry a freight load of values with them. There is indeed an irony here: both the logician and the social scientist want to be objective. Within their own frames of reference, within the rules developed by their own disciplines, they may achieve a remarkable degree of objectivity. But just relying on logic or social “science” involves a bias, an unwillingness to consider the rival and very different claims, for example, of emotion or intuition. To teach logic to

students is commendable and useful, in morals and in every other department of life. But the model we have offered suggests that logic alone is not enough—we should teach, or at least familiarize students with, all of the different ways that we form values, so that for the first time they can get a true overview—not an entirely objective overview perhaps, because true objectivity is beyond human capacities, but something more all-encompassing than what they have received to date.

In an ideal world of higher education, the study of values would constitute its own department, perhaps a department of “axiology” (the Greek root, *axion* or *axios*, refers to values).^{*} The starting point would not be values per se but rather how our minds work, our various modes of asking and knowing. Even this kind of broad-gauged epistemology (not the narrow epistemology of logicians) might be dry; but leavened with specific examples of human values, as seen in both thought and action, it could be one of the most vibrant departments of the university. It would be the one place where students could unashamedly

* Would “axiology” be taught as a humanities offering or as a social science? It would make little difference, because the distinction between these two fields has always been questionable. Both cover the same human ground, one from a more factual perspective, one from a more theoretical perspective. In practice, the factual and theoretical/systematic views of human affairs are difficult to separate, as they would be in “axiology.”

ask the “big questions” many students agree they would like to ask; where they could spend the passion that used to send them to the philosophy department, only, in many cases, to recoil with disillusion from whatever logical technique they were expected to master; where they could address large human subjects with intellectual rigor, without being mocked and without being subjected to any single professor’s *Weltanschauung*.

A department of “axiology” would be devoted explicitly to the values of openness and tolerance. For example, in exploring different modes of human knowledge, it would seek to avoid the more dogmatic versions of contemporary “reflective judgment,” a doctrinal movement that has some adherents in academe. “Reflective judgment” insists, just as we have insisted, that students need to learn how values are formed, that different modes of forming values need to be understood and mastered. But “reflective judgment” was developed by psychologists and reflects their “scientific” biases: authority and emotion are acknowledged as legitimate modes of mental processing, but lower, less well developed, inferior modes. Ways of forming values in this system form a hierarchy and, not surprisingly, the way of the social scientist sits at the top of the heap. This too is useful, if it makes a student recognize the different ways that his or her mind can proceed. But even a half-serious attempt at objectivity, an almost

unexamined goal among universities in that most professors automatically profess it, requires that the different mental modes of moral inquiry presented in our framework be taught on equal terms, or as a whole, not as a hierarchy constructed to please some one teacher or group of teachers. By following this method, colleges and universities can finally achieve their often-repeated end: to teach how to consider, scrutinize, and test our entrenched value judgments without propagating any specific “religions,” whether organized religions like Christianity, quieter, less assertive “religions” like those based on sense experience, or hidden “religions” like those based on “science.”

Thirteen

Political Value Systems or Ideologies (Taught, Reflected, or Alluded to in Undergraduate Courses) That Express Sense Experience, Logic, and Especially Emotion

AS NOTED IN the previous chapter, students in contemporary colleges and universities are directly exposed to personal values in “moral reasoning” courses. At the same time, they are indirectly exposed to personal values in all their courses, and especially in courses devoted to political and economic philosophy, moral philosophy, and (not least) literary criticism. In the chapters that follow, we will briefly review some of the specific value systems that are either taught, reflected, or alluded to

in such courses. These are all synthetic value systems, and our aim will be to show how they can be fitted into and interpreted within the framework presented in this book. The present chapter will concern itself with the political value systems or ideologies that are typically covered in political philosophy, political science, or history courses.



During the 1930s especially, but in all periods of American history, some of the most powerful and influential value systems have been political and social ideologies such as classical liberalism, conservatism, or communism. Such ideologies typically have a variety of sources. Of the four basic mental modes, sense experience certainly plays a role (we all assess ideas like liberalism or conservatism in terms of our own personal experience in the world). “Science” is usually at least marginally involved, as in our sometimes desperate attempts to “prove” the superiority of one ideology over another, attempts that are rarely successful in changing anyone’s mind. Emotion is always a dominant factor, usually the dominant factor. As we have already seen in Chapter Five, people come together around an idea or cause, thereby creating an essentially tribal religion that provides a high degree of fellowship and emotional support. Although the inspiring idea may be as basic as the desire to advance

one's family or country, it may be as highly abstract and intellectual as Marxist Leninism. Either way, once we have embraced a cause, joined together with others in a tribal compact, we will strongly, even passionately, defend it, sometimes as passionately as if we were defending our own life.

Classical Liberalism

Defined as an evangelical and crusading belief in human freedom, as a pure “religion” of liberty, classical liberalism has been the most powerful and paradoxical ideology of the past four hundred years, powerful because it has literally swept the world, paradoxical because the very idea of individual liberty and autonomy would seem to be the antithesis of tribal community. In practice, however, liberals do form a tribe, a tightly knit tribe committed to the eradication of tyranny and intolerance, and ever watchful against illiberal and “controlling” institutions such as the church, the state, the army, and the family.

Historically, the battle against the church was first and most vehement. The eighteenth-century French liberal Denis Diderot boasted that he was “raining bombs in the house of the Lord” and that the “great prostitute of Babylon” [the church] would soon give way to the “reign of Anti-Christ.” By the nineteenth century liberal opposition to “controlling” institutions

was concentrated on the state, and by the twentieth century liberal salvos were being fired at the family as well, with family life characterized, according to an outraged US Senator Daniel Moynihan, as “dreary, repressive, conducive to the sickness rather than the health of husbands and wives, parents and children alike.” Moynihan subtly misrepresents classical liberalism by arguing that “the two primary institutions which affect the way we behave as individuals are . . . the family and . . . the state. If you weaken the one, you strengthen the other. Surely liberalism began as a movement to curb the power of the state. . . . Just as surely, then, the strength of the liberal tradition in government is bound up with the family.” This statement sounds plausible enough, but it is historically inaccurate. The true classical liberal attitude is equally wary of family, church, or state, and is summed up by Moynihan’s political ally from New York, US vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro: “You know what I learned [in convent school]? Those three [church, state, and family] are the biggest oppressors of women that will ever come along.”

Although the struggle between church and classical liberalism reached its zenith several hundred years ago and is now relatively restrained, it lies just beneath the surface of American society and is symbolized by the tension between liberal Catholic politicians and their archbishops over abortion. In part, Christians

and classical liberals fight so much because they are so alike. They are not just two opposing tribes: they share a belief in history, in a progression to a better life, either a life of freedom and toleration here on earth, or an unearthly paradise after death. Very often, lapsed Christians explore a religion of logic, then of experience, before settling on classical liberalism as their primary creed. If they retain the disciplines of logic and high experience, their devotion to freedom is both anti-Christian and austere moral, the opposite of a wild and profligate freedom. They agree with philosopher Bertrand Russell that “[liberalism] does not consist simply in saying to grown-up people or adolescents: ‘follow your impulses and do as you [please]’ ”; with Judith Shklar of Harvard University that liberalism should not be equated with “selfishness,” that the “very refusal to use public coercion to impose creedal uniformity and uniform standards of behavior demands an enormous degree of self-control”; and with diplomat and political philosopher George Kennan that if you “tell me what framework of discipline you are prepared to accept . . . I will . . . tell you what freedom might mean for you.” In other words, they are like the Englishman described by historian Crane Brinton who “can do as he likes because he couldn’t possibly do anything dangerous to society.”

Provided that the classical liberal is of this type, short of self-indulgence, at peace with self and the

self's passions, intent on a mission of cleansing the world of what liberal critic and historian Lytton Strachey called "this atrocious fog of superstition that hangs over us and compresses our breathing and poisons our lives," he or she is almost always happy, even intensely happy. It is only when the fog lifts a bit, when neither church nor state nor family is particularly oppressive, when freedom and tolerance seem generally to prevail, that the classical liberal becomes a bit nervous and fidgety. The bond that unites him or her with fellow classical liberals falls away, the tribe dissolves, all that remains is autonomy, isolation, loneliness, a fertile ground for violent dissensions and the rebirth of intolerance. We see this phenomenon occasionally in academic settings. As Daniel Boorstin, a Librarian of Congress and celebrated historian, has noted: "We think of universities as places where people are very tolerant, places of free speech. But individual academic people are inclined to be dogmatic." Fortunately for classical liberalism as a religion, the entire world has not yet become as free and tolerant as an American institution of higher learning; there are still multitudes of oppressive dragons yet to be slain; and, so long as threats to freedom exist, classical liberals can have it all, both an ideology of personal liberty and individualism *and* the comradeship and security of membership in a tribe of freedom fighters.

Jacobinism (Utopian Liberalism or Rousseauism)

Classical liberals want men to be free, not because they believe that men are naturally good, but rather because, like Christians, they believe the opposite: that men are naturally evil or at least naturally weak. By limiting the coercive power of institutions such as church, state, and family, they hope to thwart the worst evil of all, which is the concentration of power in criminal hands. Under this doctrine, men such as Hitler will from time to time grasp the reins of state—it cannot be prevented—but their power will be limited because the state itself will always be limited. Moreover, the same cautionary principle applies to church and family. In a free society, evil or foolish or weak individuals will mostly just harm themselves; they will lack the authority to terrorize fellow citizens or children.

Jacobinism, on the other hand, turns classical liberalism on its head by claiming that human beings are naturally good; that evil men are an aberration; that human institutions such as state, church, and family need not be feared, no matter how powerful and all commanding they may be, *once* they are purged of evil-doers and thoroughly controlled by the “people.” In addition, these cleansed institutions can and should be used to promote a variety of social goals, not just

liberty (for example, social justice and equality), and in the process create a more perfect social environment. Among twentieth-century American leaders, Senator George McGovern epitomized this kind of social and political utopianism. McGovern's defeat in the 1972 presidential election was more than just a setback for the Democratic party and a nostalgic New Deal style of politics. It was, as Walter Lippmann described it in the *Washington Post*, a complete "repudiation" of "the 18th-century Jacobin or Rousseauistic . . . belief that man [and his social] environment . . . can be made perfect. . . . Modern society won't accept that philosophy and it is usually repudiated. . . . [It is] philosophically and morally untrue. Man is not naturally good, nor is his nature perfectible. . . . No government can bring people up. They have to achieve it themselves. The [idea] that the government can do it is one of the great illusions of our time."

Lippmann notwithstanding, the idea that human beings are good (or evil) cannot be proven one way or the other. It is an emotional rather than a factual statement, and emotions are not subject to logical or empirical demonstration. At the same time, other Jacobin beliefs are closer to factual statements, and they do not seem to be very logical. Can liberty really be advanced by concentrating power in coercive institutions such as government? Can government be big, strong, highly paternalistic, yet completely

controlled by the “people”? Can the dream embodied in the French Jacobin slogan “liberty-equality-fraternity,” the dream that pure liberty and pure equality are equally attainable in a just society governed by powerful liberal institutions, ever be realized? The bald truth, readily observable in life, is that maximum equality of individuals can only be achieved by curbing liberty and vice versa. A completely free society permits and encourages people to better themselves relative to their neighbors. A completely egalitarian society must have a means of enforcing its rules, either a vast controlling bureaucracy or a police state, and neither is compatible with liberty. Viewed in this light, Jacobin views are not just metaphysical, like a belief in human goodness, something to be accepted or rejected according to one’s emotional preferences. They are also statements of fact and logic, which turn out to be at least partly unfactual and illogical.

Jacobin Utilitarianism

This faith, which swept the United States during the 1970s in the persons of Ralph Nader, Governor Jerry Brown, and President Jimmy Carter and lingered in the unsuccessful 1988 presidential campaign of Michael Dukakis, begins by reaffirming the basic Jacobin goals of liberty, equality, and progress through government. At the same time, there is a sense

that these goals, however worthy, have led to unrealizable expectations, that related government programs have been poorly designed and managed, that inefficiency and corruption, but especially inefficiency, have become rampant in American society in general, and that all the old assumptions and techniques, especially the technique of taxing and spending to improve the social environment, must be reexamined, lest people turn away from Jacobinism entirely.

During his years as governor of California, Jerry Brown (elected in 1974 at age thirty-seven) pioneered the dramatic change in approach. He denied that he had a mission (“What do you mean mission? That’s so cosmic. I just want to reduce the sum of human misery”) and promised little (“There’s no free lunch . . . you don’t get something for nothing”), thus leaving the impression that he was not a Jacobin at all, since Jacobins always have missions and are always full of promises. By contrast, Brown was downright bleak and pessimistic (“Things are going to get a lot worse than they are now”), skeptical and critical, the inquisitor-general of government programs with an obsessive concern for detail as well as for efficiency (“Only an efficient system can be just and vice-versa”), an enthusiast of 18-hour workdays, and a nondelegator of authority. The governor’s central idea and mood (what might be characterized as Jacobinism dressed up in a severe black suit, the millenarianism of the

efficiency experts) was reinforced by a variety of symbols: the vetoing of a bill that would have officially redesignated garbage dumps as sanitary landfills; reducing staff salaries; cutting out funds to buy briefcases for state officials; living in a small apartment with a mattress on the floor rather than the new governor's mansion built by the previous governor, Ronald Reagan; driving an old Plymouth rather than being chauffeured in a limousine; flying tourist class after sale of the governor's jet. Behind this plenitude of symbols, which projected both populism and realism ("Public officials [should] act like servants of the people, not like kings"), were—more symbols: "People ask me, 'What's your program?' What the hell does that mean? [These] words have no meaning in my head. . . . I'll provide leadership. [I'll] confront the confusion and hypocrisy of government."

Jerry Brown was, himself, a singular symbol of the new and deflated Jacobinism, but he was not alone. President Jimmy Carter mirrored many of his thoughts and techniques. Consumer activist Ralph Nader also demonstrated how a purely private citizen could devote his life to "millenarian efficiency." At least initially, he lived alone in a boarding house, wore old army surplus clothes, worked constantly in a small, cluttered basement office, and inspected used Corvairs with exactly the same attitude that Jerry Brown and Jimmy Carter brought to government. In

the end, of course, Brown and Carter were defeated at the polls, and Nader's political power steadily declined in Washington.

