

University of Iowa

From the Selected Works of David J Depew

1999

The Truth is the Whole: Philosophical Reflections on Politics, Morality and Religion in America

David J Depew, *University of Iowa*



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/david_depew/55/

Ralph V. Norman
Editor

Nancy McGlasson McCormack
Managing Editor

Mary A. Nietling
Editorial Assistant

The Editorial Board

Charles H. Reynolds, Chair
Religious Studies
The University of Tennessee

George Allan
Philosophy, Education
Dickinson College

Jack M. Armistead
English
The University of Tennessee

Sheldon M. Cohen
Philosophy
The University of Tennessee

Charles Courtney
Philosophy, Religion
Drew University; Society for Values in
Higher Education

Roland A. Delattre
American Studies
The University of Minnesota

William G. Doy
Cultural Studies, Critical Theory
The University of Alabama

Carolyn Hodges
German Literature
The University of Tennessee

W. Lee Humphreys
Religious Studies
The University of Tennessee

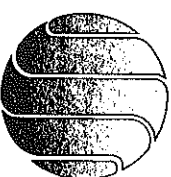
Milton M. Klein
History
The University of Tennessee

Richard C. Marius
Literature, History
Harvard University

Marian S. Moffett
Architecture
The University of Tennessee

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
John Quinn, Chancellor
Lorman Ratner, Dean, The College of
Liberal Arts

The Society for Values in Higher Education
James T. Laney, President, Emory University
Charles Courtney, Executive Director
Liberal Arts



SOUNDINGS

An Interdisciplinary Journal

Copyright © 1989 by
The Society for Values in Higher Education
and
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Vol. LXXII, No. 2-3

Summer/Fall 1989

"THE TRUTH IS THE WHOLE":
Philosophical Reflections on Politics, Morality
and Religion in America

David J. Depew

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING triad of propositions:

- P1: Every legitimate state rests on moral principles.
- P2: Genuine morality is based on religion.
- P3: In secular pluralist and democratic states, religious belief and practice are rightly thought to be matters of private choice.

I think that more frequently than not Americans will express some initial commitment to all three of these claims. There is no contradiction in doing so—as long as one assumes that we get our moral and religious conceptions by reflecting on innate ideas or on purely private experience. Philosophers prior to the twentieth century assumed just that. But there can be considerable tension if, instead, we presuppose, as most contemporary thinkers do, that there are no innate ideas, and that no experience is purely private. For we must then acknowledge that:

- A1: The legitimacy of states depends on *publicly acquired and shared* beliefs and practices.

In this event, one who subscribes to P1-P3 may well begin to wonder whether secularization, and the increasing privatization of religious belief, is leading—or has led—to an erosion of the moral principles that make our political system more than a mere exercise of unlegitimated power, based on nothing better than efficient economic and behavioral incentives and controls.

David J. Depew is Professor of Philosophy, California State University, Fullerton. He is co-editor of *Entropy, Information and Evolution* (1988) and *Evolution at a Crossroads* (1988) and author of "Narrativism Cosmopolitanism and Historical Epistemology" (*Clio*, 1985).

It is against this propositional background that I wish to situate Robert Bellah *et al's Habits of the Heart*.¹ With the withdrawal of religious norms from the public sphere, this book has asked, what kinds of moral commitments and public involvements can Americans now sustain? Basing their study on interviews with a number of white middle class Americans (no minorities are represented), Bellah and his colleagues portray religious commitments, moral choices and political beliefs in contemporary America as commodity preferences. One's religion, or no religion at all, as well as one's values more generally, are picked up like a house or a dress. They are tailored to fit one's current needs, and are dropped as soon as one's feelings change. No commitment to the future is asked, no strong vision of the past compels, no transcendent sanctions threaten. Rather, in an eternally shifting present, whose center is the isolated ego, values are reduced to more or less exquisite private pleasures. This means, Bellah and his colleagues argue, that the America celebrated and fretted over by De Tocqueville has passed away. That was an America in which the public sphere was sustained by intense participation in voluntary democratic associations, especially churches, and in which political man was being formed on the basis of virtues resting ultimately on the intense religiosity of the citizens. The decline of this responsiveness entails the decline of traditional republican ideals and practices.

Conclusions like these are intelligible and persuasive only against a certain conceptual background. I think I have identified what that background is at the outset. The authors of *Habits of the Heart* clearly take P1-P3 seriously. Moreover, an explicit assumption of their book is that where a normative public language about politics and morality is privatized or made optional, the beliefs urged by that language must wither and die. This is precisely what is implied by A1. Thus the book becomes a jeremiad about the decline of legitimating beliefs and practices in a bureaucratically dominated America, which keeps its normative inheritance alive only in increasingly privatized communities and abandons the public sphere to manipulative rationality.

Bellah's willingness to wrestle with all the intuitions contained in P1-P3, to consider them all as aspects of the American

conceptual heritage, sets his work apart from a number of contrasting approaches to problems about the "moral fabric" of contemporary America. In this paper I will discuss in detail three such approaches. These have been offered by the religious right, by liberal humanists and by scientific technocrats. These approaches have little more in common than the fact that they all cut through the difficulties Bellah and his colleagues more delicately appreciate simply by throwing out one or more of the propositions listed above. Put schematically, these parties assign what philosophers call "truth values" to P1-P3 in the following ways:

	P1	P2	P3
Religious			
Right	T	T	F
Liberal			
Humanists	T	F	T
Scientism	F	F (or T)	T

Taken together, these approaches almost exhaust the range of conventional patterns of thought in American discourse today. But it is highly unlikely that any one of these traditions can form the basis of a renewed American consensus. Each of them does violence to at least one deep intuition on which the conceptual integrity of the culture is based. I will demonstrate this in the three central sections of the paper.

In the course of developing these arguments, it will become clear that Bellah's program is not subject to this objection, and that it is attractive for just this reason. But for the same reason I will suggest in the final section that it is something of a mistake to imagine that *Habits of the Heart*, or any successor work that Bellah and his colleagues might publish, is likely to result in a series of action-oriented recommendations that can somehow be "put into practice." The tension within P1-P3 is too great for that. Thus those who have been disappointed by Bellah's work may have been judging it in the wrong light. Set against the conceptual and historical background I will sketch here, *Habits of the Heart* can alternatively be taken as performing a useful diagnostic function. It is designed to induce shared reflection and dialogue on American life, despite its empirical-sociological trappings. It has, in fact, already succeeded in doing so.² Moreover, its authors have made clear, both in the

book and in the subsequent discussions in which they have tirelessly participated, that they regard such reflection and dialogue as in itself an embodiment and renewal of the deepest beliefs and values of our culture.

This approach can be disappointing to a culture that prides itself on action and innovation and that values reflection only insofar as it generates programs for future initiative. Bellah's more reflective, indeed reflexive perspective is likely to be misconstrued. But, as our culture grows older, and as collective initiatives become harder and harder to launch, a reflective approach to cultural renewal and political amelioration is likely to become more and more prominent—and may prove far more useful than many Americans imagine.

II

The (white) evangelical Christian right tries to sustain P1 and P2 by taking religion out of the private sphere to which secularism has consigned it. It thus negates P3. It hopes to restore evangelical Protestantism to the public status it supposedly once had as the foundation of our morality and politics. In this way, the Christian right proposes to find a cure for contemporary moral and political disarray—for the decline of "personal morality" and "family values" at home and for the flagging of our mission to spread "democratic institutions" and to resist "godless communism" abroad. The recent political high tide of this group has doubtless receded. But even if it failed under Reagan to force its agenda on the nation, Reagan's arousing of this tradition from its long slumber since the 1920s, when it last bestirred itself, will be with us for a long time. It is incumbent on us to understand the deeper conceptual dynamics that sustain this tradition.

Starting with mild imprecations to worship the god of your choice, conservative Christians erupt suddenly into the startling claim that subscription to the political domination of the old-time religion and its morality is a condition for claiming and fully exercising constitutional rights. For it seems to them that the only way to protect and foster P1 and P2 is to sacrifice the pluralism of P3. This retreat from pluralism is precisely what we find articulated as a political philosophy by Jerry Falwell, founder of the Moral Majority:

The 1980's are certainly a decade of destiny for America. The rising tide of secularism threatens to obliterate the Judeo-Christian influence on American society. In the realm of religion, liberal clergy have seduced the average American away from the Bible and the kind of simple faith on which this country was built. We need to call America back to God, back to the Bible, back to moral sanity. In our attempt to rally a diversity of morally conservative Americans together in Moral Majority, we were convinced that millions of people were fed up with the fruits of liberalism both in politics and in religion. I was well aware that it is unpopular in some circles to equate the two. But I say that they must be viewed as cousins of the same family because they both rest on the same foundational presupposition of the inherent goodness of mankind.³

Falwell goes on to defend the Moral Majority against the objection that it would limit the civil liberties of those who do not agree with it. Speaking of homosexuals, for example, he writes, "We do not oppose civil rights for homosexuals. We do oppose special rights for homosexuals who have chosen a perverted life-style rather than a traditional life-style."⁴ What seems envisioned here is a role reversal in which the evangelical Christian norms that secular pluralism had privatized are (once again) made normative for society, while the beliefs and practices of those who have a more robust view of civil and human rights are to be marginalized and privatized and left with as few constitutional protections as possible.