The problem for all three of these figures lay in the contradictions, both the old, unresolved contradictions of traditional Jacobinism (trying to reconcile populism and big government, freedom and equality) and the new contradictions of a "deflated" and "efficient" Jacobinism. First, Brown, Carter, and Nader kept stressing honesty without saying exactly what they thought or stood *for*. Second, they spoke about commitment, motivation, sacrifice, and, in Carter's famous "malaise" speech, the "longing for meaning," then turned their own and their followers' attention to the need to put health warnings on salt labels, energy quotas, synthetic fuels, zero-based budgeting, and similar topics. The alternation between earnest exhortation and dry-as-dust engineering was not only confusing, it was disturbing. Such an approach might reform Jacobinism, but it could not save it, because it stripped away the emotional core, the ability to bring people together into a passionately shared community. Once the passion was lost, the process had to be efficient—there was nothing else to recommend it. In the end, weighed down by contradictions, both old and new, the process could not even be truly efficient, and so, over a period of years, the support for this kind of political

philosophy declined, presumably (like other emotional “religions,” which never die completely) destined to be revived again and again in some indeterminate future.

Violent Revolutionism

“Religions” of emotion are often contradictory and paradoxical to a degree. They are “religions” of emotion, after all, not religions of logic, and people’s emotions are paradoxical. On the other hand, most Americans want their emotional “religions” to be reasonably logical, at least not overtly illogical. They are therefore not much tempted by one of the most contradictory and paradoxical movements of all, violent revolutionism, although it has played such a major role during the last two centuries: the capture of the Tuilleries and the fall of the Bastille in France; the storming of the Winter Palace and the Forbidden City in Russia and China, respectively; the fall of the shah of Iran in 1979.

Because of these momentous successes and failures, violent revolutionism has been extensively studied and is well understood. For example, most revolutionists insist that they are fighting for change.* But on a purely

* The original American revolutionists were notable exceptions. They argued that they were fighting to protect an old order against a new, more repressive order being imposed from outside.

emotional level they are often rebelling against change, against the dismal dissolution and anxiety and isolation brought on by the weakening of the old order, whether triggered by discrete events, such as economic or military setbacks, political changes, or even by economic successes that come faster than people and institutions can absorb them. It may be cynical to observe that revolutions never occur in truly static, unchanging societies, only in societies already undergoing rapid change and social disturbance (cynical because this observation can and will be used by reactionaries opposed to every possible reform), but this phenomenon is confirmed by the historical record.* Once people are involuntarily expelled from the warm womb of the old order (warm and familiar even if thoroughly rotten), they may become desperate to regain a sense of community and fellowship. Frequently, they are so desperate that they will trade their very lives for a moment of intense comradeship, as described by a Viet Cong guerrilla fighter:

I always liked going into battle because the atmosphere was so good. Everybody knew

* On the other hand, rapid change and social disturbance do not necessarily lead to violent revolution. For example, massive social, political, and economic changes beginning in the late 1980s in Eastern Europe and then the former Soviet Union did not necessarily mean that violent revolution would follow, only that the historical risk of violent revolution was high.

that they were going to die. They had no food, and nothing to drink for days. If a man had something to eat, he would share it with you, and if you had nothing to give in return, you would show him the letter you had just got from your wife. Everybody loved each other because they all knew they were going to die.

And if these sentiments sound too foreign—too remote from the American experience—one need only think of those Harvard students who stormed and occupied University Hall, the local analogue of the Tuilleries and the Winter Palace, in the fall of 1969. As one of them wrote in the *Crimson* (the student newspaper):

What was most euphoric, however, was us and what we were to each other. For those few hours we were brothers and sisters. . . . You had to realize, whatever your politics and whatever your tactics, that we were very beautiful in University Hall, we were very human, and we were very together.

It is paradoxical that revolutionists should find such intense community in the very act of destroying the traditional social fabric.

It is even more paradoxical that the craving for this supreme emotional “high” tends to become uncontrollable and to consume all the stated objectives of

the revolution. After a time, the emphasis on “wider community” over “law and order” leads to a backlash, to fascism, to the imposition of order through fear and intimidation, and, at least temporarily, to the loss of any genuine human community at all. It is not surprising that the Harvard student just quoted, a brilliant and sensitive individual who published his first novel while still in school and who wrote in the same student newspaper article that “emotions are our guts; without them we are but thinking machines, and the destruction of which such machines ([US National Security Advisor] Bundy, [Secretary of State] Kissinger) are capable has left its scars on all of us”—should have committed suicide a few years after the 1969 “revolution.”

Classical Conservatism

Confronted with classical liberalism, Jacobinism, or violent revolutionism, classical conservatives just shake their heads as if to say: what a muddle. You all say that you want liberty or equality or a root-and-branch remaking of society, but you really want what everybody wants, you really want a loving community, and you are going about it in a completely backward way by glorifying individualism. It should be perfectly obvious that, to build true community, you have to subordinate the individual to

the group. Not an ersatz group, like an enclave of classical liberals joined together only by their struggle against the alleged oppressions of church, state, or family, or a cadre of revolutionists, passionately united for a brief moment in an orgy of destruction, but a truly durable group, one built over long periods of time with patience, skill, and discipline, a permanent and organic institution—in other words, the very same church, state, or family that the classical liberals loathe.

Accepting and subordinating oneself to church, state, and family along with the entire web of traditions, customs, and obligations that come with them is not only good for society, classical conservatism holds, it is good for the individual as well. Living outside such groups is a sterile hell of isolation, a condition that magnifies all the weakness, laziness, folly, stupidity, and ignorance that is our natural condition. Within church, state, and family is the possibility, though only the possibility, of civilization, defined not as money or power, the inflaming and satisfaction of appetites, but as a spiritual search.

The British conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan once said, “If people want a sense of purpose, they can get it from their archbishops.” True conservatives disagree: serving institutions, governments and families, as well as churches, suffuses all of life with a quiet spiritual purpose. Alexander

Solzhenitsyn, the Russian exile and Nobel Prize winner, captured this sentiment in a Harvard University commencement address: “If [Jacobinism] were right in declaring that man is born to be happy, he would not be born to die. Since his body is doomed to die, his task on earth evidently must be of a more spiritual nature. It cannot be unrestrained enjoyment of everyday life. It cannot be the search for the best ways to obtain material goods and then cheerfully get the most out of them. It has to be the fulfillment of a permanent, earnest duty so that one’s life journey may become an experience of moral growth, in that one may leave life a better human being than one started it.”

To pursue this spiritual quest through group service, social order is a must. Excessive personal liberty imperils this order, and so does social and economic equality. The first two statements are intuitively obvious (order \neq liberty), but why the third? Why the ban against even trying to build a classless society? If one is meant to subordinate oneself to the group, why not divest oneself of personal wealth like a candidate for the Catholic priesthood?

The conservative’s answer is that equality is unnatural, contrary to human nature and gifts, impractical and unrealistic. People are born unequal so that they may play different roles, make their own unique contribution to the group. Moreover, society

needs the spur of inequality to realize its full potential. In both spiritual and physical spheres, people must always be pushed to exert themselves, either by the hope of advancement or by the fear of the lash, and hope is by far the more effective method. The conservative social agenda therefore calls for a clear division of labor and rewards within the group, along with a commitment to individual and corporate excellence, no matter how much inequality or “elitism” results.

Such emphasis on the organic, institutionalized group, equally committed to spiritual experience and worldly excellence, tolerant of inequality and elitism, intolerant of individualism and social deviance, is the keynote for classical conservatism. The most consistent (perhaps the only consistent) classical conservative in recent American public life has been the newspaper and television commentator George Will, an individual who defies the traditional conservative reputation for being inarticulate, wary of words and abstractions. Like Burke and Disraeli before him, Will offers a colorful and reasoned defense of classical conservatism, with a redemptive call for more social control and for less emphasis on money and capitalism, for “soulcraft” rather than statecraft, but even he might have difficulty answering the following four questions posed by liberal critics:

1. *How can you tell when there is enough institutional (church, state, family) control over the individual? At what point does this control tip over into fascism? (Presumably at the point that “impostor” conservatives such as US Senator Joe McCarthy seize power, but this can be hard to know in advance or to correct after the fact.)*
2. *Why are so many confirmed classic conservatives and defenders of the status quo already rich? (It is true that many poor people, especially poor whites in America, are also conservative, at least on social issues.)*
3. *If human nature is so sinful, why concentrate it in powerful and coercive institutions? Why not spread the power widely as classic liberals suggest? (Presumably because scattered institutions won't be powerful enough to practice “soulcraft,” to shape human souls, whether they want to be “shaped” or not.)*
4. *Is classical conservatism consistent with democracy (a liberal invention) and vice versa? (Alexander Solzhenitsyn exemplifies this problem. He is a passionate conservative who regards Marxist Leninism as “a dark un-Russian whirlwind that descended on us from the West.” He hates cities [“cancerous tumors”], industrialism, polluting internal combustion engines, and other examples of “liberal modernism.” He wants an organic, religious, nationalistic society that will release all the*

captive non-Russian nationalities in the Soviet Union, isolate itself from the West, sanctify manual labor and country living, and develop Siberia for the Russian people. How to get there? Certainly not by violent revolution, but especially not by democratic change: “Russia is authoritarian; let it remain so and let us no longer try to change that.” It is no wonder that the Republican Party platform in 1976 called Solzhenitsyn a “great beacon of human courage and morality” while an aide to Henry Kissinger said in private, “Let’s face it; he’s just about a fascist.” It is difficult to know what to make of this kind of conservatism, for in the end, in its insistence that conservatism and democracy do not mix, in its preference for authoritarian institutions that, in Solzhenitsyn’s words, will “be based on genuine concern and love on the part of the rulers, not only for themselves and those around them, but also for their people, and all neighboring peoples, too,” it seems to slip away from the old conservative realism, the old belief in a sinful human nature, and into a utopian and almost Jacobin fantasy about redeeming the world through big government.)

Contemporary Conservatism and Liberalism

What is called conservatism in America today is of course quite different from classical conservatism, just as liberalism is no longer classical liberalism. To put this in perspective, President Ronald Reagan was a contemporary conservative, but this meant he was a classical liberal in his economic policy (as much free enterprise as possible) and a classical conservative in his social policy (more government control over pornography, abortion, contraception, school prayer, etc.). Reagan's most emotionally charged rhetoric reflected this split: freedom (classical liberalism) was mixed with heroism, self-sacrifice, duty, and service (classical conservatism), although the latter was more personal, less abstract, and thus more moving, as when heroic and little-known Americans were presented during State of the Union addresses. Contemporary liberals, on the other hand, including many Democrats, mix classical motifs in a nearly opposite fashion. Regardless of whether they are economic Jacobins (pro-equality), economic neo-Jacobins (equality and efficiency), or economic classical conservatives (strengthening the cooperative social compact to guarantee jobs), they want more government control of the economy, while on the social side they tend to be classical liberals favoring

less control (pro-civil liberty). Complicating this picture further, the term *liberal* has fallen into such disrepute (it was a badge of honor for many people as in the 1940s and 1950s) that it has rapidly been abandoned. In future political discourse, we shall probably have to replace it with some suitable euphemism that will be generally understood to mean more economic and less social control.

Secular Puritanism (Nonreligious Fundamentalism)

A variant of contemporary conservatism is secular Puritanism, a movement represented by former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in England and by some American conservative political activists such as Paul Weyrich. As Weyrich defines the concept, which he calls “cultural conservatism,”

It stands . . . apart from the Reagan [or Bush] administration—not because the administration is too moderate, but because it is, on the whole, often trivial. Many key White House advisors appear to be utterly unaware of our cultural and national breakdown. At the same time, cultural conservatism stands apart from other Reagan [or Bush] critics on the right—such as the New Right. . . . To be blunt—and I speak

as one of the founders and leaders of the New Right—it has no issues, in most people’s minds, beyond school prayer and abortion. . . . Even if its positions on abortion and school prayer were adopted as national policy tomorrow, it would be no cure. The disease is the acceptance by the culture of immediate gratification. Abortion, drug abuse, alcoholism, street and white-collar crime, and casual sex are all simply symptoms. Cultural conservatism also rejects the argument that the free market is the only answer to most problems . . . and unlike the Religious Right, it does not ask anyone to believe that traditional values are absolutely true, only that these values succeed in providing for citizens in our culture. . . . The Religious Right can be comfortable with cultural conservatism, especially its tenet that human nature is a constant, but it must accept the fact that some cultural conservatives may not be religious.*

* For example, British journalist Henry Fairlee (*The Spoiled Child of the Western World, The Seven Deadly Sins*) called himself a “reluctant unbeliever” who consequently had a “hole” in his life, but who thought that modern Westerners were in trouble because they had thrown away their Bible, knowingly transgressed the moral law, and willfully indulged in sin and indiscipline.

Cultural conservatism, unlike the New Right, has not yet committed itself to the Republican Party. Although its fundamentalism and evangelism appeal to some Republicans, its populism and skepticism about free enterprise appeal to some Democrats. William S. Lind, whom Weyrich calls the “theoretician of cultural conservatism,” worked for Democrats and even co-authored a book with Democratic presidential candidate Gary Hart, an individual who, rightly or wrongly, became identified with nontraditional values. As Weyrich explains this puzzling phenomenon:

The Democratic Party’s elite is dominated by the remnants of the liberation movement of the 1970s, [but] its rank and file is more conservative culturally than the typical upwardly mobile Republican. In particular, the blue-collar voters the Democrats lost so disastrously in 1980 and 1984 [and 1988] have strong cultural-conservative instincts. It would be risky for a Democratic candidate to try to reach around the elite to the party’s broad membership and to cultural conservatives who think of themselves as Republicans, but the success of one who did so might be dramatic.