Liberals troubled by these thoughts often seek comfort in the belief that these ideas rest on a false view of American religious and political history. But a closer look at that history shows that there is a large grain of truth in Falwell's account and that the liberal view of America is no less historically off-key. The liberal version of American history passed out by schools and colleges since those institutions were taken over in this century by successive waves of Progressivism stresses the secular tolerance of the Founding Fathers. But the public religion that originally undergirded the legitimacy of American politics had far less to do with Enlightenment Deism and far more to do with Protestant evangelicalism than secular historians have, until recently, let on.

What must be remembered first is that America was populated, in large measure, by people who were on the ultimately losing side of the English civil war of the seventeenth century.

The great Protestant empire that Cromwell's armies dreamed of was founded, in a different form, here. A generation ago, the American historian Bernard Bailyn, building on the insights of Perry Miller, showed that those who responded to the revolutionary call were motivated less by the enlightened and skeptical worldview of the elite who wrote their legal documents and spoke for their regime abroad than by the idea that Englishmen had, from the earliest times, personal rights that had subsequently had eroded by governments, which frequently justified their usurpations by appeals to established religion.⁵ Any genuinely legitimate government that the liberated colonies might establish must, therefore, be formally enjoined from exercising that sort of illegitimate power. Thus among the basic legitimating acts of political foundation was the disestablishment of the established colonial churches. In this feat Enlightenment toleration played a crucial role. The point, however, in many people's minds, was not to protect abstract human rights. Far less was it to induce religious skepticism. Rather, the depoliticized churches now felt themselves commissioned to build a new Jerusalem, no longer in England's green and pleasant land, but in the wilderness where God had sent these people, as he had sent the Tribes of Israel into the desert. So great was the opposition to establishment that only about five percent of this deeply religious people formally belonged to established churches at the time of the Revolution. After disestablishment, however, church membership, through the spreading and decentralizing mechanism of denominationalism, rose steadily until it reached a peak of almost sixty percent in the 1950s. It hovers not much lower than that today.⁶

The expectation of socialists and other radical humanists that this opium of the people would gradually disappear, as it seems to have in many other industrialized countries, seems wildly at odds with these trends. The reason is that in America the development of political man—the fundamental project of the bourgeois ascendancy—went hand in hand with the spread of religion. This system was already well developed by the time De Tocqueville got here. His European readers were wondering, he was aware, how a country could maintain order if it had disestablished religion. In answering that question, De Tocqueville did not challenge the assumption that political order

depends on religious authority. He merely asserted that Americans are among the most religious people on earth, carrying its authority within their breasts and thus having little need for external supports: "Liberty regards religion as . . . the divine source of its claims. It considers religion as the safeguard of morality, and morality as the best security of the law, and the surest pledge of the duration of freedom." This view is entirely consistent, De Tocqueville says, with Americans' subtle anticlericalism, which led them to expect the clergy to stay out of practical politics.⁷ To this insightful analysis Marx could only reply, somewhat weakly, that individualistic, capitalist American man, since he is obviously still very religious, must not be yet be genuinely democratic.⁸

My reason for recalling these facts is to suggest that from the first the American polity acquired legitimacy among the governed in proportion as it acknowledged and internalized the vision of a Protestant Republic rather than of an Enlightenment City or a Socialist Commune. "America," no less a figure than Woodrow Wilson said, "was born a Christian nation for the purpose of exemplifying to the nations of the world the principles of the righteousness found in the word of God."⁹ Within this context, the periodic evangelical revivals that had begun by the seventeen forties came increasingly to acquire the deep political significance that they retain even in our own times. This is especially true of the Second Great Awakening, which followed the ratification of the Constitution. According to the civil religion that actually developed here, the vicissitudes of the nation were precipitated by personal sin and betrayal. They might, therefore, be reversed by personal regeneration and salvation. On this view there is a complex, dialectical relation between civil and sectarian religion, and not the usual contrast between them that one finds in most discussions of the topic since Rousseau. The public, political religion was embodied in a narrative of freedom. But this implied great responsibilities on the part of the politically free individual not only to keep state power from congealing into a world of its own, but also to live in a way that made a minimally interfering and maximally democratic state possible. Thus the purely private significance of sectarian soul-saving acquired, in Protestant America, political overtones. As Sacvan Bercovitch has

shown, the standard genre of public discourse in which this vision was urged was the jeremiad, a variant on the sermon form.¹⁰ It was into this hermeneutically thick context that Lincoln spoke, and after him Martin Luther King. Their political presuppositions did not differ as much as liberals might like to think from those of Dwight Moody or Billy Graham.¹¹

From the side of the ruling elite, moreover, this interdependence between religion and politics was just what one might have hoped for. Classical political theory, well known to the Founders, had held that republican self-government, a political form haunted historically by failure and fragility, rested on virtue. Against the claim that virtue had died with the Ancients, the Calvinist republican tradition, which had been inherited by Americans, held that one could indeed have modern republics so long as religion had been deeply and personally internalized by the sort of people whom David Riesman has called "inner directed." Religion of this sort would produce precisely the virtues of self-restraint needed for republican self-government. In saying that the "American Constitution is made only for a moral and religious people," John Adams expressed this understanding of the foundations of the Republic, as well as his (often wavering) hope that the conditions for such an experiment would continue to be fulfilled in this country.¹²

It has, of course, been noted that the language of republican virtue was quickly displaced by a more secular political theory which, following Hobbes, Locke, Newton and Adam Smith, stressed the beneficial, self-equilibrating effects of self-interest.¹³ This was an ideology developed during the Whig ascendancy in England after 1688. It was fit more for an oligarchy than for a republic. It has unquestionably had a massively vulgarizing effect on our social and political life. But, contrary to what is often claimed, this fact did not destroy, or even weaken, the link between politics and religion that had been established by the displaced republican theory. On the contrary, it threw into greater relief the importance of private religious and moral life as a way of compensating for the nation's, as well as the individual's, inherent tendency toward materialism and selfishness. The United States is a markedly dualistic, almost Manichaean society—as the constant oscillations in its foreign

and domestic policy between self-interest and moralism demonstrate.

So far, then, this looks like an academic gloss on precisely the story that Falwell tells. But it really isn't. As Martin Marty and other religious historians have made clear, the infusion of masses of mostly Catholic and Jewish immigrants, who could not easily be assimilated to America's Protestant religious and political self-understanding, brought about a crisis that by the end of the nineteenth century was beginning to split what Marty calls "The Protestant Empire" into two irreconcilable parties. Some churches, or at least their leadership, were willing to acknowledge the newcomers, with their own religious traditions, as full parties to the American Covenant. In some cases, notably among Social Gospelers, they were even willing to do something about the many problems that immigration had spawned. Liberal Protestants, as they came to be called, thus acceded to a more inclusivist, secular and pluralist understanding of American civil religion than had prevailed earlier. They were frequently pushed in this direction by the newcomers themselves, who were able to quote chapter and verse from America's foundational documents.¹⁴

Meanwhile, in reaction to the betrayal of the original Covenant that they saw in these developments, adherents of the old time religion, taking the name evangelical with them, regressed to an intensely reactionary nativism. For the first time, they laid down precisely who one had to be and what one had to believe if one was to be a loyal American, fully faithful to the nation's Covenant with God. Their quarrel with pluralism may have been fought out over issues such as evolution, but the issue was more deeply about the sources of morality and political legitimacy. It is in this context alone that we can speak of "Fundamentalism." The term itself did not exist until 1910.¹⁵ Yet it is this tradition alone, and not the larger pattern of which it forms a part, which Jerry Falwell blithely identifies as the "Judeo-Christian influence on America." This tradition, which had become recessive as Progressivist secularism succeeded in more fully integrating the immigrants and in acknowledging their civil rights, awoke in a fury when it was compelled in the 1950s and 1960s finally to acknowledge the civil rights of Black Americans. It was then required to experience the psychic

nightmare of our defeat in Vietnam. In the wake of the collapse of the liberal ascendancy by the early seventies, this nativist tradition acquired, if only temporarily, a political prominence and power that left liberals, who had naively assumed the self-evidence of their own version of American history, unable fully to comprehend what had happened. Thus I turn now to the liberals and their story.

III

In the passage quoted above, Falwell speaks negatively of liberal humanists, both secular and religious. Liberal humanists have a markedly different view from the Christian right about how to solve the problems posed by the triad of propositions I set down at the outset. They propose to protect the freedom and privacy of P3 against views like those of Falwell by rejecting P2. While it is true, they say, that every legitimate state rests on morality, morality does not rest on religion. It has independent foundations in rationality itself. The Golden Rule—"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"—depends either on the idea of being rationally consistent in your choices, as Kant had it, or on the ability of reason to perceive long-range self-interest, as Utilitarians like Benjamin Franklin thought. With sectarian, dogmatic and authoritarian religion thus put out of play, it becomes much easier to defend a more vigorous, pluralistic and tolerant view of civil rights than that proposed by the evangelical right. Rights are thought to rest on basic human claims discernible by reason itself, unclouded by parochial tradition or inherited prejudice. These must always be respected and protected. To think this way is to acknowledge that man is autonomous, or as Falwell puts it imprecisely, "basically good." It is, therefore, to renege on some of the premises of orthodox Christianity. Liberal humanism implies thereby that moral and political man is fully capable of running his own affairs; and that, as John Kennedy put it in his Inaugural Address, "In this world God's work must be truly our own." Kennedy's words were all the more pointed, and the moment they were uttered all the more significant, because they embodied his acknowledgement of the liberal view of human and civil rights. This view had allowed Catholics to be integrated into the American polity in the first place, and so

had allowed Kennedy himself to aspire to the presidency. These words implied a rejection of traditional Catholic doctrine no less than of Fundamentalist nativism. From the point of view of both Protestant and Catholic orthodoxy humanist moralism is not moral at all. For its assertion of human autonomy implies an arrogance that renders its moral pretensions empty or hypocritical.

However, despite the fact that from the liberal humanist perspective morality does not rest on religion, religion was thought to have moral worth in the most revered formulations of modern humanism. It was even thought fit to play an important role in the life of a reasonable nation. For a morally valid religion—a "Religion within the Bounds of Reason," as Kant put it—is an imaginative formulation and exemplification of the rational moral principles that can be found, for example, in the life and teachings of Jesus. This religion acknowledges the existence of a Supreme Being whose attributes embody and guarantee rational moral principles. The constitutional right to practice whatever religion one wishes, or none at all, was not, therefore, the result of religious indifference or moral relativism on the part of the enlightened Founding Fathers who held these views. Rather, this right expressed their conviction that where religion is disestablished the autonomous moral power of reason will be released to provide legitimacy for the state—and will gradually reform sectarian religion itself so that it comes to be constrained by rational morality and belief. This was certainly the view of Jefferson. The author of Virginia's Statute on Religious Freedom accordingly found time to snip the Gospels up into a little book which preserved the rational core of Jesus' morality and disposed of the quaint Jewish background and folk-mythology.

It is important to remember, however, that this Enlightenment religion was not the civil religion that actually took root in nineteenth-century America, however fondly academic liberals may think it was. The Enlightenment moment in American history quickly became recessive. The state that actually arose came to depend for its legitimation, as we have seen, much more on the Protestant Covenant theology of the people than on the rationalism of their leaders. Nonetheless, as Jefferson and others had hoped, this view did have a softening effect on

many Christian churches within the Evangelical Republic. It is the source of the liberal Christianity that Falwell conflates with secular humanism. In addition to the toleration it injected into relatively orthodox denominations, the influence of liberal humanism induced Calvinists to become Unitarians, especially as they grew fearful of the emotional excesses of popular revivalism. With the coming of the Romantic movement, many Unitarians in turn became Transcendentalists. They were the formulators of the most poetically and imaginatively compelling version of American civil religion on its political side. It was these liberals who became abolitionists and had the moral courage to wage their bloody war against slavery. Later, after the rise of the socially problematic industrial cities, this tradition gave birth to the Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, which in part precipitated the irreversible break with the Fundamentalists. This tradition in American Protestantism was still vigorous enough in recent times to respond convincingly to the Civil Rights and Anti-War movements, along with traditions that had originally been empowered by its tolerant and universalist understanding of the Covenant—liberal Catholics and Jews and, not least, American Blacks.

Thus some liberal humanists are members of churches and synagogues, and some churches and synagogues are themselves more or less officially liberal. These institutions have tried to fuse the claims of autonomous morality with the deepest impulses of the Bible. Asked whether religion rests on morality or morality on religion, persons of this persuasion will try to refuse the choice. Religion and morality are two aspects of the same thing. Responsiveness to God's judgment does not contradict moral autonomy, but is an expression of it. However, a large and diverse number of educated and secularized Americans, who had become alienated from the sectarianism and moral oppressiveness of their own religious and ethnic backgrounds, and from the conventionalism and hypocrisy that hung like a pall by the end of the nineteenth century over the Evangelical Empire, abandoned the churches and often the religious point of view more or less entirely in pursuit of often genuine public, as well as private, goods. Of particular importance to many of these people, was the perception that Protestant individualism, despite the good intentions of Raus-

chenbusch and others, seemed too deeply wedded to small town capitalism and to a condescending reliance on equally small-scale charities to meet the challenges posed by monopolization and class warfare. The matter came to a head with the collapse of *laissez-faire* capitalism and the subsequent Great Depression. (Note that conservative, evangelical Christians still stridently defend a vision of small town capitalist America that exists mostly in myth.) Influenced by the potential of science to solve large-scale problems, and more tenuously by a socialist tradition that European immigrants had brought, in some small measure, to America, many sincere and well informed people came to feel that morality and social justice could be served only by rejecting religion altogether. The term "secular humanism" is properly used only in this connection. After the break with conservative evangelicalism provided an opening toward secularism, therefore, liberal Protestantism became only one voice within a widening progressive, and increasingly secular, consensus that ranged from the intensely religious to groups and persons quite hostile to religion. From this perspective at least, Falwell is not that far off in conflating religious and secular liberals.

The liberal consensus was held together by a revisionist version of American history that exaggerated the importance and continuity of the Enlightenment moment, while at the same time it preserved a vague, highly inclusive sense of the nation's unique call and destiny, the roots of which lay in Covenant Theology. This vision became part of the ideology of the schools through the massive ascendancy of the Progressivist tradition in these institutions. Attention thus shifted to the schools rather than the churches as the primary sites of moral and political formation. The role of learned humanistic Jews in the universities and the courts in articulating this vision is of particular importance. Like Catholics, Jews had taken advantage of the understanding of civil rights accorded to by liberal Protestants. Unlike Catholics, however, they were not pleased to have that understanding continue to rest on Christianity, no matter how rationalized and watered down it was. Jews had had long experience in being losers in any sort of Christian polity, even the most ostensibly enlightened. Thus just as learned Jews had done in the German Enlightenment of the late eight-

eenth century, so now they pressed for a more purely philosophical, rational understanding of the civil rights of Americans.

It is in the context of this transformation that the philosophical work and influence of American Pragmatists should be situated. C.S. Pierce, the father of Pragmatism, may have been moved by an animus against absolutism in strictly metaphysical and epistemological matters in proclaiming that ideas are tools rather than pictures. But it was to undermine specifically American forms of religious and political absolutism that Pragmatism most deeply interested James and Dewey. James argued that from a pragmatic point of view, religious belief, language and conceptual patterns remain uniquely effective in helping people deal with existential questions. His pragmatism questioned only the dogmatism of religious institutions, and suggested that the effectiveness of religious belief was proportional to its privatization.¹⁶ Dewey, however, who lived in more turbulent times, disagreed with James on the value of religious beliefs as such. Dewey had started out as a liberal Congregationalist but broke with the Church completely, believing that his instrumentalist view of rationality could provide the philosophical foundations for a broad Progressive tradition that privileged no particular world-view and that approved ideas only on the basis of their moral and social fruits in the shared experience of people. Democracy, as Dewey envisioned it, could provide in social solidarity the sense of meaning that James still ascribed to individual religious sensibility.¹⁷ Nonetheless, Dewey's liberalism prevented him from calling into question the right of people to their private religious beliefs and practices, or to their private property, unlike the socialists to Dewey's left. The result was a pragmatic "pluralism" in which all religious traditions would have equal standing in a public realm that was substantively secular, capitalist—and liberal.