Mandarinism

Another, very different, variant of contemporary conservatism, mandarinism, is reflected in the person of former national security advisor and secretary of state Henry Kissinger. Here we have the basic conservative vision—service to institutions and transmission of values—but rendered in a highly elitist and tragically pessimistic form. As with the old mandarinism of ancient China, in which the most promising students were carefully groomed to compete for the highest bureaucratic positions, primarily in government but also in state religion, or in the army, there are a series of interlocking “great games” to be played. One game is for the leaders of our own established institutions—corporations, military services, governments, professional organizations, churches—to search out and cultivate the best and brightest of the next generation, and for these young “stars,” usually the graduates of elite educational institutions, to cultivate their powerful elders in turn. The second “great game” is for the “stars” to compete with one another for a limited number of places at the top by working sixty-hour work weeks and otherwise proving their devotion and dedication. The third “great game” is for the leaders of institutions, finally crowned after decades of simultaneously serving and maneuvering, to compete against other institutions as the president of Microsoft or

IBM eventually gets to compete against other computer companies or Kissinger eventually got to compete against the Soviets.

Described thus baldly, mandarinism seems to be about power, not religious values. Looked at more closely and gently, however, it is extremely rich in values, especially emotional values. For bright young people to devote themselves, their youth, their lives—their every waking hour, in many cases—to old and often troubled institutions, forsaking either a life of leisure and liberty or the chance to become entrepreneurs and build new and bold ventures, is obviously an important moral choice, one fraught with implications for society as well as for each individual. Britain's traditional devotion to mandarinism, especially a mandarinism that downgraded business and almost totally excluded entrepreneurship, was a significant factor in her decline from a world power accounting for almost 50 percent of the world's economic production during the mid-nineteenth century to one accounting for approximately 5 percent today.

For those who choose the mandarin life, either by conscious choice or out of simple conformity, swept along from one good school to another and then one prestigious job after another, there is often a sense of exhilaration, especially if they are winning the great game and their advancement is rapid. Also, after a time, comes the sober realization, so well expressed

by Kissinger, that the institution one has captured and now represents is perpetually in jeopardy, beset by indiscipline and decay, utterly resistant to even the boldest efforts to lead and renew. In other words, the service of institutions, but especially of “great” institutions, is a grinding, thankless, Sisyphean task that in the end makes all the world’s cleverness and all the world’s victories turn to dust. The only realistic aim for a true conservative is consequently not to triumph, in the sense of redeeming the institution he or she serves, but only to achieve a certain equilibrium, to maintain order, and thus to postpone, for a little while longer, like a faithful Chinese civil servant in the waning days of an imperial dynasty, the decline or demise that is eventually sure to come.

Entrepreneurialism

The opposite of mandarinism is entrepreneurialism—the burning desire to build the new rather than preserve the old. Henry Kissinger, by serving Harvard and then the US government, chose to be a mandarin; his younger brother Walter, by building a private company, chose to be an entrepreneur. While still a professor, Henry sometimes looked wistfully at what might have been if he had followed Walter’s career: entrepreneurship seemed so much freer, so much less fettered by the dead hand of the past

and of bureaucracy, so much more “American,” and, not incidentally, so much more rewarding financially. Later, it was perhaps Walter’s turn to be wistful about his brother’s career.

Although mandarinism and entrepreneurialism seem to be polar opposites, they actually share some elements in common. At first glance, entrepreneurship seems to be a form of classical liberalism rather than classical conservatism. Individuals who do not “fit in,” who insist on being their own boss, who want freedom and “financial independence” from existing groups and institutions set out to build a company (or, if financial independence is less critical, set out to build a nonprofit institution). In reality, however, entrepreneurs are not free. They sacrifice themselves totally to achieve their dream, and even if they make millions in the process, they will usually have little time to enjoy their money. For one who finally “succeeds” and passes the leadership of the new institution on to others, both leisure and money quickly lose their allure. Before long, the retiree is pining for another entrepreneurial challenge, for a new sense of commitment, for the classical conservative joys of being part of a group again, especially a group that is united in the struggle to give birth to a new company or institution. So, in the end, entrepreneurship and mandarinism, for all the differences in what they hope to accomplish, for all the unbridled optimism

of the one and Kissingerian pessimism of the other, ultimately boil down to something not totally dissimilar: a very practical mixture of ambition and self-sacrifice, together with a willingness to devote all one's time and energy—and then a little more—in the service of an institutional cause.

Legalism (The Religion of Law)

Legalism, like entrepreneurialism, is a compromise between classical liberalism and classical conservatism. It is liberal in that freedom can be guaranteed by written laws; conservative in that, once the laws are written, everyone must conform to them. Whether pursued from the liberal or conservative side, the legal life has always been much more than a profession in America. Every father wants his son to be a lawyer and, increasingly, every mother wants her daughter to be a lawyer as well. Once students have passed the bar examination, they become members of a large priesthood, one that is maintained in considerable comfort and finds its apotheosis in the single most prestigious American institution, the Supreme Court.

Within American society, the worldly religion of law mingles with and reinforces the unworldly religion of Christianity in unexpected ways. Both the legal community and the church have been forces for discipline united in their disapproval of “dropping

out” and sexual freedom, though lawyers are rather more in favor of hard work and may wink at sexual escapades provided that they do not interfere with eighteen-hour days at the law library whereas preachers may reverse the emphasis. Lawyers have also been, until quite recently, remarkable guardians of financial probity. Whatever individuals may have done, bar associations have maintained the strictest rules against financial conflict of interest, self-promotion, and self-aggrandizement. Only during the 1980s were these constraints finally thrown off: lawyers advertised; they clogged the courts with nuisance suits; they stopped working by the hour whenever they could get a flat fee or a percent of a financial “deal”; they chased huge class-action tort fees, fees in some cases making them centi-millionaires; they began to go into business for themselves, operating as investment bankers, real estate operators, and a host of other roles while still supposedly practicing law.

Did all this mean the end of law as a religion—as more than a profession and much more than a business? Not likely, because law is such an integral part of the American emotional fabric. But if lawyers keep up their current level of financial promiscuity, they may eventually represent a debased and discredited religion, a powerful secular force that has been largely stripped of its inner emotional meaning.

Social Darwinism (the Religion of Selfishness, Winning, and Power)

All the social ideologies treated up to this point have had—at their heart—a high degree of unselfishness. Even the ones that seemed at first glance to promote selfishness—classical liberalism or entrepreneurialism, for example, have in fact promoted a great deal of selflessness as well. Social Darwinism, by contrast, is a religion of pure selfishness: life is about survival; survival is accomplished through power and dominance; the purpose of life is therefore to gain control of others through whatever means are available, however brutal or coercive, because might is always right. The character Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* defines Social Darwinism in its most extreme form: "Extraordinary men have a right to commit any crime and to transgress the law in any way, just because they are extraordinary." In everyday American life, a mild and socially acceptable form of Social Darwinism is exemplified by baseball player and manager Pete Rose of the Cincinnati Reds or the man whose record Rose pursued over the years, Ty Cobb, who once said:

The man who stood between me and victory was my enemy. Baseball is a red-blooded game for red-blooded men . . . a game of merciless competition . . . and

mollycoddles better stay out. . . . Clubs fight desperately to win. Players fight desperately for their jobs. It's survival of the fittest, a struggle for supremacy. It expresses more nearly than any other game the aggressive American fighting spirit, the determination to succeed. If thin-skinned young fellows don't like that type of play, why don't they take up ping-pong?

Cobb's doctrine is loaded with paradoxes. It is bold and assertive, yet its underlying emotional tone is one of fear. It is selfish and premised on "getting mine" yet also highly disciplined and puritanical. Even while glorifying "survival of the fittest," it constantly emphasizes duty, as in Cobb's assertion that he has a "duty" to be a man, which is to say, to try his hardest to win. It also extols team spirit. Even the nastiest, most selfish and egotistical Social Darwinist is rarely solitary. Like a Mafia chieftain, he tries to enlist a group of followers by promising them a share, however small, in the communal spoils. In the case of Hitler, he unites an entire nation in the pursuit of raw power. Those who sign up under the leader's banner of shared greed and aggrandizement are ironically expected to be model soldiers within the group: Mafiosi engage in elaborate blood oaths of brotherhood; Himmler listed the virtues of the Nazi SS as "loyalty, honesty, obedience, hardness, decency, poverty, and bravery." Moreover,

the new recruits are encouraged to think of themselves as “supermen,” epitomes of fitness and power, but are then forced into rigid bureaucratic structures and often made to abase themselves in the most degrading manner before their “superior” officers.

If we look around the world today for examples of Social Darwinism—persons who are out for themselves and only themselves, who embrace a group or wider cause only because they think it will further their ends, of social systems that combine bold assertion with craven fear, “getting mine” with puritanism, viciousness with a rigid code of personal loyalty, individualism with bureaucracy—we would have to choose the post-World War II former Soviet Union first, not the Soviet Union of official communist ideology, but the real Soviet Union.* Ironically, we might next choose our own Wall Street. Although the comparison seems absurd, both the Kremlin of Communist days and contemporary Wall Street often seem to share a similar outlook—it is just that the *apparatchiks* measure their power and success in titles, fancy apartments, cars, and country dachas, whereas the investment bankers measure theirs directly in dollars.

* It is an interesting observation that revolutionaries, whether Russian or French or Chinese or other, often become Social Darwinists once they are in power. For as Theodore White has written about Mao Zedong’s willingness to see old revolutionary comrades murdered: “Suffering is a bond, but power is a drug.”

Otherwise, it often seems much the same: not just the encouragement but the intense glorification of personal and group greed, of macho competition within and without the group, of being the fittest, in the dual sense of strongest “producer” and wiliest bureaucratic manipulator, of being a “winner,” no matter what the cost to self or society.

Fourteen

Economic Value Systems or Ideologies (Taught, Reflected, or Alluded to in Undergraduate Courses) That Express Sense Experience, Logic, and Especially Emotion

Capitalism

THE UNIFYING IDEA behind a social ideology (such as classical liberalism), the idea that unites people behind a common cause and against common enemies, concerns the organization of society. The unifying idea behind an economic ideology (such as capitalism), on the other hand, concerns the organization of economic production. These two

kinds of ideologies tend to get mixed up in the public mind. For example, some people think that classical liberalism, the religion of freedom, is indistinguishable from capitalism, the religion of private property, free enterprise, and limitless individual opportunity. But if this were true, how can one explain a country such as Singapore, a thriving capitalist economy that is socially authoritarian? Or President Ronald Reagan throughout the 1980s, who was very conservative on social issues but totally committed to “free enterprise”? In reality, it proved a fantasy to suppose that Russia, if only it adopted capitalism, would by that fact eventually emerge as a liberal and democratic state. And it is equally wrong to believe, as many Jacobins have, that the elimination of capitalism will automatically produce a just society based on a fair sharing of resources.

If capitalism is neither the font of liberty nor the source of all the injustice in the world, what exactly is it? First, it is a recognition of the extraordinary power of *compound interest*, a power that has remained undiscovered and unused for most of human history. For example, if you invest \$100 at 10 percent interest per year, at the end of a century you will have \$1.4 million; at the end of two centuries, \$19.0 billion; and at the end of five centuries, a sum vastly greater than the world’s current gross national product (5 followed by twenty-two zeros). The principle of compound interest guarantees that any society can eventually get

rich. Second, capitalism is about *moral qualities*, specifically hard work, discipline, and patience. To make compound interest pay off, you must be willing to save and work for your grandchildren. It is precisely because most people find it impossible to do this, to subordinate their interests to those of future generations, that human societies throughout history have been so mired in poverty.

Third, capitalism is about the diffusion of knowledge and money, which means the *diffusion of economic power*. So-called moral slackness is actually only one reason that societies have failed to realize the fruits of compound interest. The other reason is that governments have monopolized power, and governments, unlike parents with children, invariably spend all their resources today without much thought for the morrow. Why did imperial China, so rich in culture, remain economically poor for thousands of years? Because the privileged class, the mandarins, worked only for the government. Even when they accumulated vast personal fortunes, they could not pass it on to future generations. Why did the great Arab cultures of the Middle Ages suffer the same fate? Because, as the French historian Fernand Braudel pointed out, the rich merchants “were rarely able to maintain their positions for more than a generation; they were devoured by political society.” In postwar Russia, the state wasted most of society’s substance

on armaments. In the advanced democracies, government not only taxes and spends; it also inflicts hidden taxes such as inflation and deficit financing, both of which undermine the saving and investment process.

Fourth, capitalism is about *inequality*. Within its own logic, this is not viewed as a defect but as a virtue. Inequality is needed for motivation. It is hard enough to save for one's children and grandchildren, but impossible if everyone's children will have the same. Moreover, the rich, even the most profligate and undeserving rich, play a vital economic role. If all the wealth of all the richest families were redistributed throughout society, it would add only a few dollars to the average household's income, a few dollars that would almost certainly be spent. Only by piling up wealth in individual hands, so much wealth that even the most determined profligate could not spend it all, will society be sure of keeping most of its savings intact, and therefore available for productive investment. In this peculiar sense, the rich, whatever their personal qualities, are stewards and trustees of society's future.

Finally, capitalism is about *success*, the ethic of success. Hard work, discipline, patience, and similar moral qualities are lauded, but they are not enough to earn a reward. The capitalist must also be efficient and successful in order to enrich himself. As Friedrich Hayek, an economist who was perhaps the most inveterate champion of capitalism, has written: "In a

[capitalist] society it is neither desirable nor practicable that material rewards should be made generally to correspond to what men recognize as merit." It is not duty performed but end results that count.

Having thus stripped capitalism to its bare essentials (compound interest; savings ethic; diffusion of knowledge, money, and power; economic inequality; and success ethic), what do we see? To its defenders, we see a paragon of human artifice, especially in the third element, the diffusion of power. In a capitalist society, Nobel Prize winning economist Milton Friedman points out, even the richest individual has only a tiny fraction of the power of a party leader in Russia; conversely, even the lowliest worker has enough power to secure some rights, and these rights tend to expand along with the economic pie. Moreover, he adds, the range for constructive social action is exceptionally broad: "Say I'm in a collectivist society and I want to save an endangered species; I want to save the heron. I have to persuade people in charge of the government to give me money to do it. I have only one place I can go; and with all the bureaucratic red tape that would envelop me, the heron would be dead long before I ever saw a dollar, if I ever did. In a free-enterprise capitalist society, all I have to do is find one crazy millionaire who's willing to put up some dough and, by God, I can save the heron."