Having triumphed by the fifties and early sixties, this view, and the reworked Enlightenment story of American history that encoded it, reached a point of apparent self-evidence. Few reflected on its vulnerabilities. In the great celebration that was America at the flood tide of world hegemony, evangelical nativism was perceived as a marginal, soon-to-disappear phenom-

non. It is striking, therefore, that the pluralist vision, and the liberal consensus it fostered, has receded in the last decade and that the evangelical nativism it was designed to render impotent has thrived. Indeed, among articulate humanists themselves the religiously oriented position urged against Dewey's secular optimism by Reinhold Niebuhr has been taken up again by writers like Bellah.¹⁸ For Bellah, no less than for Niebuhr, it is pre-rational religious tradition, imagery, language and practice that provide the context within which Enlightenment rationalism makes whatever sense it does. Enlightenment moderation lives off Christian excess. Take that background away and its arguments have no point. When, under the impact of modernity, that substantial background of social practices erodes, neither the categorical imperative, nor the utilitarian rule that we should maximize happiness, nor pragmatic consensus seeking can give any guidance that is not already implicitly contained in whatever moral intuitions we still happen to possess from our religious traditions. Nor, more importantly, can moral rationalism and its philosophical techniques of analysis yield any new motives that will lead us to act in accord with those intuitions.

On this view, the religiously informed background that once provided, and in some measure still does provide, the fundamental patterns of moral socialization in our society continues to undergird in a unique way the concrete substance of our morality. This remains true for Bellah even if he admits, as a liberal humanist, that from a theoretical point of view religion is conceptually rooted in an autonomous moral impulse. For it remains true on this view that if morality is to be preserved it must be encoded in, or at least affected by, terms that draw from the religious traditions of the nation. Secular humanists may well feel impelled to distance themselves, for various good reasons, from religion. But the purely secular world that results from taking this distance, it now seems to Bellah and others, withdraws the very conditions under which liberal humanism, with its insistence on the intrinsic worth and autonomy of human beings, has any real concrete meaning.

Views like these go back to Hegel.¹⁹ They are, however, surprisingly common in the seventies and eighties of our own century. What might be called the impotence of the Enlighten-

ment is a vital theme among contemporary humanist writers. Meaning, the German sociologist Jürgen Habermas has written, becomes a scarce commodity in modernized states precisely because it is a non-renewable resource inherited from the past.²⁰ In his influential *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that we have inherited nothing but the shards and pieces of a moral philosophy that, having lost its coherence in a numinous theological world view, now makes only a fitful sense.²¹ By "we" MacIntyre means, most immediately, professional philosophers, whose sacerdotal role in contemporary universities seems now restricted to chanting ritual pieties about the rational foundations of morality and politics, and to telling hagiographical stories about Socrates and Kant and Mill in order to disguise from themselves, and especially from others, the fact that the modern, technocratic university no longer has much to do with the old humanist culture. It would appear, then, that the new Dark Ages of the post-bourgeois, post-political order predicted by Max Weber are upon us. They seem to have been brought on, moreover, by our rationalism itself.²²

The fact that disenchantment of this magnitude exists among the brahmins of humanism may partially explain why views like those of Falwell can get a public hearing. The religious right, whose persistence (like that of traditional cultures generally) liberals constantly underestimate, has flooded into the public space vacated by a confused and doubt-ridden liberal culture. What, however, has caused this crisis of confidence within liberal humanism?

The causes are both historical and conceptual. History has, in general, disappointed the liberal prophets of the nineteenth century. They assumed that social progress and individual freedom would increase together. What happened instead was that a series of disastrous economic crises, wars, revolutions and depredations of underdeveloped regions seemed to demonstrate that political and economic freedom must result in unacceptable inequalities and explosive social tensions, and that equality and order can be attained only by compromising freedom. Widespread disillusionment about the power of autonomous reason to direct society accompanied these dilemmas. It is only recently, however, that these disillusionments, which began affecting Europe a century ago, have really taken

root in America. This has much to do with the assault on the peculiar American sense of world mission that followed our defeat in Vietnam, and on the perceived failure of the great liberal push of the sixties to assure social justice at home. It is against this background that the recent influence of European pessimism on American humanist thinkers should be situated.

On the no less important conceptual side, however, the crisis among humanist thinkers rests on their acceptance of the consequences of the assumption I have labelled A1—the notion that all ideas are in some basic way rooted in shared speech and public discourse. Wittgenstein, Heidegger and others demonstrated earlier in the century that all of our concepts, and even our sense of ourselves, are not only acquired through speech but get their very meaning from the roles they play in what Wittgenstein called "language games." There is no such thing as a private language in which an isolated ego confronts a bundle of sensations and then tries to keep track of them by constructing and manipulating concepts. For this reason philosophers now find it difficult to draw a clear line between the origin of a concept and its justification, even though drawing precisely that distinction was what philosophers had been expected to do since the Enlightenment. The authority of tradition was never to be preferred over rational argument. To think otherwise would be to fall into "the genetic fallacy." Now, however, it is at least as compelling to say, for example, that the maintenance of traditional beliefs and practices is a condition of the possibility of having and using moral concepts as that these practices must conform to independent rational criteria. It is in the context of these philosophical "discoveries" that philosophers now talk freely of an "end of philosophy." For this notion certainly does call into question the nature of philosophy as it has been practiced since early modern times.²³

Now we reach the crucial point. In the light of this stress on the publicity of all our thinking, it appears that the fundamental liberal notion of an autonomous and inviolable self depends in principle, as well as historically, on the Judeo-Christian notion of God's love for each individual. Thus it can readily appear that without some reference, no matter how attenuated, to this old theological idea, the central idea of personal worth and

freedom on which all forms of morality and rights-based liberalism rely cannot be sustained. In this way liberal humanism may be deeply dependent on religion, and its tendency to attack the latter may have set up the conditions for its own disappearance. Nietzsche, whose reputation has never been higher than at present, suspected just that. Thus Michel Foucault has argued that Nietzsche was right to suggest that if God is dead "Man"—the notion of the inviolable individual self—cannot be far behind.²⁴

This consequence seems to have been accepted with equanimity, however, by those I have called scientific technocrats. As I will show in the next section, the culture of expertise that is now in the ascendancy in government, academia, the media and large-scale bureaucratic organizations of all sorts assumes that social progress and all the other promises of nineteenth-century liberalism can be achieved without morality or the religious view of man on which it is based. All that is required is full reliance on organized and applied science. Repelled, however, by the bleak administrative view of human life and the defective conception of freedom that he, together with MacIntyre and other thinkers, sees in these developments, Bellah is attempting to keep the inheritance of American liberal humanism alive in the face of the administered happiness of scientism by asking humanists to reclaim their republican and religious roots. Republicanism requires morality—virtue, as the Ancients and Montesquieu would have called it; and morality, Bellah suggests, means responsiveness to a call that comes upon us from beyond our own skins. This call has been made available to us preeminently in religious communion, if not civil then sectarian. Bellah thus comes as close as any humanist has to subscribing to the *de facto*, if not the *de jure*, primacy of religion over morality, thus responsoring a position that De Toqueville merely reported.

To the extent, however, that humanist thinkers like Bellah demand genuine morality as a principle of political legitimacy (P1), while also accepting the claim that morality presupposes a Judeo-Christian sense of the self (P2), liberal humanism is left struggling to keep its inherently ambiguous place midway between the pre-modern, pre-political godly man, and the post-political man created by that powerful child of humanism itself.

technocratic scientism. For with its love of reason and its hopes for science, humanism has brought forth full-blown from its own head a new kind of intellectual who is as hostile to his or her morally-oriented humanist parent as to religion itself. Since it is nothing but a pale ghost of its religious parent, humanist moralism would seem to be destined no less than religion itself to be reduced to the status of political irrelevance.

IV

To the views that have provoked these most recent and most troubled reflections I now turn. Scientism is the belief that where a problem cannot be tackled by the scientific method it is either a pseudo-problem or can be only imperfectly formulated and solved. It is important, however, to recognize that one can be pro-science and anti-scientistic. What is at stake is whether one believes that human rationality is expressed exclusively in the "scientific method," whatever that may turn out to be.

Scientism was given its most influential philosophical defense by Positivism. Positivists were inspired by Comte's attempt, in the 1830s, to entrust the enlightened and revolutionary inheritance of France to a "church"—that is how Comte thought of it—of scientific experts, who would deploy the methods that had been successful in understanding and controlling nature to knowing and controlling social processes through social technology. Positivists believe that metaphysical and ideological disputes are meaningless, and are therefore irrational and dangerous. Scientific disputes, on the other hand, are resolvable because they restrict themselves to predicting and manipulating only what our sensory experience tells us about.

Positivism acquired great international prestige earlier in this century because of the able defense of these ideas given by the Logical Positivists of the Vienna Circle and their English admirers.²⁵ The emigration of a number of these philosophers to the United States during and after the thirties precipitated, especially after the Second World War, a marked change in the self-understanding of American academic life. The Logical Positivists' rejection of absolutes and their scientism was used to refresh American Pragmatism, which was thought in some ways to have anticipated it, and to strengthen the hopes for social

reform that Pragmatists had placed in science. Moreover, in a climate of opinion that sought to contrast American internalism with Communist absolutism, this amalgam of Pragmatism and Positivism was used to show that Americans would exercise a hegemony over the world infinitely preferable to that of the Russians. America's alleged empiricism, pragmatic and pluralistic abhorrence of absolutes would check totalitarianism. There was thus much talk in the fifties and early sixties of an "end of ideology," in which the "tough-minded," "value free" methods of inquiry developed by those with "laboratory habits of mind" would bring about a world where freedom did not have to be sacrificed to achieve economic and social progress. This was to be done through the creation of a range of social sciences having both a pure and an applied side. Just as engineering is applied physics, so social scientific knowledge is to be applied to solve social problems by using techniques of analysis and intervention sometimes bluntly referred to as "social engineering." In contrast to the holistic social engineering of totalitarianism, however, the good kind of social engineering was to be problem-centered and "piecemeal," as Pragmatists had already insisted.²⁶

Scientism approaches our triad propositions by denying, in the first instance, the truth of Pl. Political legitimacy does indeed rest on rationality, as liberal humanists had maintained. But rationality manifests itself in science rather than in morality. Morality, together with religion and aesthetics, is reduced to emotional response and meaningless, sometimes harmful, ideology. On this view, it makes little difference what one wants to say about the relationship between morality and religion. For nothing very important hangs on whether one depends on the other or the other way around. One might plausibly deny, in the spirit of Logical Positivism, that these claims are meaningful enough to get settled truth values at all. But even then one can argue, as does B.F. Skinner in his extraordinary book *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, that morality does indeed rest in some sense on religion. Both religion and morality, as mere social phenomena, presuppose what Skinner calls the Myth of Autonomous Man: the idea that I have a unique personality inside my skin that Thinks and Chooses and is Loved by God, and by Immanuel Kant, as having inherent,

indeed infinite worth. Skinner evokes long-standing Positivist themes to suggest that rationalist moralism inherits this view of man from religion. In that weak sense, Skinner argues, morality does indeed rest on religion. The Myth of Autonomous Man implies a belief in "essences"—bloodless substitutes for the gods that were once thought to underlie phenomena. So long as we continue to believe in "essences," Skinner goes on, and especially in an inviolable "human essence," we will be unable to transform the conditions of life so that the greatest happiness of the greatest number dreamed by the Enlightenment results. For the scruples against violating the autonomy of persons that must then ensue will prevent us from applying the results of behavioral technology to change the destructive habits and actions of men, which subtract from their own and from the sum total of human happiness.²⁷

It was for this reason, Skinner might have argued, that Mill's Utilitarianism was so ineffective. In his Victorian piety, Mill believed that he was merely providing a more rational and reliable version of the traditional morality of Judeo-Christian essentialism. But on this interpretation Utilitarianism produces counter-examples that even first-year philosophy students are expected to recognize. There are always conditions in which the greatest happiness of the greatest number can be achieved only by violating the autonomy of individuals.²⁸ If, however, we give up our belief in essences and restrict ourselves to predicting and manipulating the phenomena we actually perceive, as Positivists urge us to do, we will be free to forego our scruples and to do what is necessary for the good of society. On Skinner's view, then, morality is not only not necessary for social progress, but is positively harmful. It must be replaced by social engineering.

A similar story can be told about the fate of Dewey's Pragmatism. Dewey was, as Richard Rorty has said, the American Mill.²⁹ His Pragmatism rested on a receding but real background of religious values, and on an almost religious sense of democratic discourse. Dewey's promotion of science was intended to further these aims. Instead it led to their subversion. Pragmatism had been an attempt to take a tolerant view of the many languages that a democratic and pluralistic society uses in making its collective decisions. It sought to delegitimize the

absolutist claims that speakers often use to constrain the flow of discourse and to short circuit decision-making. Under the influence of scientism, however, pragmatism was transformed into a doctrine in which scientific demonstration was assumed to constitute a privileged language into which all rational discourse and decision-making must be cast. What had been regarded as the only language immune to absolutism thus became ironically an absolute language that called into question the intelligibility and utility of other approaches.

Even at his most scientific, Dewey thought of science as little more than organized and responsible inquiry in every field of endeavor, and especially in public discussions about political and social policy. His educational ideal was to empower every citizen to participate in this discourse. The contrast-class to Dewey's "science" was religious and philosophical absolutism, not ordinary language. The most striking consequence of the newer view, however, is that the way people normally talk and respond to their problems is dismissed as cognitively worthless, except as data for further expert analysis and manipulation within highly self-conscious and artificial theoretical frameworks. Only an expert language will be epistemically valid or technically effective. The implication is clear that traditional American practices of democratic opinion formation must now be entrusted to "tough-minded" experts, whose internal discourse and decision-making serve as a surrogate for old-style democracy. That style may have been adequate for an isolationist culture whose behavior was often affected by the tacit idealism and naïveté of its religious inheritance. But in a world made dangerous by "international responsibilities," over which hangs constantly the nuclear Sword of Damocles, this would no longer do. Nor would it do in a domestic economy in which constant intervention is required to sustain the high production and consumption rates that justify, or excuse, the departures from traditional American pluralism decentralization inherent in the new system of "top down" management. Accordingly, the culture of scientific technocracy plays an indispensable role in ideologically justifying, as well as in practically guiding, our present economic and political system. In this way it can even appear, especially to its own practitioners, as the outcome and successor of liberal progressivism itself, and not

as its gravedigger—although common folk have deep suspicions about this.

In saying these things, I do not mean to call into question the genuine expertise that well-educated people can acquire and put to good use. The issue is about how expertise is to be conceived. What is missing from the Positivist, and generally scientific, conception of the expert is the deep learning and sympathies that experts must possess if they are to be effective. What is missing is the practical wisdom that comes from broad education, from deep commitment to the underlying values and traditions of the expert's own society, from acute knowledge of the historical context of and constraints on action, and from a sustained willingness to submit one's opinion about how to adjust tradition to the need for innovation to wide public discussion and participation in decision making. These qualities amount to a refusal to substitute what the Greeks called *techné* for the practical wisdom they called *phronesis*. Unlike *techné*, *phronesis* rests on piety toward one's inheritance. It is the central intellectual virtue of genuine republican life. For it is the ground of self-rule. This, too, is a theme that Bellah and his colleague, the philosopher William M. Sullivan, have emphasized as a lesson to be learned from *Habits of the Heart*. In doing so they are seconding the stress on practical wisdom advocated by philosophers such as Hans-George Gadamer, Hannah Arendt, Richard Bernstein and Alasdair MacIntyre.³⁰ The fear of all these writers is that people possessing practical wisdom have now been replaced by an army of highly competitive, woefully inexperienced people whose ability to manipulate the argot of a specialization alone certifies them to play prescribed roles in large public and private bureaucratic organizations. Since universities are mainly in the business of producing these people, a certain skepticism about current university culture attends most of these reflections.

Ironically, then, Skinner must concur with Bellah that modern society, to the extent that it submits itself to the rule of technocratic scientism, is eroding the premises of religious and moral man. From this perspective, Kant, Mill and Dewey were still too Christian to be anything more than heralds of a new, fully secular order that is only now emerging. For Skinner, however, there is no reason to think that this erosion of the

liberal humanist half-way house between religion and science is anything but a good thing. On the contrary, it is the outcome and fulfillment of the rational politics that the early humanists set out to have.

What, then, of P3? If Skinner is right in thinking that freedom and dignity are merely essentialist residues of an irrational and misery-producing religious worldview, how are we to protect the rights that liberals have wanted people to have so that they can fend off the aggressions of others, the tyranny of majorities, and now the power of the technocratic-bureaucratic state itself? Skinner's blunt away with this issue is to deny, in effect, that a person who had been rendered happy needs any rights—even if the idea of rights were coherent. It is more common, however, for those who share Skinner's general outlook to try to find a new, albeit a weaker, interpretation of rights, and not to reject them outright. One way to do this is to say that our rights reflect the fact that pleasures, or better "utilities," are what we are all after and that no one's preferences are inherently better than another's. The only problem that remains, then, is the technical one of how to distribute pleasures in a way that acknowledges the equal rights, that is the equal claim to their preferences, of all. And for this we need experts in "social choice."³¹

This equation of values and rights with pleasures and claims to pleasure is precisely what Bellah and his colleagues are most worried about in *Habits of the Heart*. With the reduction of all forms of value to pseudo-commodities, the ability of reason to discern differences in the intrinsic worth of various goods evaporates. Rationality functions in a purely instrumental way to find efficient means to maximize and distribute preferences, now considered as commodities. In such a world, scientism acquires self-reinforcing legitimation by its ability to repress questions about inherent worth and to deliver the goods. However, traditional humanistic discourse—the discourse in which the bourgeois political project was originally framed—disappears with this development. Everyone now has a "right" to his or her own "value system," and even to an irrational belief that one's current preferences and "life-style" are better than all the rest. But that is all there is to it. We may congratulate ourselves on our freedom to express our preferences and

to live our various "life styles," Moral Majority notwithstanding. But we are also required by the logic of this view to concede that this freedom rests squarely on our inability to defend our choices rationally. By re-identifying American political liberty as the ability—sadly wanting, we may feel, in socialist states—to have at our disposal an indefinite range of material and spiritual commodities to choose from, we ratify the collapse of the rational public discourse on which the modern political project of freedom was built.