Critics of capitalism, on the other hand, even friendly critics, see a different picture. The Swiss theologian Karl Barth, who accepted much of capitalism as an economic necessity, thought that the capitalist religion was an “atrocious”—on the same order as “war . . . militarism . . . prostitution [and] alcoholism.” Economist John Maynard Keynes, writing in the wake of the Great Depression, deplored both the “appeal to the money-making and money-loving instincts of individuals” and the banal glorification of success, but nevertheless warned that the time to abandon the less attractive aspects of the capitalist creed was “not yet. For at least another hundred years we must pretend to ourselves and to everyone that fair is foul and foul is fair; for foul is useful and fair is not. Avarice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little longer still. For only they can lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight.” Keynes’s biographer Roy Harrod expressed the same ambivalence: capitalism, properly managed, would underwrite the good life for all, but only if it was clearly understood that the term *good* was defined by art and intellect, not by money:

After so many generations of toil and drudgery, the people, through the rising standard of education and . . . the rising standard of living made possible by [science and capitalism], were coming within sight of the

Promised Land. . . . There, on the bank of [a] slowly flowing river, new generations would . . . discuss books, philosophy, the nature of the good life, and the characters of their friends. There they would learn to be critical and to entertain those crisp and bold ideas that each new age needed. . . . There, too, in those happy surroundings, a love of the beautiful and of the gracious arts of life would be fostered. . . . It was a sacred trust. If art failed and intellect declined, the people would find that, after all their struggles, the promised inheritance had become a desert.

Utopian Communism

Utopian communism, the doctrine of total economic equality preached by Lenin, Mao Zedong, and the Cambodian Pol Pot, still exists as a theoretical alternative to capitalism, from which it sprang, but as a “religion” in our sense of the term it is nearly dead throughout the world, and in America it is stone dead. To recapture some of the old appeal, before the tides of blood washed up from the Soviet purges, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and the Cambodian massacres, before all the embarrassing economic failures, it is necessary to look backward, to

the 1920s, when Keynes provided his usually shrewd if somewhat naïve appraisal, an appraisal that capitalists need to study and think about all the harder as they see communism collapsing around them:

Leninism [like capitalism] is a combination of two things . . . religion and business. We are shocked because the religion is new, and contemptuous because the business, being subordinated to the religion instead of the other way round, is highly inefficient. . . . If we want to frighten ourselves in our capitalist easy-chairs, we can picture the Communists of Russia as though the early Christians led by Attila were using the equipment of the Holy Inquisition . . . to enforce the literal economics of the New Testament. . . .

Like other new religions, [Leninism] seems to take the colour and gaiety and freedom out of everyday life and to offer a drab substitute in the square wooden faces of its devotees. Like other new religions, it persecutes without justice or pity those who actively resist it. Like other new religions, it is unscrupulous. Like other new religions, it is filled with missionary ardour and oecumenical ambitions. . . . For me, brought up

in a free air undarkened by the horrors of religion, with nothing to be afraid of, Red Russia holds too much which is detestable.

Yet we shall miss the essence of the new religion if we stop at this point. The Communist may justly reply that all these things belong not to his ultimate Faith but to the tactics of Revolution. . . . The Revolution is to be a supreme example of the means justified by the end. The soldier of the Revolution must crucify his own human nature, becoming unscrupulous and ruthless, and suffering himself a life without security or joy—but as the means to his purpose and not its end.

What, then, is the essence of the new religion as a New Order upon earth? . . . In one respect Communism but follows other famous religions. It exalts the common man and makes him everything. Here there is nothing new. But there is another factor in it which also is not new but which may, nevertheless, in a changed form and a new setting, contribute something to the true religion of the future, if there be any true religion. Leninism is absolutely, defiantly non-supernatural, and its emotional and

ethical essence centres about the individual's and the community's attitude towards the Love of Money

To me it seems clearer every day that the moral problem of our age is concerned with the love of money, with the habitual appeal to the money motive in nine-tenths of the activities of life, with the universal striving after individual economic security as the prime object of endeavour, with the social approbation of money as the measure of constructive success, and with the social appeal to the hoarding instinct as the foundation of the necessary provision for the family and for the future. The decaying religions around us, which have less and less interest for most people unless it be as an agreeable form of magical ceremonial or of social observance, have lost their moral significance just because—unlike some of their earlier versions—they do not touch in the least degree on these essential matters. A revolution in our ways of thinking and feeling about money may become the growing purpose of contemporary embodiments of the ideal. Perhaps, therefore, Russian Communism does represent the first confused stirrings of a great religion. . . . Beneath the cruelty

and stupidity of New Russia some speck of the ideal may lie hid.

Democratic Socialism

As a youth, Michael Harrington participated in Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker Movement. After abandoning Christianity and embracing Karl Marx, he wrote a book, *The Other America*, which helped persuade US Presidents John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson to undertake their War on Poverty social programs. Thereafter, he became increasingly uneasy with his own fame and success until he nearly fainted during a speaking engagement and had to retreat to his hotel room with such piercing chest pains that he thought he was having a heart attack:

The itinerant radical agitator, the writer of articles with long titles for magazines of small circulation, the practitioner of a comfortable poverty on the margin of the affluent society, could not recognize the middle-aging participant in the discussions with men of power, who was married and received middle-class fees for giving anticapitalist speeches. . . . By accepting every invitation to give a talk, by being casual and open to every demand,

just like in the good old undemanding days, I could pretend to myself that I was still that other Michael Harrington. . . . Eventually that masquerade, and the furious pace it required, could not go on any longer. I came unstuck.

Having learned to pace himself, Harrington became until his death in 1989 the leading democratic socialist in the United States. His socialism was comprised of one part anti-Christianity, one part anti-communism, and one part anti-capitalism. Harrington condemned Christianity because he thought the church was an integral part of the unjust economic order and in any case “God is dead”; communism because it is full of desperate and vicious doctrines such as violent revolution, class warfare, the end justifying the means, the puniness of individual human life beside the forces of history, the expendability of democratic methods; and capitalism because it eliminates the one ideal that might replace the vanished Christian faith: the ideal of economic equality and of a loving community built on such equality. According to this view, people ought not to accept inequality, which is interpreted as a conspiracy of the rich against the poor. No matter how much the system tries to bribe us with efficiency and consumerism, we should demand a better economic order, beginning with much more taxation of the rich, many

more goods and services provided “free” for all, the abolition of large monopolistic private companies with their deceptive advertising, and the development of people’s bureaucracies that will be open to democratic participation and encourage face-to-face encounters with their constituencies.

Opponents of Harrington voiced several criticisms: that democratic socialism is oxymoronic, that is, no nation on earth is simultaneously democratic and socialist, presumably because economic equality requires enforcement and large-scale enforcement requires authoritarian methods; that at least the American democracy, as consulted by various polls, seems to prefer a system of inequality, probably because its citizens are incurably optimistic and like to think that their ship or at least their children’s ship will soon come in; that a participative or face-to-face bureaucracy is yet another contradiction in terms; that confiscatory taxation of the rich eliminates much of society’s savings, its economic seed corn, in addition to reducing incentives.

For all these reasons, among others, democratic socialism has steadily lost ground since its heyday in the 1960s and early 1970s, when the chairman of the US President’s Council of Economic Advisors (Arthur Okun) stated, “I would prefer . . . complete [economic] equality” and a candidate for president (George McGovern) added that “citadels of [private]

economic privilege [make it] foolish to expect that any fiscal or monetary policy will work, whether the adversary is inflation or recession or both.” The nadir for democratic socialists occurred in the 1980s, when some conservative analysts charged, fairly or unfairly, that virtually all of statistically defined hard-core poverty in the United States (as opposed to people who are only temporarily poor) could be identified with fatherless welfare households and that these households had been “created” by Great Society antipov-erty programs of the kind espoused by Harrington.

Despite this generally low estate, democratic socialism has its strong proponents. As a professor of philosophy, Robert Paul Wolff of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, says about his effort to become an interpreter and self-described cheerleader for contemporary Marxist economics:

Until I got involved in this stuff, I never talked to other people about my work. Now I have a sense of myself as being part of an enterprise that’s larger than myself . . . of sharing it with other people, and that’s tremendously rewarding . . . like being reborn.

Agrarianism

Capitalism, communism, and socialism all share one central assumption: that industrialism is a positive development, that it is already positive and will be more so in the future, that it can be managed and perpetuated in such a way as to avoid an eventual collapse, with everything crashing down in a horror of suffering and destruction. Agrarianism, on the other hand, rejects industrialism itself, not just such specific manifestations of industrialism as capitalism, communism, and socialism. Factories, chemical plants, cities, skyscrapers, sprawling “glass-and-grass” office parks and subdivisions, fast-food strips with buildings shaped like pancakes or hot dogs, expressways, temperature-controlled barbecues in automatically sprinkled backyards, suburban banks designed as Williamsburg replicas, bad air, bad water, poisoned food chains, mechanized one-crop agriculture, mass-produced junk, consumer debt, farm debt, international debt, fashion and fad, the “right” car, the “right” clothes—it is all a vast tragic mistake. To paraphrase nineteenth-century historian and moral philosopher Henry Adams on politics, the effect of industrialism “on all men is the aggravation of self, a sort of tumor that ends by killing the victim’s sympathies; a diseased appetite, like a passion for drink and perverted tastes; one can scarcely use expressions too strong to describe the violence of egotism it stimulates.”

Among agrarian critiques of the industrial way of life, one can distinguish at least five types: Southern (aristocratic), populist, technocratic, communitarian, and conservationist.

Southern (Aristocratic) Agrarianism

The Southern agrarian myth may be summarized as follows: in Europe, an old and settled and chivalric life best described by Sir Walter Scott's novels (*Ivanhoe*, *Waverley*) is suddenly overthrown by the malevolent forces of revolution and industrialism. A saving remnant, especially from Scotland and Wales but also from France, reaches the New World to reestablish the Old Civilization on virgin shores.

As Southern writer Frank Owsley has said:

With the environment of the New World and the traditions of the Old, the South . . . became the seat of an agrarian civilization which had strength and promise for a future greatness second to none. The life of the South was leisurely and unhurried for the planter, the yeoman, or the landless tenant. It was a way of life, not a routine of planting and reaping merely for gain. Washington, who rode daily over his farms . . . inhaled the smell of ripe corn after a rain . . . and, when in the field as a soldier or in the city as President of the

United States, was homesick at the smell of fresh-plowed earth.

The Old South, proponents of this form of agrarianism will concede, labored under contradictions. In the midst of the celebrated courage and courtesy and magnanimity and loyalty and honor and integrity and generosity and leisureliness, there was pride and violence and unrestrained individualism and, of course, slavery. But, according to the myth, these flaws were belabored by men whose real motivation was to destroy the agrarian civilization and exploit it economically. The truly characteristic figure of the Old South was the white-haired “gentleman in Mississippi, a doctor . . . who [gave] most of his life to charity and [was] innocent of all money and business.” Had the Confederates won the war, journalist and ascerbic essayist H. L. Mencken argued, they

would have abolished slavery by the middle 80s. They were headed that way before . . . but . . . on sound economic grounds, and not on the brum-magem moral grounds which persuaded the North. The difference here is immense. In human history a moral victory is always a disaster, for it debauches and degrades both the victor and the vanquished.

After the war, the myth continues, the ancient civilization, based equally on land, family, community, and gentility, was extinguished in both Old and New Worlds, but it was not just the South that suffered the consequences—it was the entire United States. As Southerner Andrew Lytle wrote: “[Without the South to provide restraints], an agrarian Union [was] changed into an industrial empire bent on conquest of the earth’s goods. . . . This [meant] warfare, a struggle over markets . . . but [it was really] a war to the death between technology and the ordinary human functions of living.” To this conclusion Mencken added:

The chief evils in the Federal Victory lay in the fact, from which we still suffer abominably, that it was a victory of what we now call Babbitts over what used to be called gentlemen. . . . Whatever the defects of the new commonwealth below the Potomac, it would have at least been a commonwealth founded upon a concept of human inequality, and with a superior minority at the helm. It might not have produced any more Washingtons, Madisons, Jeffersons, Calhouns, and Randolphs of Roanoke, but it would certainly not have yielded itself to . . . raw plutocracy . . . Ku Kluxry . . . shouting Methodists . . . political

ecclesiastics, nigger-baiting, and the more homicidal variety of wowserism.

Although Southern civilization died at Appomattox, Southern agrarianism as a religion refused to die. In August 1929, Allen Tate, a Southern writer, poet, critic, and “gentleman farmer” teaching at Vanderbilt University, wrote his friend Donald Davidson the following letter:

The other day I wrote to [poet and novelist Robert Penn] Warren, and suggested the following radical program:

- The formation of a society, or an academy of Southern positive reactionaries . . . committed at first to direct agitation.
- . . . Philosophically we must go the whole hog of reaction, and base our movement less upon the actual old South than upon its prototype—the historical social and religious scheme of Europe. We must be the last Europeans—there being no Europeans in Europe at present.
- The advantages of this program are the advantages of all extreme positions. It would immediately define the muddling and unorganized opposition (intellectually unorganized) of the Progressives; they have no philosophical program,

only an emotional acquiescence to the drift of the age, and we should force them to rationalize into absurdity an intellectually untenable position. Secondly, it would crystallize into opposition or complete allegiance the vaguely pro-southern opinions of the time.