Between the instrumentally rational discourse of experts, and the irrational babblings of the manipulated public sphere, there falls now only an awesome silence where the discourse of liberal humanism, which once had asserted itself against a religious dogmatism of which it was itself a powerful echo, used to be heard.

V

In the course of these reflections, we have incrementally acquired a deeper understanding of Bellah's project. Bellah is at heart a liberal humanist. But he has come to grasp fully and to fear deeply the tendency of the liberal consensus, as I have described it, to slide into technological scientism. This is a tendency that it is hard to miss if one is professionally situated in contemporary American universities. What undergirds this slide is the progressive weakening of a conception of persons as inherent, infinite centers of value, and of communities and voluntary associations as aimed at protecting the integrity of persons and the networks of meaning that sustain their lives. This conception of the value of personality—precisely the conception that Skinner denies—is tied historically to Judeo-Christian ideas about human nature and the human condition. As these conceptions disappear from public discourse, becoming ever more marginalized and privatized, Bellah fears that a corresponding threat arises to progressive politics, and more deeply to the traditions of American republican self-government that De Tòqueville had noted as resting on religiously grounded, or at least religiously protected, principles. Bellah's solution is not, however, like that of the religious right, to call into question P3—although he would not hesitate to say that the scrupulous value-neutrality advocated by most adherents of P3 is

indeed responsible for the disappearance of normative languages from the public sphere. Rather, Bellah breaks with the customary liberal rejection of P2. He argues, in effect, that only if P2 is at least as true as its denial can the coherence of the liberal, progressive tradition remain vital as it struggles against both religious and scientific distortions. Bellah is not likely to receive thanks from liberals for this flirtation with religion. But for Bellah it is nonetheless true that only if P2 is regarded as at least a partial truth can a viable antidote be found to the manipulations of "expert" culture.

The somewhat tortured route by which Bellah arrived at this fragile view is worth recounting. Long before writing *Habits of the Heart*, Bellah had become a prominent sociologist by studying the role of civil religions in the life of nations. He had compared the Tokugawa religion of Japan with America's sense of itself as a Protestant Chosen People; and he had judged these countries favorably, from the point of view of political legitimacy, in comparison with countries that had failed to develop a distinctive civil religion.³² This was a topic and an approach that could easily arise within the Weberian presuppositions of American sociology in the fifties and sixties. For Weber's American followers, the study of how states are legitimated by a shared belief system was a topic of supreme importance, for it was supposed to provide an antidote to the economic determinism of Marxism.

Bellah's commitment to this perspective led him to mediate extensively on the history of the United States, and on its current situation and prospects, as a function of the vicissitudes of its civil religion. A civil religion is a real religion, for Bellah, and not mere nationalist idolatry, to the extent that it opens a nation to "transcendent judgment . . . and . . . realizes . . . a higher law."³³ By these standards, the American civil religion appeared to him genuinely religious. Lincoln's great achievement, for example, was his transformation of the evangelical impulse into an explicit theodicy of the mass slaughter of the Civil War: The War was a punishment for violation of the nation's Covenant with God through its fateful compromise with slavery. Lincoln, not least through his own martyrdom, renewed this Covenant for a chastened and purified people, which was now thought fit to extend its divinely sanctioned in-

situations across the continent. The modern Civil Rights Movement, with its renewal of Lincolnian themes in the rhetorical brilliance of Martin Luther King, Jr., led Bellah to a burst of optimism. In the *Broken Covenant*, however, a deeply disturbed Bellah read the Vietnam War as a breach of faith. This imperialist intervention was unrestrained and unredemptive by any genuine civil religion, the language and themes of which had been co-opted into reactionary nationalism, where they had not been eroded to nothingness by geopolitical cynicism and expert manipulation.³⁴ Mere power had replaced legitimacy. More recently, Bellah has sometimes been inclined to hope that renewal within a range of voluntary associations, and especially within the churches, might serve as a site for personal moral growth and for the prophetic witness that undergirds progressive social policies.

Throughout these oscillations, Bellah has continued to assume, with Weberian sociologists of religion, that legitimated moral and political systems rely on a network of symbols sufficiently pointed toward the transcendent, and deeply enough entrenched in the life of a community, that they can compel personal and communal response and responsibility. Bellah has, however, taken ever greater distance from the civil religion, in Rousseau's sense, that he at first thought he had discerned in America, but which he no longer thinks can bear heavy moral freight, if it ever really did. In a seminal paper in 1967, Bellah had written that "There actually exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion in America."³⁵ In saying this Bellah was disagreeing (how explicitly I cannot tell) with Will Herberg's influential claim that the actual and genuine religions of America just are Protestantism, Catholicism and Judaism; and that American civil religion, while it is indeed a genuine phenomenon, is not a genuine religion but rather a cult of a national way of life.³⁶ Herberg's claim served to legitimate the conservative, privatistic and bland religious pluralism of the Eisenhower era. This pluralism, we were given to understand, had been brought about not by divine covenant but by a shrewd human contract to tolerate diversity about values. On this view, Catholics and Jews were now finally equal to Protestants, as the liberal consensus had insisted, but only so long as

all these sects performed no political role other than to provide sites for congratulating the state and the society for their religious tolerance. Bellah might well have sensed conservative self-congratulation in this commonplace view, and a corresponding tendency uncritically to accord wisdom to the state in any number of other matters. His alternative, therefore, picked up the reformist side of the earlier progressive consensus and sought in civil religion something with more public, normative punch.

But the civil religion that Bellah identified as serving these public purposes was, as it turned out, subject to several objections. First, Bellah initially assumed too large a gap between civil and sectarian religion. As I have suggested earlier in this essay, these have been, and are in fact, quite intimately connected. Once this is appreciated, it becomes clear that the civil religion that Bellah posited was really just a semi-secular version of Protestant Covenant theology—more public, doubtless, than Herberg's neutralism, but also more Protestant. Put otherwise, Bellah wrote and continues to write from the perspective of a large-hearted liberal Protestantism that invites others (including post-Vatican II Catholics now assimilated to the dominant culture) to join it, rather than from the perspective, more common among traditional Catholics and Jews, in which demands are made for a kind of inclusivism that features a weakening of the pre-eminence of Protestant sensibility in public discourse. This tendency is not, I think, entirely unrelated to the lack of sociological inclusivism in choice of subjects and ideological self-consciousness that many critics have noted in *Habits of the Heart*. All of the stories in this book are about white middle class good-hearted, mildly selfish folk who are equally mildly embarrassed by their consumerism and egoism—Protestant man at the end of his pilgrimage. This constricted range of subjects has been something of a barrier to a more enthusiastic reception of *Habits of the Heart* among secular liberals and minorities.³⁷

Second, by postulating a public religion, Bellah opened himself to Herberg's objection that purely civil religion is really a nationalist cult, such as we all recognize in the case of the Afrikaners. Bellah has come, as I have noted, to appreciate this point. Thus he seeks now to situate the crucial element of

judgment and responsibility, which undergirds real religion and genuine republican life, more on the sectarian side, relying on the prophetic traditions of Judaism and Christianity to perform a role that he had earlier ascribed to civil religion itself. The public purposes of civil religion are to be achieved indirectly. A difficulty is that these prophetic traditions achieve their power (as in the case of Jesus of Nazareth himself) precisely because they take a dim view of the secular world as such. It is thus difficult to see how they can have the effect of lending renewed legitimacy to the state.³⁸

These objections constitute real criticisms of *Habits of the Heart*. However, limitations that can be traced to Bellah's personal and professional starting points are far from sufficient to justify dismissing his and his colleagues' work. By situating this work within the wider historical dialectic that I have traced, I have in fact contended that Bellah has made contact with deep, objective problems about the coherence of American thought that are seldom explicitly recognized and that will not go away. He has done this by honoring a number of potentially conflicting intuitions, summarized in P1-P3, none of which can be dismissed without damage to the integrity of our cultural inheritance—as our exploration of three one-sided traditions has shown.

These remarks suggest that simple-minded criticisms are far from sufficient to discredit Bellah's project. But they also suggest that we ought not to expect that explicit, detailed proposals for solving these problems will be forthcoming from *Habits of the Heart* or from any successor book. Since this may be disappointing to a people as oriented to practical problem-solving as Americans are, it may be useful to explain why such proposals cannot logically, and should not normatively, be looked for.

Note what is implied when religious conservatives, liberal humanists or scientific technocrats dismiss one of the three intuitions we have been following. Certainly they thereby attain a clearer sense of what is wrong with America and what to do about it. But they achieve this clarity precisely by narrowing the aperture through which the problem is viewed. In effect, they commit themselves to an overarching, abstract, universal theory of the good life, the grounds of which transcend and precede the particularities of specifically American history and

experience. The theory must then be brought to bear on political reality from above, by way of an explicit program for change that amounts, in effect, to an imposition of a simple solution on a complex reality. Social change, on this view, comes by way of "applied theory," whether the applications take the form of rhetoric, as in the case of religious conservatives, or the form of behavioral technology. In either case, *phronesis*—the kind of practical wisdom that identifies what is good for a society at any particular time from within the deep experience of that society itself—is displaced. Since it is, as I have argued, a key part of Bellah's project to defend the claims of practical wisdom, it is highly unlikely that programs of action conceived along technical or persuasive lines will issue from this work.

Bellah wants to defend *phronesis* by initiating and sustaining a wide dialogue about how this society is to defend the continuity of its tradition. This is not because dialogue is sufficient to achieve renewal. It remains true that talk is cheap. But, on Bellah's tacit view, dialogue itself, when it is conducted with respect for the beliefs and commitments of all legitimate parties, sets afoot myriad incremental attitudinal and practical changes. The cumulative beneficial effects of these changes often cannot be seen until some later point. It is the practical function of historians to recognize and canonize these developments. From this perspective, then, discourse both initiates and constitutes a process of social renewal in a living community. Bellah's own work is likely to be an effective catalyst of discourse only for a limited part of the discursive community. Presumably it is of direct interest mostly to those liberal humanists—heirs to what appears to be a rapidly decomposing Progressive consensus—who find themselves ground between the two stones of religious conservatism and technological scientism. But the failure of Bellah and his colleagues to speak for everyone hardly prevents other voices from being heard. Indeed, by their resolve to respect every legitimate participant in national dialogue the authors of *Habits of the Heart* do their part to encourage other voices.

Implicit in this view is a particular conception of the relation between theory and practice. That conception was best articulated in modern times by Hegel, who thought of himself as Aristotle's successor in defending the primacy of practical wisdom

over *techné*. Hegel said that "Philosophy is its own time reconstructed in thought." By "reconstructed" he meant both reenacted and, by that reenactment, renewed. What cities were among the Greeks, he thought, nation states are in the modern world—focal sites for those temporally extended discussions and enactments that constitute civilized life. The underlying issue in all such discussions is how the claims of tradition are to be adjusted to calls for innovation. In proportion as a nation is civilized, and in possession of what Habermas calls an "undistorted speech situation," it will generate a wide range of alternative views, from among those that are logically possible, about how this adjustment between the old and the new is to be achieved under particular conditions. In *On Liberty*, Mill claimed that the best solution would emerge from an intense, almost Darwinian competition among conflicting positions. But this approach can be dangerous if it is the exclusive mode of discourse, as it threatens to be in scientism. For if the dialectic implicit in the motion of social discourse itself is pushed forward by the vigor with which individuals and groups urge their own views, it is no less true that it is also helped along by those who try to see how the whole discussion hangs together, on the presumption that each contending party has hold of one part of the complete picture. This is what Hegel meant when he said, "The truth is the whole."

It is probably the case that renewal of the Progressive consensus within the United States cannot be achieved without shifting the perspective from which discourse is conducted from an inward-looking national perspective to a more global, ecological perspective. I cannot deal here with the reasons for this. But this shift will have the effect of renewing the coherence of our national thought and experience even as it moves us beyond it. That too is implied when we acknowledge that "The truth is the whole," and it is a truth to which the authors of *Habits of the Heart* have been particularly faithful.

This approach is also a distinctively philosophical one, once it is acknowledged that philosophy is most productive when it remains within the bounds of social discourse, quite apart from whether it is professional philosophers who practice it or sociologists. William James said that "Philosophy is an attempt to see how things as a whole hang together as a whole." Philoso-

phy, on this view of it, does not address mankind from beyond the human sphere. Rather, it seeks clarity from within the human condition and community. It is a Socratic art that helps us clarify our beliefs and commitments by revealing real and potential inconsistencies among them. In doing so, it brings to light the dialectic that lies hidden beneath and within the superficialities of social discourse, revealing thereby the mysterious rationality that is implicit in all genuine social life. Garry Wills expresses this view well when he writes:

The best things in a church, as in a nation, or in individuals, are hidden and partially disowned, the vital impulse buried under all our cowardly misuses of it—as the life of a nation lies under and is oppressed by its crude governing machinery, as the self lies far below the various roles imposed on it or adopted by it, as covenant and gospel run, subterranean, beneath temple and cathedral. Life's streams lie far down for us, below the surface of our lives—where we must look for them.³⁹

Robert Bellah and his colleagues have helped us look for these things in precisely these places in the heart.⁴⁰

NOTES

1. Robert N. Bellah, R. Madsen, W.M. Sullivan, A. Swidler and S.M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
2. See Charles H. Reynolds and Ralph V. Norman, eds., *Community in America: The Challenge of Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
3. Jerry Falwell, "An Agenda for the Eighties," in Jerry Falwell ed., *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: The Resurgence of Conservative Christianity* (New York: Doubleday, 1981) 186-87.
4. Falwell 189.
5. Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1967); Perry Miller, *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1967). (On Miller in this connection, cf. David A. Hollinger, "Perry Miller and Philosophical History," in *The American Province* [Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1985] 152-66). Cf. J.G.A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York: Atheneum, 1981); and Quentin Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), both of whom corroborate Bailyn.
6. Martin Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Dial Press, 1970) 38.
7. Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Part I, Chapter 2. On the separation of clergy from politics, Part II, Chapter 5. These views are even more evident in the work of Adam Schaff, a German immigrant who

wrote on American life a generation after De Tocqueville. Cf. Adam Schaff, *America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), with Introduction by Perry Miller.

8. Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question" (1844) in (for instance) L. Colletti, *Early Writings* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975) 217:

North America is the land of religiosity *par excellence*, as Beaumont, Toqueville and the Englishman Hamilton all assure us. If in the land of complete political emancipation we find not only that religion exists, but that it exists in a fresh and vigorous form, that proves that the existence of religion does not contradict the existence of the state. But since the existence of religion is the existence of a defect, the source of this defect must be looked for in the nature of the state itself. (217)

Marx goes on to identify this defect with private property, which creates the state, even the democratic state, as its instrument for exercising power over propertyless classes and prevents them from becoming what I have called fully democratic human beings. Thus the constitution of the American union implies that "Man was not freed from religion. He received the freedom of religion. He was not freed from property. He received the freedom of property. He was not freed from the egoism of trade. He received the freedom to engage in trade" (233).

Here is the place to say a word about Socialism as a response to the dialectic we are considering. The Socialist tradition emerged out of the Rousseauian break with Calvinist republicanism and was put into currency by radical Jacobins during the European revolutions of the early nineteenth century. It reached definitive expression in Marx's work. Marx was among the first to challenge the idea that each of us has a purely private life or could have a purely private language (A1). On this assumption, he assigns the following truth values to our set of propositions:

P1	P2	P3
F	F	F

On this view, political legitimacy not only does not rest on religion or morality, but also will be achieved precisely when religion and liberal moralism are no longer protected by any appeal to private right. For it is religion, and its ghost-like liberal-moralistic successor, together with the individual's alleged right to regard these private fantasies as helpful or true that sustains the inequities and injustices of social life, blinds people to the economic dynamics that underlie and sustain their plight, and prevents them from achieving a life of genuine social solidarity. This is because religion and "bourgeois morality" act as ideological guarantors of economic and political individualism. Many Democratic Socialists are not as intransigent as Marx on the falsity of P1. They sometimes speak of a "deeper and truer morality," based on the full identification of the individual with his or her social relationships, as the source of real political legitimacy. Still, it is difficult to see how one can affirm P1 while denying P3.