Tate's movement, joined by critic John Crowe Ransom, Andrew Lytle, and Frank Owsley, as well as Davidson, Warren, and others, was launched with *I'll Take My Stand*, a book of essays published in 1930, whose title was drawn from the Southern national anthem. Ransom reported that it was "a group effort beyond anything I have ever taken part in. Its quality was rare and fine as a piece of cooperation. . . . It was the best days I ever had." But Northern intellectuals immediately attacked the Southern Agrarians as disguised fascists, and even novelist Sherwood Anderson, a Virginian, accused them, in Southern historian W. J. Cash's words, of wishing "to sit on cool and columned verandas, sip mint juleps, and converse exquisitely while the poor whites and the black men toiled for them in the hot, wide fields spread out against the horizon." Against such unfounded and unfair jibes, Tate offered a spirited if fatalistic defense. If America refused to listen, if even his beloved South rushed headlong to desecrate the graves of Confederate dead with factories, big cities, and shopping centers, this was only to be expected:

The older I get the more I realize that I set out about ten years ago to live a life of failure, to imitate, in my own life, the history of my people. For it was only in this fashion, considering the circumstances, that I could completely identify myself with them. We all have an instinct—if we are artists particularly—to live at the center of some way of life and to be borne up by its innermost significance. The significance of the Southern way of life, in my time, is failure. . . . What else is there for me but a complete acceptance of the idea of failure?

Populist Agrarianism

As powerful as the Southern myth of aristocratic agrarianism is, there are other, equally compelling forms of agrarianism. In the non-aristocratic or populist agrarian myth, immortalized by Henry David Thoreau's *Walden Pond*, the harried urban dweller packs all his or her belongings and heads for the country, where he or she lives a life of perfect health and sanity and self-sufficiency on a small plot of ground with as few conveniences as possible.

In actual life, people do not necessarily give up all the conveniences, and perhaps keep some city ties as well, but they do emulate the Walden life, often quite successfully. For example, James Crawford attended

Rice University on an ROTC scholarship, served with the Navy in Vietnam during that war while simultaneously learning Russian, and then abruptly resigned from the Navy to protest the American bombing of Cambodia. Thereafter, he gave antiwar speeches, worked for a congresswoman on a draft resister's amnesty bill, and attended law school at night, when he threw it all over and removed himself and his two dogs to a life of growing and selling organic vegetables from a thirty-five-acre farm in West Virginia.

At the time, Crawford insisted that

it wasn't all negative. I didn't feel I was abandoning the movement for change or opting out on some private trip. I just felt I wanted to be useful in a more concrete way, even a small way. . . . I like the idea of earning a living by making something that is valuable to people and selling it directly to them. I like that one-to-one relationship. [Sitting with a reporter by shelves of freshly "put up" tomatoes in the kitchen of his tarpaper shingled farmhouse, he added that] the important thing was to live in the present instead of the future and not to fall prey to the consumerism that saturates American life and keeps people forever dissatisfied, seeking something bigger, costlier,

faster, shinier or louder to make them feel more powerful.

Initially, of course, farming posed all sorts of problems for someone who had grown up in the suburbs of Boston:

I went to buy a plow and it was embarrassing. . . . I had to ask a lot of dumb questions. . . . In the winter, it [was] lonely and I [had] to get a regular job in the woods to [meet] tractor . . . and truck payments.

At times, country life seemed confining; even the nearest library was hours away. But Crawford persevered, got married, and continued selling his fine New Morning Farm organic vegetables in Washington, DC.

Technocratic Agrarianism

Most agrarians are as suspicious of science and technology as they are of industrialism: they view all three as of a piece. But at least some agrarians distinguish between technology, especially high technology, which they regard as full of hope for mankind, and industrialism, which they view as a kind of perversion of technology. Writer and inventor Buckminster Fuller, for example, thought that technology had spawned an ugly and dangerous industrialism because it was still incomplete. If we persevere, he

maintained, we will eventually perfect our technical apparatus and then all the problems will disappear.

In the meantime, Fuller, who was an ardent lover of nature, thought it would be no desecration to fill the remaining wildernesses with some human structures, so long as these structures were in the “natural” shape of a tetrahedron—the famous Fuller dome. Other technocratic agrarians have pictured a day when the cities will be emptied, when most families will prefer to homestead in the country, but when electricity, air conditioning, and other amenities will be supplied by solar panels and both work and entertainment will flow through high-tech telecommunications networks. This utopian vision, of “opening” the countryside without urbanizing or spoiling it, brings together all sorts of people: “New Age” dropouts, spiritual counselors, psychiatrists, computer specialists, energy experts, architects, engineers, celebrity spokespersons. One of the central figures of the movement was John Denver, the balladeer of country life, who lived in the mountains near Aspen, Colorado, who helped establish a foundation for research into appropriate technologies for the new outdoors-oriented life, and who sometimes enhanced the mood of his concerts by showing professionally produced “home movies” of himself and friends hiking through mountain glens, riding horseback through bold streams, and roasting marshmallows around roaring campfires.

Simple Communitarianism

Like other agrarians, communitarians reject industrial capitalism, communism, and socialism, but for different reasons. They believe that people should live together in small, largely self-sufficient communities, sharing their hopes and activities and all their worldly resources. Whether organized as a hyperdisciplined Israeli kibbutz or a loose association of American “New Agers,” what counts is not the country setting, but the subordination of individualism to the needs of the group.

Conservationism

Conservationism is a kind of agrarianism with reduced objectives. It does not seek to outlaw industrialism or make ghost towns of great cities: it merely wants to protect what is left of the countryside and, ultimately, to keep humanity from destroying the life systems on which it depends. Insofar as it defends the right to exist of a rare monkey or the rain forest habitat that supports the monkey, its aims might be characterized as aesthetic or moral or both. But insofar as rain forests tie back into the world’s oxygen-carbon monoxide balance, the greenhouse (warming) effect of burning too much fossil fuel, or cancer risks from ozone depletion, the aesthetic or moral viewpoint becomes urgently utilitarian as well. As Kathryn Fuller, president of the World Wildlife Fund US,

has stated the case: “Environmental issues like climate change are uniquely global. With the exception of the proliferation of nuclear weapons, nothing has such broad ramifications. As the political divisions that drove the arms race begin to break down, we must find common ground among ourselves so that we may make peace with our environment. There is simply no alternative.”

Fifteen

Philosophical Value Systems (Taught, Reflected, or Alluded to in Undergraduate Courses) That Express Logic Plus . . .

Logical Naturalism (Combines Logic With Elements of Sense Experience)

IT MAY BE recalled from Chapter Four that the father of modern “religions” of logic, Spinoza, sought his all-important first premise in an *a priori* (self-evident) proof of God’s existence (“To be perfect, by definition, God must be; if we can imagine God, he must exist”). When this proof was later refuted by David Hume and Immanuel Kant, philosophers sought other (not *a priori*) ways to build a constructive, not just a destructive, “religion” of logic, and their

first thought was to find a starting premise in human experience, a purely factual premise from which a secular ethics could be deduced, an ethics that would be completely free of the idea of the supernatural.

The most important attempt in this direction was made by Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832). Bentham began by attacking all deductive systems based on God or a reality beyond this world as “nonsense on stilts” that should be swept away at a glance. The proper course was to stick to this world, not to imagine another, and the most obviously observable fact about this world was that everyone pursued pleasure and avoided pain. From this, it could be inferred that pleasure in a general sense corresponded to happiness. Selfish pleasure, on the other hand, either solitary selfish pleasure or the selfish pleasure of a small group such as a family or close circle of friends, invariably led to pain rather than happiness, either because it collided with other selfish individuals or groups or because it contradicted our natural socializing instincts. True happiness is therefore “the greatest happiness of the greatest number”—a phrase that led Bentham to cry out “as it were in an inward ecstasy, like Archimedes on the discovery of the fundamental principle of hydrostatics, EUREKA.”

To make this “greatest happiness” principle as practical as possible, Bentham invented what he called a “hedonic calculus” to measure the precise amount

of pleasure that could be expected from a specific action. Among the factors to be considered were: intensity, duration, certainty (or uncertainty), nearness (or remoteness), further consequences, purity, and the number of people affected. The particular kind of action did not matter at all—for example, pushpin (a form of gambling) was just as good as poetry if it produced a commensurate amount of pleasure. Nor did motive enter into the calculus: consequences, and only consequences, were worth considering. Believing in God, for example, was neither good nor bad in itself. But since Bentham thought it tended to produce more pain than pleasure, believing in God was by definition useless and the expenditure of scarce resources on bibles and churches was misguided at best and criminal at worst. The only proper object for human beings (and their government) was to try to increase the total sum of human pleasure in the world by feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, reforming the penal code, or improving public health, and if one had to be a little inhuman to get all these goals accomplished, that was all right, too. As Bentham concluded:

I would have the dearest friend I have to know that his interests, if they come in competition with those of the public, are as nothing to me. Thus I would serve my friends—thus would I be served by them.

The inventor of this remarkable doctrine, which literally stood Christianity on its head by deriving goodness and altruism from pleasure and materialism, was one of a long line of English eccentrics. A graduate of Oxford at fifteen and an obsessive toiler at dry-as-dust tracts on law, penology, economics, and public sanitation, as well as on philosophy, he was too shy to publish anything. His friends had to purloin his manuscripts and secretly publish them—with the result that the wealthy recluse unwittingly became a public figure and a hugely successful reformer. In typical fashion, he worried about making his death as useful as possible and directed that his body should be publicly dissected. Subsequently, his face was reconstructed with wax, his skeleton clothed in a respectable dark suit, and his visible remains placed on permanent display at University College, Cambridge.

The year that Bentham died, one of his chief protégés, John Stuart Mill, was only twenty-six years old. Educated by a father who thought that “life [was] a poor thing at best, after the freshness of youth and of unsatisfied curiosity had gone by,” by age three he had begun to read ancient Greek; by sixteen he had coined the term *utilitarianism* to describe his own and Bentham’s philosophy; by twenty-one, he had suffered a devastating nervous breakdown, a breakdown that was forever after cited by proponents of “natural” and “unstressed” child rearing. In subsequent years, Mill softened (or, as some

would say, muddled) Benthamism by distinguishing between so-called higher and lower pleasures:

It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.

He also attempted, as Bentham never had, to supply a logical proof for the proposition (deduction) that happiness can be equated with pleasure. As Bertrand Russell later described this process:

[Mill says]: Pleasure is the only thing desired; therefore pleasure is the only thing desirable. He argues that the only things visible are things seen, the only things audible are things heard, and similarly the only things desirable are things desired. He does not notice that a thing is “visible” if it can be seen, but “desirable” if it ought to be desired.

With this seemingly small slip, Mill stumbled into a logical fallacy highlighted by David Hume a century earlier in one of the most important passages of all moral philosophy:

In every system of morality which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and makes observations concerning human affairs; when of

a sudden I am surprised to find that instead of the usual copulations of propositions *is* and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought* or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible, but is, however, of the [greatest] consequence. For as this *ought* or *ought not* expresses some new relation or affirmation, it is necessary that it should be explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others which are entirely different from it.

These few words of Hume's (summarized as "no ought from an is") strike a severe blow at Benthamite utilitarianism because they strip the philosophy of its logical grounding. As always in philosophy, nothing ever quite dies. There are contemporary American philosophers who still call themselves utilitarians and look for variants that might be logically demonstrated (for example, so-called negative utilitarianism*), but none of their efforts seem yet to have availed. Whatever residual appeal the "religion" of usefulness may hold for people—and

* The notion that if we cannot demonstrate logically that happiness and pleasure are synonymous, perhaps we can demonstrate that the opposite of pleasure, pain, is inconsistent with happiness, or that selfish happiness is inconsistent with true pleasure.

its appeal is undeniable (indeed, as we shall see in the next chapter, economist John Maynard Keynes described it as the paradoxical source of the rampant practicality and materialism, alternating with social activism and reformist zeal, that characterize modern and especially modern American life)—it now operates primarily on an emotive rather than on a logical level.

Logical Intuitionism (Combines Logic With Elements of Intuition)

A naturalistic philosopher like Bentham or Mill looks for his initial premise in the real world of sense experience. He need not, however, stir from the peace and quiet of his study; he requires only a single observation, or several observations, for a starting premise, and everything else can be deduced. If Hume is correct, however, that no *ought* can be deduced from an *is*, that a starting premise cannot be found in the real world, the world of *isness*, where else can it be found? The answer for some philosophers, such as G. E. Moore (1873–1958), is that the starting premise must simply be intuited, picked right out of our unconscious brain.

Moore was not only an intuitionist in this technical sense. He was also an ardent foe of what might be called everyday Benthamism, the idea that because pleasure constitutes the highest possible good, human energies

should be directed toward useful projects that increase pleasure and alleviate misery. Somewhat confusingly, Moore is sometimes loosely described as a utilitarian because he did agree with Bentham that the consequences of actions mattered more than the motives behind them. But the main thrust of “Moorism” was violently anti-Benthamite and Moore’s followers quickly abandoned all traces of Benthamism, as the following account by the economist Keynes, a student of Moore’s at Cambridge, clearly reveals:

My Early Beliefs^{*}

I went up to Cambridge at Michaelmas 1902, and Moore’s *Principia Ethica* came out at the end of my first year. . . . It was exciting, exhilarating, the beginning of a renaissance, the opening of a new heaven on a new earth. . . .

Even if the new members of the Club know what [this new] religion was it will not do

* Prepared for a “club” of intimate friends and not necessarily meant for publication, these memorable remarks (thought by many, this author included, to be the finest short essay on moral philosophy ever written) were read by Keynes as he lay draped over a favorite chaise longue in the double drawing room of his London townhouse on a September evening of 1938. The spirit of the gathering is suggested by the opening remarks: “If it will not shock the club too much, I should like in this contribution to its proceedings to introduce for once, mental or spiritual, instead of sexual, adventures, to try—and recall the principal impacts on one’s virgin mind and to wonder how it has all turned out.”

any of us any harm to try and recall the crude outlines. Nothing mattered except states of mind. . . . These states of mind were not associated with action or achievement or with consequences. They consisted in timeless, passionate states of contemplation and communion. . . . The appropriate subjects of passionate contemplation and communion were a beloved person, beauty and truth, and one's prime objects in life were love, the creation and enjoyment of aesthetic experience, and the pursuit of knowledge. Of these love came a long way first. . . .

Our religion was altogether unworldly—with wealth, power, popularity, or success it had no concern whatever, they were thoroughly despised.

This religion . . . is still my religion under the surface. . . .