I do not discuss the Socialist approach further because it has played a marginal role in American life. It addresses itself to America from a position largely outside the lived tradition of American experience. That is not hard to understand in virtue of our deep-seated attachment to indi-

- vidualism, capitalism, religion and the sacredness of private rights. Nonetheless, since the late nineteenth century the Socialist point of view has often allowed intellectuals, and at times workers themselves, to offer insightful analyses of American institutions and values; and it has pushed liberal reformers leftward—from classical (*laissez-faire*) liberalism to liberalism in the modern sense, in which the state intervenes to provide competitors in a capitalist polity equal opportunity—as they tried to deal first with the industrialization of the country, then with the collapse of *laissez-faire* capitalism and the Great Depression, and finally, since the Second World War, with America's deeply problematic involvement in the world beyond its shores. Cf. Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973). It can be argued persuasively that the absence of a Socialist tradition in America has had a distorting effect on its political life and on public policy decision-making.
9. Marty, *Righteous Empire*, frontispiece. Cf. also Martin Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land* (Boston: Little Brown, 1984) 363.
 10. Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970).
 11. For this account of the development of church and state in America, see Marty, *Righteous Empire* 179 and 210 ff.
 12. Skinner traces the spread of Calvinist republicanism from Europe to Scotland to America. Rousseau's political theory both derives from Calvinism and is a rebellion against it. Like his Genevan compatriots, Rousseau stresses virtue and selflessness as a condition of political self-governance, as did the Jacobins and Marxists after him. Unlike Calvinists, however, Rousseau did not think that this could be accomplished within a framework of Christian assumptions, but only by restoring classical Greek and Roman attitudes toward the state. Rousseau, who initiated the modern use of the term civil religion, employed it to make precisely this contrast. In Chapter 8 of *The Social Contract*, he says that a civil religion is "limited to a single country only and gives that country its special patrons and tutelary deities." The Christian religion, on the other hand, "instead of binding the hearts of citizens to the state, detaches them from it, as from all worldly things." For this reason it is a mistake to "speak of a Christian republic. Each of these words excludes the other." The American experience is, on this view, impossible—yet it exists, or at least existed. The quotation from John Adams is taken from Reynolds and Norman 17.
 13. John P. Diggins, *The Lost Soul of American Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).
 14. Marty, *Righteous Empire* 177-87; Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land* 297-99 for this account of the great split in American Protestantism. Cf. Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land* 338-41; 347-55, and Marty, *Righteous Empire* 183, for the "Social Gospel" and its representative figures, Washington Gladden, Josiah Strong and Walter Rauschenbusch.
 15. On fundamentalism, cf. Marty, *Righteous Empire* 210-20.
 16. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) and *The Will to Believe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979). Cf. David A. Hollinger, "William James and the Culture of Inquiry" in Hollinger 3-22.
 17. For an account of Dewey's background in a changing Congregational Church, see Bruce Kuklick, *Churchmen and Philosophers: From Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). Dewey's political vision is nicely explored in Richard J. Bernstein, "Dewey, Democracy: The Task Ahead of Us" in John Rajchman and C. West eds., *Post Analytic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) 48-59.
 18. Richard Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985). Niebuhr scorned the optimistic secular liberalism of Dewey's *A Common Faith* in *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*. Cf. Fox 165-66.
 19. Hegel argued that the abstract moralism of Kant's categorical imperative is consistent with virtually any maxim of action. Given the human capacity for self-deception and hypocrisy, Kant's moral principles will not sort out evil from good. Only where moral norms are embedded in the concrete *Sittlichkeit* of social traditions and practices can their moral rationality and worth be identified: G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. and ed. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) para. 134-141, 89-104.
 20. Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).
 21. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).
 22. MacIntyre 245: "This time, however, the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another—doubtless very different—St. Benedict."
 23. The "Death of Philosophy" is explored in Kenneth Baynes, J. Bohman and T. McCarthy, eds., *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1987). I do not mean categorically to prejudge whether philosophy can find its way to a new defense of what is now called "foundationalism." If this were to occur, as contemporary philosophical "realists" and "essentialists," such as Kripke and Donnellan hope, it would have to be a foundationalism that harks back to Leibniz more than to Descartes, whose egoistic starting point inevitably and repeatedly fails. Even then, philosophers would have to convey their new confidence in reason to the culture at large, in an era when there would probably be no one to listen. These reflections have been evoked by some stimulating conversations with my colleague Dr. Isaac Nero.
 24. The idea of the "Death of Man" is central for "post-structuralist" thinkers like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. The notion is that the very idea of an autonomous, introspecting, self-realizing individual—the fundamental concept of the self in modern philosophy and politics since Descartes—cannot be understood outside the idea of God's recognition of such a self. The disappearance of the relevant conception of God means, therefore, as Nietzsche implied, that the corresponding idea of man is equally empty. For an insightful summary of Foucault's views, cf. Hubert L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
 25. Rudolf Carnap, Herbert Feigl and Carl Hempel are representative figures. A.J. Ayer's *Logic, Truth and Language* remains the best introduction to Logical Positivism.
 26. This attitude can be seen in Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1960); in C.P. Snow's *The Two Cultures* (New York: Learning Plans, 1959); and especially in Karl Popper's influential *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), all academic classics of the Cold War period. Popper, in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* and elsewhere, distinguished between "piecemeal social

engineering," which was good, and "holistic" social engineering, such as the Communists and Nazis were thought to practice, which was bad because it rested not on the experimental attitude but on an ideologically motivated attempt to totally remake society. While not, strictly speaking, a Positivist—he disagreed with the notion that metaphysics is nonsense and with the verification criterion of meaning—Popper largely shares the scientism I have ascribed to Positivists.

27. B.F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York: Knopf, 1971).
28. These counter-examples are vividly illustrated in Ursula LeGuin's short story, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," where the maximal happiness (pleasure) of a whole society is predicated on the torture of a single child. What utilitarianism bids us do morally often forbids. In support of the view that Mill is a crypto-Christian, or at least a crypto-essentialist, note how in his essay "Utilitarianism" he is led by Utilitarian hedonism to affirm, with Bentham, that "poetry is a good pushpin," while his Victorian sensibility, repelled by this conclusion, urges him to deny it by claiming, inconsistently, that some pleasures are inherently superior to others.
29. Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) 290, n.16.
30. William M. Sullivan, *Reconstructing Public Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1981); Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*.
31. These issues came vaguely to public awareness in the matter of Judge Robert Bork's unsuccessful nomination to the Supreme Court. Bork, whose roots lie in academic Positivism (specifically Milton Friedman's economic theories) rather than in garden-variety conservatism, discovered that not all claims to have a "right" to some social good, or to what Bork blithely refers as "gratifications," can be efficiently and productively distributed, like true commodities, through a self-equilibrating market mechanism. He was led, therefore, to take a pseudo-conservative view of legal procedure, since on any other view "rights," that is claims to pleasure, will proliferate beyond all measure, and will overwhelm the ability of experts to dispose of them. The expert culture distrusted his conservatism, while true conservatives distrusted his commitment to theory over experience.
32. Robert N. Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1957); "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96.1 (Winter 1967); Philip E. Hammond and R. N. Bellah, *Varieties of Civil Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).
33. Robert N. Bellah, "American Civil Religion in the 1970s," in Russell E. Richey and D.C. Jones eds., *American Civil Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).
34. Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in a Time of Trial* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975). My account of Bellah's development follows David Noble, "Robert Bellah, Civil Religion, and the American Jeremiad," *Soundings* 65.1 (Spring 1982): 88-102. Cf. also Martin Marty, *A Nation of Behavers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) 180-203.
35. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America."
36. Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (New York: Doubleday, 1955). For Herberg's response to Bellah's early work, cf. W. Herberg, "America's Civil Religion: What it is and Whence it Comes," in Richey and Jones, *American Civil Religion*. Herberg appears to have anticipated Bellah's apparent retreat on this point.
37. See especially V. Harding, "Toward a Darkly Radiant Vision of America's Truth: A Letter of Concern. An Invitation to Re-creation," in Reynolds and Norman 67-83, with Bellah's reply, 269-70.
38. This objection is implicit in S. Hauerwas, "A Christian Critique of Christian America," in Reynolds and Norman 250-65.
39. Garry Wills, *Bare Ruined Choirs: Doubt, Prophecy and Radical Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1972).
40. Earlier versions of this essay were read to the Department of Philosophy, California State University, Fullerton; and at the Annual Conference of the Society for Interdisciplinary Nineteenth Century Studies in Boston, Spring 1987. I wish to express thanks to my colleagues at Fullerton for their many helpful comments; to Chuck and Carl Dyke for extended critiques; to Robert Bellah for reading and responding to the manuscript; to a clear-headed anonymous reviewer of this Journal for many good suggestions; and to Mervette Hamid for her generous help in typing the manuscript.