The fundamental intuitions of *Principia Ethica* . . . brought us one big advantage. . . . We were amongst the first of our generation . . . to escape from the Benthamite tradition. . . . I do now regard that as the worm which has been gnawing at the insides of

modern civilization and is responsible for its present moral decay. We used to regard the Christians as the enemy, because they appeared as the representatives of tradition, convention, and hocus-pocus. In truth it was the Benthamite calculus, based on an over-valuation of the economic criterion, which was destroying the quality of the popular Ideal.

Like other high priests of logical “religions,” G. E. Moore was quite certain that he had succeeded where others had failed, that his approach of intuiting some starting premises and then reasoning through to conclusions had at last established ethics on a firm foundation. But had he, in fact, accomplished all this? Keynes pointed out a major technical difficulty: honest and intelligent people might disagree about initial intuitions. Another moral philosopher, H. A. Pritchard (1871–1947), responded with an even more damaging assessment: Why bother at all to reason from intuited premises? Why not just intuit everything and forget about labored deductions? As Pritchard wrote:

The sense that we ought to do certain things arises in our unreflective consciousness. . . . We then want to have it *proved* to us that we ought to do so. . . . If . . . by Moral Philosophy is meant the knowledge which

would satisfy this demand, there is no such knowledge, and all attempts to attain it are doomed to failure because they rest on a mistake, the mistake of supposing the possibility of proving what can only be apprehended directly. . . . If we . . . doubt whether there is really an obligation to originate A in a situation B, the remedy lies not in any process of general thinking, but in getting face to face with a particular instance of the situation B, and then directly appreciating the obligation to originate A in that situation.

In suggesting this procedure, Pritchard thought that he was merely simplifying and improving on Moore. Not for a moment did he imagine that he was jeopardizing the entire enterprise of establishing objective moral truth. Confronted with a doctrine of total intuitionism, even a beginning student of philosophy would immediately ask: If a few initial intuited premises lead to disagreement among honest people, what will happen if everything is intuited? And what will happen if Hitler or Stalin is doing the intuiting?

Pritchard seemed unaware of these questions. Even if he had been aware of them, he would presumably have dismissed them as theoretical and of no practical consequence. From his own cloistered perspective at Oxford, people simply did not disagree about moral

intuitions. Like afternoon tea, croquet on the lawn, or freshly starched tennis whites, moral agreement was a given, a natural part of civilized life. The propositions that one should do good, avoid lying, give others pleasure, not worry too much about one's own pleasure—these were as self-evident as a mathematical relationship, as self-evident as $2 + 2 = 4$. The only remaining task for moral philosophers was to help individuals deal with conflicting goods. For example, should one shout in public to awaken a fainted man, slow one's car at a major intersection while carrying an injured passenger to a hospital, or return a borrowed book on time if its continuing possession might accomplish a useful purpose? With these surprisingly trivial issues, Prichard's logical intuitionism might be accused of sliding into the logical error of irrelevance.

Logical Subjectivism (Combines Logic with “Science”)

Prichard's most famous essay was entitled “Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?” Although this was an arresting title, it was also quite misleading. Prichard did not really think that all moral philosophy was based on a mistake; that is, he agreed, with most of his predecessors, that the necessary task of moral philosophers was to discover an objective basis for human belief and conduct, a basis

so objectively sound that no sane person would ever dispute its conclusions.

The subjectivists, on the other hand, philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), Bertrand Russell (1872–1972), Alfred J. Ayer (1910–1989), and the American Charles Stevenson (1908–1979), really did think that moral philosophy had been based on a mistake, the mistake of desperately clinging to a facsimile of Christianity while dispensing with church and Bible. In their view, the early European and American moral philosophers, even individuals like Spinoza who had not been raised as Christians, had all tried to save God *and* Christian ethics by producing rigorous logical proofs of their necessity. When this failed, their successors, individuals like Bentham and Moore, tried to deduce Christian ethics, or something like Christian ethics, without any reference whatever to God, the nature of the universe, or any of the “great questions.” This too failed, inevitably and irrevocably, because it had missed the main point: that ideas like God and ultimate reality (cosmological ideas) and ideas like free will, human nature, human ethics, beauty, and justice (moral ideas) were all equally meaningless. They were neither propositions that could be tested mathematically nor facts that could be verified by observation or experiment.

David Hume, as usual, had already enunciated this position two hundred years earlier in “An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding”:

If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, *Does it contain an abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.

But it was left to the moral subjectivists of this century to reach the final, shocking conclusion that Hume's dictum applied not just to Christian theology or "German" speculation about a metaphysical fourth dimension beyond our world. It applied just as forcefully to speculation about the very here-and-now subjects of good and bad or right and wrong.

A few of the more fire-breathing subjectivists took the rather paradoxical view that nonpropositions and nonfacts masquerading as propositions and facts were dangerous, and that both theology and moral philosophy were therefore inherently wicked. Others, such as the young Alfred J. Ayer, simply dismissed religion and moral philosophy as contentless, not much different than the barking of dogs. As Ayer wrote:

If a sentence makes no statement at all, there is obviously no sense in asking whether what it says is either true or false. . . . To say that God exists is to make a metaphysical

utterance which cannot be either true or false. . . . As we have seen, sentences which simply express moral judgments do not say anything.

As time passed and the fury dissipated, subjectivists became more thoughtful about their position. Russell replied to a newspaper attack by stating:

What Mr. X says in criticism of my views on ethics has my entire sympathy. I find my own views argumentatively irrefutable, but nevertheless incredible. . . . [The chief ground for adopting my view] is the complete impossibility of finding any arguments to prove that this or that has intrinsic value. . . . We cannot prove, to a color-blind man, that grass is green and not red. But there are various ways of proving to him that he lacks a power of discrimination which most men possess, whereas in the case of values there are no such ways. . . . Since no way can be even imagined for deciding a difference as to values, the conclusion is forced upon us that the difference is one of taste, not one as to any objective truth.

Once he reached this position, Russell never abandoned it. But he did try to correct the more extreme and less defensible versions of subjectivism. For

example, the idea that people's moral positions are totally contentless, just so much bubbala-bubbala, cannot be right. When one person speaks to another about morals, communication obviously takes place, even if it is only that, as Russell ironically put it, "ethics is the art of recommending to others what they must do to get along with ourselves." Picking up this clue, Charles Stevenson found that quite a lot was going on in moral discourse, namely, persuasion, command, grading, the adjustment of material and other interests:

People from widely separated communities have different moral attitudes. Why? To a great extent because they have been subject to different social influences. Now clearly this influence doesn't operate through sticks and stones alone; words play a great part. People praise one another, to encourage certain inclinations, and blame one another, to discourage others. Those of forceful personalities issue commands which weaker people, for complicated instinctive reasons, find it difficult to disobey, quite apart from fears of consequence. . . . Social influence is exerted, to an enormous extent, by means that have nothing to do with physical force or material reward. The ethical terms facilitate such influence. Being suited to use

in suggestion, they are a means by which men's attitudes may be led this way or that.

Stevenson's linguistic analysis sounds both Freudian (nothing is what it seems or seems what it is) and Marxist (arguments about good and bad are often disguised power struggles), but his conclusions are careful, prudent, and even somewhat reassuring: "good" cannot be defined; it is neither logically demonstrable nor scientifically verifiable. On the other hand, "this is good" means "I like this," and the statement "I like this" is neither contentless nor meaningless. So, human beings are not mere canine barkers.

Russell was also at pains to point out the limits of subjectivism. Although a major ethical argument cannot be settled by logic or experimental demonstration, most apparent ethical arguments are really something else. Imagine, for example, that someone proposed to eliminate all pollution control standards in the United States. The proposer would almost certainly try to bolster such a position both by reference to a variety of moral arguments ("Pollution controls are incompatible with personal liberties and incompatible with property rights") and by reference to a variety of alleged facts ("Pollution control is expensive and reduces productivity").

Because a variety of moral arguments and facts are used, clarity, consistency, and accuracy can all be checked. Consequently, it would be incorrect to say

that one person's position on pollution control is as good as another's. One position may be either clearer, more consistent, or more factually accurate, and if so, it is the logically superior position.

Russell concludes his defense of subjectivism with what might be taken to be an *ad hominem* argument (Gula fallacy 43). Those individuals who cannot live without moral objectivity and certainty, like those who cannot live without God or God's heaven, are cowards:

Where traditional beliefs about the universe are concerned, craven fears . . . are considered praiseworthy, while intellectual courage, unlike courage in battle, is regarded as unfeeling and materialistic. . . . The universe is unjust . . . the secret of happiness is to face the fact that the world is horrible, horrible, horrible . . . you must feel it deeply and not brush it aside. You must feel it [in your heart] and then you can start being happy again. . . . I cannot believe [that any good can come from] systems of thought which have their root in unworthy fears. . . . It is not by delusion, however exalted, that mankind can prosper, but only by unswerving courage in the pursuit of truth.

Logical Subjectivism Reexamined (Further Combinations of Logic, Experience, Intuition, “Science,” and Emotion)

Bertrand Russell might be said to be the last of the world-famous philosophers. His death at age ninety-eight in 1972 left no current philosopher with a comparable popular reputation.

Within universities, however, the moral subjectivism of Russell, Ayer, and Stevenson was reworked, modified, or critiqued in a number of ways, some of which may be summarized as follows:

Linguistic Philosophy

Even if moral opinions are entirely subjective, they can still be clarified, especially by applying a rigorous linguistic analysis. Although this idea is now very old, it still inspires journal articles dealing, among other topics, with such questions as the meaning of the word *if* in the sentence: “If kangaroos had no tails, they would topple over” (a celebrated example that has prompted much debate).

Philosophy as Literature

This surprising doctrine seems to turn philosophy on its head by apparently de-emphasizing what has always

been the very heart of logic: clarity, order, structure, the search for a teachable truth. Once “relaxed” in this way, philosophic works should be read for aesthetic enjoyment—like poetry or a novel. As Ronald de Sousa of the University of Toronto wrote in 1985:

Good philosophy goes for subtlety, for the messy details—in short for the sort of thing we have novelists for. . . . When philosophy is . . . rich and nimble . . . it has its own esthetic rewards.

Philosophy as Intermediary

In this view, articulated by Richard Rorty of Princeton, past president of the American Philosophical Association’s eastern division, the questions that traditionally dominated philosophy have “dried up.” A philosopher should no longer seek primarily to be a moral leader or cultural overseer but should instead act as

the informed dilettante, the Socratic intermediary between various discourses. . . . He can say something about the sciences to the humanities and say something about the humanities to the sciences—not because of any special philosophical expertise, but just because [of] a general familiarity with the rest of culture.

Rorty had to admit, however, that this job description left philosophers difficult to distinguish “from the general all-purpose intellectual who writes for the *New York Review of Books*.”

Intuitionism/Utilitarianism

In his *Reasons and Persons* (1983), Derek Parfit of Oxford University combines elements of both attitudes in an engagingly eccentric way. He is a thoroughgoing mystic: contrary to commonsense beliefs, we are not really individuals; our selfhood, our sense of personal identity, are illusory; all of reality is one; we are elements of the whole. As Parfit comments: “The truth is very different from what we are inclined to believe. . . . Is the truth depressing? Some may find it so. But I find it liberating and consoling.” Why is it consoling? Partly because “I care less about my death,” but also because (and here we have a Benthamite twist) the absence of self kicks the stilts out from under selfishness. How can anyone want to be selfish when the self does not exist?

Although Parfit thinks that he has some of the answers, there is much more work to be done:

Belief in God, or in many gods, prevented the free development of moral reasoning. Disbelief in God, openly admitted by a majority, is a very recent event, not yet completed. . . . Non-Religious Ethics has been

systematically studied, by many people, only since about 1960. [It] is at a very early stage. We cannot yet predict whether, as in Mathematics, we will all reach agreement. Since we cannot know how Ethics will develop, it is not irrational to have high hopes.

An example of the kind of problem that Parfit is working on: compare three outcomes:

- a. Peace.
- b. A nuclear war that kills 99 percent of the world's existing population.
- c. A nuclear war that kills 100 percent.

(b) would be worse than (a), and (c) would be worse than (b). Which is the greater of these two differences?

A more vexing problem is how to justify a concern for future generations in a world where individuals do not exist. If all reality is one, why would a nuclear explosion matter? Parfit disarmingly responds:

Since I failed to find the principle to which we should appeal, I cannot explain the objection. . . . I believe that, though I have so far failed, I or others could find the needed principle: Theory X. But until this happens, [it] is . . . disturbing.

Parfit then displays another Benthamite twist (moral consequences matter more than rules):

If possible [any conclusion about the immateriality of nuclear explosions] should be concealed from those who will decide whether we increase our use of nuclear energy. These people know that the Risky Policy might cause catastrophes in the further future. It would be better if these people believe, falsely, that the choice of the Risky Policy would be against the interests of the people killed by such a catastrophe. If they have this false belief, [false because “self” and “self-interest” have already been demonstrated to be non-existent], they would be more likely to reach the right decision.

Finally, in a characteristic aside, Parfit concludes that

if I or others soon solve these . . . problems, [they] will be, in a trivial way, welcome. We enjoy solving problems [even though with] unsolved problems, we are further away from the Unified Theory . . . that resolves our disagreements [in] truth.

Logical/Emotive Jacobinism

This approach suggests, once again, that moral philosophy has rested on a mistake. Traditional moral philosophers have tended to focus on the individual, as if each individual were autonomous in his or her

actions. As the ancient Greeks always emphasized, however, we are social creatures, and our moral decisions are made in a specific social and political context. Even if one accepts the philosophical idea of subjectivity, therefore, it does not mean that people are free to do as they please. Quite apart from the constraint of law, there is the necessity of getting along with others. In this sense, moral subjectivity is a pseudoproblem that merely clouds the real problem of social and political justice.

In one version of this argument, we construct a rational moral and political philosophy by asking ourselves what we would do if we were shipwrecked on a desert island with everyone else living on earth. What kind of “social contract” would we devise, basically starting from scratch, and not knowing the kind of society that would eventually evolve on the island? For John Rawls of Harvard, the answer is that we would start with a doctrine of “fairness,” that is, that “all social values—liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect—are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone’s advantage. . . . If certain inequalities . . . would make everyone better off than in this hypothetical starting situation [for example, allowing a student more education in order to become a doctor], then they accord with the general conception.”

Obviously, there are some artificialities about this method and conclusion. We are not necessarily rational beings, as Rawls assumes. We are not shipwrecked but rather grow up in families and communities that shape our outlook, and we do know quite a lot about the kind of society in which we will live. Even if we did not know, and had to choose, as Rawls says, under a “veil of ignorance,” it is not at all clear that we would choose the “safe” alternative, a society based on complete equality, rather than the “gambling” alternative, a society based on merit and the reward of talents, or even on private property and inheritance rights. One wonders if Rawls, in choosing equality as his starting premise, is not merely extrapolating his own social democratic beliefs. A member of Rawls’s circle, his Harvard colleague Robert Nozick, has published a strong attack on the equality principle.

Putting all these criticisms aside, however, one wonders if Rawls may not be missing a larger point, that moral philosophy is not just political philosophy, not just social constraints and arrangements. Whatever social and political structure exists—even if the structure is highly repressive, as in the former Soviet Union—the individual is left with private moral choices. A philosophy that excludes such private choices as a field for discussion cannot claim to be entirely complete.

Logical/Emotive Conservatism

Like Mortimer Adler, philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre is an Aristotelian who wants to return moral philosophy to its Greek roots. Like John Rawls, he believes that moral philosophy cannot be separated from a social and political context. In other respects, however, particularly his emphasis on history and tradition and his political conservatism, MacIntyre is the opposite of the other two.

MacIntyre begins by lamenting the confusion, rootlessness, and anomie, the interminable and irresolvable debates, that subjectivism has foisted on American society. This state of affairs, he says, is nothing less than “disastrous,” but there is a way out, actually a way back—to ancient wisdom. Consider once again the *is/ought* conundrum defined by Hume. When speaking of a functional object such as an inexpensive watch, one can certainly state a fact, such as, “The watch does not work,” and then derive an *ought*, such as, “I ought to fix the watch or throw it away.” Although philosophers have usually distinguished between a watch and a human on the ground that the function of the watch is clear whereas that of a human is not, this distinction is actually quite wrong. Human purpose and function are clear: to discern what they are, one need only consult history or, as a shortcut, Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics*.

What, then, does Aristotle say? In MacIntyre's reading, he says that humans are social and political creatures, that their proper function and all their happiness lie in shared activity, and especially in selflessly building and serving a community. Moreover, specific virtues facilitate, but are also intrinsic to, this enterprise: honesty, fairness, reliability, consistency, obedience to law, courage, courtesy, judgment, among others. These virtues make it possible to work together; to create friendships based not solely on the shifting sands of affection but on the surer foundation of partnership and shared accomplishment. An individual human being, especially an individual obsessed with his or her own pleasure and well-being, is functional and miserable. But a human being as a *politikon zoon*, a member of a family and a larger political community, can achieve "merit," "honor," "harmony," and purposefulness.

MacIntyre has no illusions that we can return to the life of a Greek city-state. Nor is he a slavish follower of Aristotle. He notes that his favorite philosopher, like all philosophers, was connected to a specific time and place—one that denigrated women and permitted slavery, among other evils—and that he paradoxically contributed to the destruction of the city-state system by serving the Macedonian tyrant Philip and by teaching Philip's son, Alexander the Great. But however difficult it might be to restore the Greek ideal derived from the city-state,

what MacIntyre calls “liberal individualism” must still be firmly resisted: “What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us.”

Unlike most contemporary philosophers, MacIntyre has acquired a popular following. Perhaps this is because he has sought to deemphasize technique and return to the fundamental moral issues that trouble people. He has observed that studying “the concepts of morality merely by reflecting, Oxford armchair style, on what he or she or those around him or her say and do is barren” and has added that “the ideal of proof is . . . relatively barren” as well. Of the criticisms that have been leveled at MacIntyre’s philosophy, some have been fair and some not. The charge that he is fascist cannot be supported: his concept of community specifically includes freedom and civil liberties, although perhaps not as many liberties as are taken for granted in American life today. The charge that his approach is vague, abstract, or romantic misses the point. What MacIntyre offers is a broad philosophy of history, not a roadmap for contemporary life and politics—a philosophy of history like that of Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, Edmund Burke, or ultimately the Jewish or Christian religion, from which all Western philosophies of history descend.

Applied Ethics

Practitioners of contemporary applied ethics, preeminently Sissela Bok and Judith Shklar of Harvard University, remind us that moral disputes can be divided into at least four different categories.

1. Fundamental disputes pitting one entire value system against another opposite value system—for example, Cuban Catholicism against Cuban communism under the rule of Fidel Castro.
2. Disputes between parties who share a general, though perhaps ill-defined, agreement on ends, particularly family or friends.
3. Disputes between closely related parties that must be resolved—for example, discussions of a legal bar association's canon of ethics, a hospital's approach to treating patients, or a White House internal policy dispute.
4. Legal disputes.

In the first category, moral philosophy may not provide ultimate answers. In this respect, subjectivism is correct. But answers may be logically derivable in the second category and must be derived in the third and fourth. Whatever category is involved, the moral philosopher plays a useful role in defining terms, spotting inconsistencies between multiple propositions, checking facts, clarifying consequences,

grading various means to the same end, and effectively acting as a gatekeeper, bouncing “bad” arguments from the premises while allowing “good” arguments to continue to confront one another—either conclusively or inconclusively, as the case may be.

In their books and articles, applied ethicists tend to write about particular virtues or vices (*Lying*, by Bok; *Ordinary Vices*, by Shklar), grey areas between virtue and vice (*Secrets*, by Bok), specific social issues (abortion, euthanasia, animal experiments, surrogate mothers, industrial pollution, violent or obscene television, civil liberties), or a series of social issues grouped together under an important virtue or vice (such as, the issue of civil liberties in a discussion of government lying or secrecy). Such works mix anecdote with anthropology, specific people with sociological theory, colorful literary references (Lady Nijo’s extramarital pregnancy in fourteenth-century Japan) with rigorous moral reasoning.

To a few friendly critics, there is a disproportion between the amount of effort required by this method and the payoff. Herbert Stein, a distinguished economist, commented about a 1983 book by Paul Menzel on medical ethics: “I repeatedly had the feeling that the only possible answers to the questions he raises [e.g., Should funds be allocated to preventative medicine or treatment? To rare killer diseases or more common, milder ones? To prolong the life of the old, or to

save the young?] are ‘I like it’ or ‘I don’t like it.’” But Stein’s dismissal is too easy. Applied ethics is something old that is nonetheless new and important. It is an instance of a discipline becoming larger by becoming smaller, of opening up horizons by restricting its vision. Teaching students about verbal clarity, consistency, the avoidance of logical fallacies, the application of these skills to real life—all this is potentially invaluable. To pursue this calling is not to disavow the more traditional, more grandiose modes of philosophizing, but to bring the entire philosophical enterprise back to the modesty of Socrates and thus to put it on a steadier, more sustainable course.

Sixteen

Value Systems Associated with Literary Criticism (Taught, Reflected, or Alluded to in Undergraduate Courses) That Express Sense Experience Plus . . .

THE “RELIGION” OF high sense experience described in Chapter Three says that there are no formulas, no precise blueprints for building a life. Everyone has to find his or her way by living, traveling, reading, looking, and listening—in brief, by experiencing, but by experiencing with a necessary degree of self-discipline. The related “religion” of prodigal sense experience generally dispenses with the self-discipline. Contemporary teachers of literature, but also of history and art, may identify with

either tradition, although more commonly with the former, but they may also borrow ideas, concepts, and values from very different sources, notably emotion, logic, and “science.” From emotion, the idea of social commitment—the notion that everything we do must somehow relate to politics and social issues—has steadily crept in. From “science,” a whole series of ideas has been absorbed, beginning with an emphasis on professional specialization, professional technique, hidden knowledge available only to specialists, and extending to the notion that research and study must be “useful.” From logical subjectivism (itself a cross between logic and “science”) has come a pervading skepticism about the meaning and content of language, a skepticism that is most strongly expressed by a form of literary criticism called deconstructionism. Whatever the “ism,” we must always remember that when we observe professors arguing about how to teach history or literature or art or music, we are always, at least to a degree, watching them argue about how to live, and such quarrels can be vigorous, even fierce or unrelenting. To illustrate this we will begin with some of the simpler ideas being contested in contemporary college and university humanities departments, then sample a few of the more recon-
dite approaches.

Critical Specialization

In practice, the idea of concentrating on a small field, emphasizing depth over breadth, produces the most sublime or the most impractical results. An example of the sublime, achieved at considerable self-sacrifice, is the University of Pennsylvania's Sumerian Dictionary project. As one of its authors, Erle Leichty, reports:

To be an Assyriologist [a professional student of the Assyrians in the ancient Middle East, but also, by extension, of ancient Sumerians and other neighboring peoples] you don't have to be crazy, but it helps. . . . Not only is the path [toward a PhD in Assyriology] fraught with pit-falls, traps, and barriers, but there is no light at the end of the tunnel. I remember that my first teacher in Assyriology, George Cameron, told me the first day: There are no jobs in Assyriology, there never have been any jobs in Assyriology, and there never will be any jobs in Assyriology. . . . A few [Assyriologists] spend part or most of their careers in virtual slavery, working on large research projects such as the Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary. This . . . group is acutely aware of the meaning of "soft money." The

next grant is all that stands between them and the unemployment line.

Assyriology is a well-defined subject requiring an arduous and disciplined intellectual preparation. By contrast, literary specialties such as “The Absent Father in Fact, Metaphor, and Metaphysics in the Middle Generation of American Poets”—a topic presented at a Modern Language Association convention—must be defined by their practitioners. Professor W. Jackson Bate of Harvard dismissed these latter specialties as a “progressive trivialization” of “humane letters.” Barbara Johnson of Yale then dismissed Bate:

[He] uses the word “human” or “humane” all the time, but means “anything that makes a white, dominant-class, Harvard-affiliated male feel good about himself.” If some subjects are “trivial to him,” the explanation is that “none of them are what he is.

Similar chafing can be heard about what Jonathan Yardley irreverently but also rather harshly calls the “Faulkner factory,” the concatenation of scholarship that results when a great number of people rush into the same specialty:

Within the ranks of American literary academicians, there are two great industries. One of these is the writing, photocopying,

and broadcasting of resumés. . . . The other is the exhumation of the literary remains of William Faulkner, America's greatest writer and these days its most exhaustively scrutinized by the drones of academe.

By now Faulkner Inc. should be a candidate for the Fortune 500. Certainly its "output"—the word is used advisedly—is proof positive that productivity in America is not dead. For a decade or more a mighty river of Faulkneriana has spewed forth from English departments, filling untold miles of library shelves with microfilm copies of deservedly unpublished doctoral dissertations; university presses lard their lists with scholarly exegeses of Faulkner's work both great and small; small presses enter the fray with facsimile editions of the great man's fugitive work. . . .

[All] these labors serve only to stifle literature, to smother it under the accumulated weight of scholarship that exists only for its own sake, to alienate the general reader who is deliberately excluded from the world of the "professionals." . . .

The belief is widespread within the academy that . . . a literary reputation such as

Faulkner's is made "a fact" by the endeavors of the drones of academe. . . . But the drones don't produce serious criticism; they produce make-work, and the only people who read it are other drones. To imagine that the literary reputation of William Faulkner is enlarged or diminished by a thesis or dissertation grubbed out in order to meet the academy's voracious appetite for the trivial is the height of folly—or, more likely, of arrogance. The reputations that are made and broken within the academy have no effect on the real world out there.

Naturally, Yardley's Mencken-like diatribe has not itself escaped scathing criticism.

New Criticism

New critics wanted to cut through the luxuriant overgrowth of contextual scholarship and concentrate directly on the "naked" text or object. What do the words actually say? How are they used? The entire exercise of "close reading" seems modest, objective, down to earth, especially in the hands of American critics such as Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks, but the underlying motivation may be strikingly visionary. The English new critic I. A. Richards has argued that literature "is capable of saving us . . . of

overcoming [the] chaos [of scientific industrialism] by supplying new unifying myths” to replace the discredited popular myth of Christianity. Richards’ colleague F. R. Leavis goes further: literature (and by extension history or art) is synonymous with the life-sustaining, creative, and civilizing force of the universe. To study this subject is not just useful, like studying law or science; it is the highest form of life imaginable.

Semiotics (Semiological Structuralism)

Semioticians (semiologists) are concerned with the “structure” of all human communication, which they assiduously study. As critic and novelist William McPherson has said about this effort: “One of the newest . . . religions . . . is the cult of the semiotician, whose field is the way we communicate with one another . . . what we mean by what we say and do. To the semiotician, everything is a form of communication and communication, naturally, is everything. Thus does the cult endure and its tribe increase. The new priestly caste, by the way, will consist of semioticians, among such other contemporary shamans as psychologists, anthropologists, and physicists.”

Not every semiotician adopts the shamanistic style. Roland Barthes, perhaps the most celebrated semiotician, was a shy man (“I find it hard to bear

seeing several people at a time”) who lived simply in a sparsely furnished apartment near the University of Paris. He taught and also wrote elegantly crafted books extolling, among other things, “romantic” and “sentimental” love. Other semioticians are more earnest, cranking out tracts on such communication devices as traffic lights, medical symptoms, for cryptographic codes, or even consulting with government agencies on communication problems. In 1984, the Department of Energy asked Thomas A. Sebeok, a semiotician at the University of Indiana, to devise a way to “mark” nuclear waste dumps so that human beings of CE 12,000, who might no longer speak English, would be warned away from them. Sebeok filed a report suggesting that warnings be “launched and artificially passed on into the short-term and long-term future with the supplementary aid of folkloristic devices, in particular a combination of an artificially created and nurtured ritual-and-legend. . . . A ritual annually renewed can be foreseen, with the legend retold year-by-year. The actual ‘truth’ would be entrusted exclusively to—what we might call for dramatic emphasis—an ‘atomic priesthood,’ that is, a commission [that] would be charged with the added responsibility of seeing to it that our [warning], as embodied in the cumulative series of metamessages, is to be heeded—if not for legal reasons, then . . . with perhaps the veiled threat that to

ignore the mandate would be tantamount to inviting some sort of supernatural retribution.”

Deconstructionism

Deconstructionists* wish to overthrow, once and for all, the “great works, great men” school of literary criticism with its fixed canon of literary excellence and its fixed readings of established texts and objects. “Works” mean whatever you, the reader or viewer, think it means, and meaning will vary from person to person. Deconstructionists sometimes seem to shout from the rooftops: down with elitism, down with “taste,” down with tradition, down with all the “standards” and “certainties” of the aristocratic past. Nothing, or almost nothing, should be spared; everything should be subjected to the same relentless leveling. Is Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* a great work? Impossible to say, since the word *great* is an emotive—that is, a contentless and meaningless—word. What does the play *Hamlet* mean? Well, it is rife with linguistic contradictions and indeterminacies and may mean anything—or nothing.

In the hands of some critics, such a radical deconstruction of literal readings is not, itself, to be taken

* Part of a larger group of poststructural hermeneuticists (hermeneutics means interpretation), also referred to as reader response theorists.

literally: it is ironic and meant to be fun. In the hands of others, such as the founding father of the movement, the French critic Jacques Derrida, the assault on literature and art is supposed to be the first step toward a worldwide political and social revolution—a revolution that is made more difficult to get off the ground because it is so difficult to understand Derrida, who writes in the following style: “Thus it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which governs the structure, while escaping structurality. . . . The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its center elsewhere.”

“Scientific” Criticism

Of the various “scientific” modes of interpreting literature, history, and art, psychoanalysis may seem the most daring, because it often seeks to shock the reader. Matthew Arnold’s famous line from the poem “Dover Beach,” “Where ignorant armies clash by night,” is actually about the sex life of his parents; T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* is an unwitting confession of homosexuality. The evidence for such assertions is scanty (a reviewer of the Eliot interpretation notes that the author “uses . . . speculation treated as

fact to reinterpret poems, then uses his reinterpretations as evidence for the biographical ‘fact’”) but slippery scholarship may be concealed behind masses of jargon. Harold Bloom, one of the most engaging literary critics to draw on Freudian ideas, argues that the writing of poems represents an “Oedipal death-struggle” against the castrating power of precursor poets and then divides the struggle into six “reversionary ratios” styled “clinamen, tessera, kenosis, daemonization, askesis, and apophrades.” If this seems a bit obscure, we are admonished that “no reader . . . can describe her or his relationship to a prior text without taking up a stance no less tropological than that occupied by the text itself.” Bloom also suggests that his interpretation—indeed, the interpretive act in general—is not mere criticism; it stands alone, independent of the poems or poets analyzed, a work of art in its own right. Not surprisingly, this example of hubris (to maintain the classical motif) has inspired both fun and notoriety in literary circles.

In addition to the psychoanalytical mode of interpreting texts and art objects, there is the sociological mode as well. This has unquestionably opened up new vistas, especially in history: the lives of ordinary people living in huts rather than palaces; food; sex; health and medicine; marriage and death—all those subjects that add up to the “day-to-dayness” of life. When social historians and sociological literary critics focus on these

neglected topics, ransacking the archives for long-forgotten and often quite illuminating facts, the effect is to liberate historiography and criticism from the stuffy, aristocratic biases of the past. Unfortunately, these same facts, painstakingly rescued by sometimes heroic feats of research, may be obscured by such abstract and hard-to-define concepts as “elites” or “social class,” neither of which can easily be empirically validated, or else they are all mixed up with a Marxism that is not really sociology but rather a stridently ideological and emotive “religion” of egalitarianism. Occasionally, the tension between old-fashioned critics, who want to concentrate on history and literature and art itself, and the Marxists, who look through these subjects to a hidden agenda of class conflict and capitalistic and bourgeois oppression, erupts into a violent war of words. Sidney Freedberg of Harvard laments that “the political direction of the [art] department has become notorious. Some members of the faculty have gone so far as to suggest that works of art be sold . . . almost as if they were a capitalistic self-indulgence.” A Philadelphia curator agrees: “As far as art history goes at Harvard, the things in the museums might as well be a thousand miles away.” The direct object of Freedberg’s wrath, the “avowed Marxist” professor Tim J. Clark, responds: “I have no interest in grayness, in indiscriminate leveling. Neither, in fact, did Marx. He was a worshipper of Greek art, a fanatic for Balzac, and constantly quoting

Shakespeare and Goethe.” An even fiercer partisan of the “leather jacket” school of art criticism excoriates old-style connoisseurship as “handmade shoes and bow ties and clothes from Savile Row,” as either being rich or chasing after the rich—in short, as a decadent and snobbish aestheticism that offends “decent” as well as “proletarian” values.

Political Criticism

Montaigne would have strongly disapproved of both psychoanalysis and sociology, especially the kind of psychoanalysis and sociology that is really just emotive politicking, but he would have been even more concerned about the largely emotive and political approach to teaching and experiencing literature, history, or art. In his view, great works were to be treasured as a window on life, not enlisted in the service of some abstract political cause. He would have been equally unhappy with patriotic criticism of the type that was sponsored by George Gordon in the early twentieth century, at Oxford (“England is sick, and . . . English literature must save it. . . . The Churches . . . have failed, and social remedies being slow, English literature has now a triple function: still, I suppose, to delight and instruct us, but also, and above all, to save our souls and heal the State”), *and* with the sourly unpatriotic

contemporary criticism depicted by A. M. Eckstein of the University of Maryland:

[At] a conference on [George] Orwell and *1984* at an unnamed Midwestern university [the first speaker talked about] the “oppression” of psychotics in America; [the second] did not even attempt to keep to a topic related to Orwell, launching instead a direct and impassioned appeal for support for his own particular group of nuclear-freeze activists; [the third] spent his time fiercely advocating vegetarianism . . . and castigating US capitalism for failing to inform people that “when they eat meat, they eat death”; [the fourth and fifth speakers continued in the same vein and the sixth launched] a bitter, hour-long attack on America—and only America—for its lies, distortions, evasions, and hypocrisy.

Looking at these methods as a whole—from specialization to deconstruction to political criticism—it appears that some professors of literature, history, and art are still somewhat uncertain about how to deal with the modern world of science and mass culture. For centuries, most teachers of what we now call the humanities shared some common beliefs descended from Montaigne: that experience is both a means and

an end of life; that works of literature, history, and art are supremely important as interpreters of experience; that the very greatest works, those preserved and handed down from generation to generation, provide a magic passage to a larger world; that through them, and only through them, one learns to enjoy the variety of life without being overwhelmed, to separate the gold from the dross, to acquire taste, to form personal standards, both moral and aesthetic, of the very highest order. Very gradually, two additional ideas have insinuated their way into this beautiful ideal of the most splendid high culture, ideas that are foreign to the original conception and that are now locked in an Oedipal death struggle (to borrow critic Harold Bloom's phrase) for survival and dominance.

The first of these ideas is that personal experience and observation, the empirical method, the concentration on fact, especially the fact of a particular work of literature or art, are no longer enough. What counts is not experience per se, but what is thought to lie beneath the surface of experience, that is, symbolic patterns or structures. This emphasis on abstraction over fact, theory over experience, defines a new direction, a reversal of the historic approach to teaching literature, history, and art.

The second additional idea is that of relevance. This notion takes so many forms it is difficult to enumerate them all: the resurgence of frankly ideological criticism;

the rapid spread of what is called literacy studies as a new literary specialty, although the primary emphasis is on theory rather than on teaching people to read and write; especially the willingness of some leading literary academicians to appear in *People* magazine (Paul Fussell of the University of Pennsylvania) or to admit their fondness for daytime television “soaps” (William Pritchard of Amherst writing in *TV Guide*).

The problem, of course, with all concepts of relevance is that they are necessarily very much in the eye of the beholder. Professor Bate of Harvard considered deconstructionism to be remote, esoteric, trivial, a form of secret and malevolent Gnosticism, thus clearly “irrelevant.” Opponents of Bate, on the other hand, thought that his reverence for the old ideal of directly teaching “great works, great men” was so elitist that, even if it dealt with the most common, everyday human concerns, it was still, by definition, remote, esoteric, irrelevant, and so on.

Whereto these particular quarrels? No one can say. No discipline can thrive by remaining chained to the past. New ideas and techniques should be welcomed. At the same time, if the humanities are to thrive, to recover lost ground and lost prestige, if the various fields counted under the humanities are to recapture the exhilarating achievements of the past—as when professors of literature and history battled churchmen in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for

control of the great universities and won—they must presumably continue to look for answers rooted in the great works and objects themselves; in a reaffirmation of the belief that literature, history, and art are supremely important (and always relevant) because they offer what James Wolcott has called “contesting visions of what’s true and what’s good”; in the repetition of familiar but necessary critical tasks; in the patient transmission of important and easily lost-sight-of experience from the past; and in the continual search for experience worth preserving and passing on to future generations.

Part Six

Epilogue

Seventeen

A Personal Note

A FEW INDIVIDUALS WERE kind enough to review a draft of this book. The almost invariable response was: all right as far as it goes, but please conclude with a statement of your own personal values, your own point of view. As one reader said: “There is so much confusion today. Which options should we choose?” Another reminded me that Nietzsche had said: “The world revolves around the inventors of new values”—not the reciters of old values, even if presented in a new framework.

Another reader drew his own conclusion about what I was saying:

What you are really saying is that the richness and complexity of values is good in

itself. Values merge and separate, separate and merge, not in a Newtonian structure of six boxes, but in an Einsteinian continuum, with everything always overlapping, interfusing, interacting in complex and fascinating ways. What we really need to fight is people like the fundamentalists who do not like this fascinating world and want to put us back in just one box, where in effect we are imprisoned and suffocate.

I told this individual that he seemed to be expressing values associated with the first type of value system, sense experience, and was in effect suggesting that I was promoting this type of value system. He admitted that perhaps this was not the conclusion of my book, just a statement of his own personal “religion.”

Other readers thought that I was “really saying” this or “really saying” that, for example that “science” was good or “science” was bad. Another reader said that the mental modes were all very well, but they really just boiled down to two: left-versus-right-brained thinking, which could be associated with reason on the one hand and emotion on the other. I know that neuropsychologists no longer put much credence in this kind of left- and right-brain distinction, and, in any case, pointed out that moral arguments based on natural science analogies rarely survive, because the science keeps changing (a famous economist once

spent years developing a perfect coincidence between sunspots and economic cycles, only to have the scientists change their sunspot cycles).

My readers were kind to share their thoughts, and their collective reaction shows how much we glorify and demand conclusions, commitments, solutions. This is not only a dominant feature of value systems based on “science”; it characterizes authority, logic, and emotion as well. Not every reader, to be sure, shared this desire for a forceful, charismatic conclusion. One condemned the whole enterprise of writing this book as pointless: “You can’t think about values; you have to live them. All these boxes are terrible: a pattern is not living” (the writer Anaïs Nin said the same thing, “A pattern is not living,” another example of the first type of value system).

But I have a different viewpoint. I do not think that classifying and trying to understand values kills the joy of living them. Indeed, I think that almost all human creativity, whether in music or dance or politics or business or thought, is based on “pattern.” Nor do I think that a forceful conclusion, a “Here’s what it all means,” is always appropriate. There are so many answers already available in this world. This multiplication of answers, of options, is the central feature of our age. In the past, only a few people had the means or the desire, in effect the luxury, of adopting their own personal values. Now even the masses, at least in

many parts of the world, have this luxury. The tendency, however, is not to formulate one's own values. It is, instead, to pick up this ready-made "religion" or that one, then another one. Such "religions" are always at hand, and we are not too choosy about where we get them or which one we pick up. We turn on the television in the early morning, someone "famous" is telling us how to live, summarizing his book or life's thought in one or two sentences, and we are moved by what he or she says, at least for a moment.

In discussing this, I am reminded of the Greek philosopher Socrates as he is presented in the early Platonic dialogues. What is most irritating about Socrates is that he keeps asking questions, drawing out the opinions of others, without ever giving away what he himself thinks. The conversation moves this way or that, you think that Socrates' interlocutors have cornered him, that he will finally have to reveal what he thinks, but he just asks another question and continually evades his pursuers. Socrates realizes that you cannot be a little Socratic; if your purpose is to make others think, to come to their own conclusions after the most exhaustive (and hopefully playful) thought, you cannot begin by expressing your own beliefs. Once you express your own beliefs, other people will either be swept along in agreement or immediately put up their defenses, and either way they do not learn to think. If you express even one

belief before you have heard from your listeners, you become an advocate, not—for want of a better word—a guide. I have been an advocate, and I will want to be an advocate again, but in this book I want to be a humble guide, offering critiques from alternative perspectives, with no blanket condemnation of any one approach.

Returning to Socrates, we find inescapable parallels between his time and ours. Although values are never fixed, they had seemed fixed in pre-Socratic Athens. Suddenly, value choices proliferated; the challenge, in the jargon of our own era, was “postmodern”: not to create more and more new values, but rather to make sense of the explosion in values (explosion in both senses of the word). Whatever my intentions, I know that I have not played at being Socrates very well; I have revealed all kinds of prejudices, judgments and beliefs. Besides, the search for objectivity can only be carried so far; just by writing this book, I have endorsed a series of important values. In particular, I have sharply disagreed with the Scottish philosopher Adam Smith, who said that “though you despise that picture, or that poem, or even that system of philosophy which I admire, there is little danger of our quarreling on that account. Neither of us can reasonably be much interested about them.” I agree instead with Irving Kristol that “it is ideas which rule the world.” I also agree, fundamentally, with Bertrand Russell, that ideas should be

expressed clearly or not at all. I also reject the notion, prevalent in most discussion of values, that they should be logical or emotional or “scientific” or whatever. I think values can and will be all these things, often at the same time, which is all to the good. And finally, in a refusal to preach, I am saying that people need to consider their own values, consider them seriously, consider them for themselves, and that there are ways to discuss values and teach students about them that are perfectly acceptable, and all the more desperately needed, in a devotedly pluralistic society.

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