A Professionalized Society: Our Real Future

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Preface

Some years ago, Kennesaw State University was provided with the funds to set up a distance learning facility. The Board of Regents allocated funds from the state lottery to purchase the computers and broadcasting equipment to create two-way television link-ups. The idea was to facilitate remote learning. No longer would students have to travel to our campus to obtain the benefits of our first-rate faculty. This, at any rate, was what was expected. The installation was supposed to usher in a brighter future of expanded educational opportunities. Sadly, things did not work out this way. The technology that was intended to elevate learning did the reverse. Static video pictures of teachers and learners proved less inspiring than in-person interactions. Practice demonstrated that when the participants were not on camera, their attention tended to wander. Most of their time was spent restlessly fidgeting as they awaited liberation from what was experienced as excruciating boredom. Far from a demand for distance learning exploding, the equipment sat unused most of the time.

Far grimmer in its failures has been the promise of a Marxist Revolution. Marx predicted that capitalist greed would reduce the mass of humankind to quivering poverty. The workers who produced the wealth that enabled their masters to live in luxury would themselves scrape by on subsistence wages. Eventually, however, they would recognize that they were being oppressed and would rebel. Taking over the reigns of power, they would first delegate the government to administer social resources. Ultimately, once most of them were free of the taint of capitalist corruption, property ownership would be eliminated. Selfishness would be abandoned and they would voluntarily share the fruits
of an ever more productive planet. Universal cooperation would, therefore, make for
nearly universal happiness.

Of course, this too did not transpire. The communists did manage to foment a
revolution, but it did not occur amidst growing poverty. Nor did it replace proletarian
misery with universal prosperity. In the Soviet Union, communist apparatchiks quickly
took over and imposed a heinous tyranny. Millions died in the name of preserving the
revolution, and many millions more were tortured when incarcerated in vile gulags. Even
so, the faithful refused to acknowledge these disappointments. Voluntarily knuckling
under to party discipline, they would not admit that Stalin’s purges were anti-democratic
or that Mao’s later Cultural Revolution was ill conceived.

When predictions about distance learning failed, money was wasted, but no lives
were lost. When Marxism proved abortive, human suffering was rife. Pundits who
hailed each of these as the dawn of a coming millennium were badly mistaken. None of
them understood the implications of social organization. Wildly optimistic about what
were essentially fairy tales, they confused what they could imagine with what was
possible. Sadly, the social sciences that should have helped them clarify their thinking
were AWOL. My own discipline of sociology has been absent from the social
forecasting sweepstakes, largely because it too was co-opted by the Marxists. Instead of
independently studying what the future will bring, it has recycled old theories about
social exploitation and an impending redemption.

Although history should have discredited these collectivist ideologies, academic
true believers, schooled in the predictive catechisms of political saviors, have had
difficulty breaking loose. They have become veritable poster children for what happens
when prophecies fail. Leon Festinger and his colleagues long ago demonstrated that when religious commitments are disproved, those committed to them do not change their minds; they simply retrench. They make adjustments in their predictions, but keep soldiering on. This has been the fate of the Marxists, including those who have come to dominate sociology.

To determine what is really going to happen in our future it is essential to analyze social knowledge from a less jaundiced perspective. Much as been learned and much of this can be applied to foreseeing impending social developments. When it is, it becomes clear that neither the liberal nor the conservative forecasts are apt to prove correct. The culture warriors on both sides of this moral divide may be convinced of their perceptiveness, but they too are true believers who have been caught in a time warp. What neither faction seems to understand is that we are in the midst of a Middle Class Revolution. As part of the first truly middle class society in history, how our lives are organized has been transformed and promise to be further rearranged. We are in the process of becoming a professionalized society without most people even realizing that this is occurring. Nor do they appreciate the implications this conversion has for them. The following pages are dedicated to working through these repercussions. What does it mean to become professionalized? How will society be held together as the old social formulae are superseded?

My hope is that most of what I have written will make sense to the average reader. Not as optimistic as many prognosticators, I am nevertheless mildly so. As I frequently tell my students, I am only a semi-reformed idealist. Although I am sensitive to the social sources of personal irrationality, as a human being embedded in a social
environment, I too am capable of failing to see what is in front of my nose. Because I too have sentimental dreams I would like to see fulfilled, I can imagine them more substantial than they are. Thus while I know that most efforts at prediction leave out too many details to be accurate, I still hope to get closer to the truth. I also hope that people will learn from our collective mistakes so that we can make our futures brighter.

Change, however, is slow, imperfect, and cumulative. Much of what I project will never come to fruition during my lifetime, but I hope the dynamics of what is unfolding can be deciphered. Many would-be reformers believe that they can dictate de jure change. They assume that their intensions and expertise are such that they can control the future in the form of legal mandates. Conceiving of themselves as social engineers, they intend to manipulate social institutions for the benefit of all. I have no such illusions. I recognize that conscious efforts at change are effective only around the margins. The way societies evolve has more to do with human nature and the requirements of social integration than intentional blueprints for change. De facto change is something we more often observe than master. So much is happening, and so much of this is outside our awareness, that we recognize it only in hindsight. In fact, change is more usually intergenerational than immediate. People so effectively resist innovations, that it is left to their children, or grandchildren, to embrace them. It is only hubris, and a desire to cheat the uncertainties of the human condition, that seduce us into believing we exercise more control than we do.

This said, understanding what is happening around us may enable us to assist in unfolding it more effectively. At least, we may avoid the most serious pitfalls. If this is
foolish, it is nevertheless my personal faith. As a relatively recent recruit to the upper middle class, I apparently retain the enthusiasm of a convert.
Chapter 1

Fairy Tales

A Clouded Crystal Ball

The good old days were long gone. While the Steeplechase Park limped along barely breaking even, Dreamland was a distant memory. Although Disney World was yet to open, Coney Island’s glory days were beyond restoration. People still flocked to play the games and to ride the rides, but the amusement area had become a shabby flicker of what it once was. I, however, still a teenager, worked on one of its trash littered streets, happy for my summer job as a Barker, yet depressed by the sleaze. One of the things that kept me alert was the comings and goings at the fortuneteller’s stall across the street. Operated by stereotypical gypsies and bracketed by shutters bearing symbolic stars and moons, it did a respectable business. Not as many merrymakers consulted its resident soothsayers as played our game, nevertheless a steady stream of paying customers sought insights into whether they would soon meet Mister Right or grow rich playing the ponies. Whatever else this meant, it indicated that a desire to peer into the future was alive and well in twentieth century America. My secular convictions aside, a crystal ball mentality had evidently not been fully discredited. Despite the triumphs of modernity, clairvoyance maintained an allure that seemed next to impossible to extinguish.

Once upon a time tribal shaman’s burned the shoulder blades of sheep in order to create the patterns of cracks believed to hold the secrets of what was to come. Other seers, with equal assurance, tossed chicken bones into the air so as to decipher the configurations into which they fell. Meanwhile their fellow villagers gathered around to
learn whether their own luck would be good or ill. Indeed, many paid for the privilege of
to these wise men. The reason was simple. Like most human beings, they were
aware of their personal vulnerabilities. Surrounded as they were—even more than
today—by countless mysteries over which they had little control, they sought what
advantages they could. As a result, glimpses into the future were thought to provide an
edge. If only one could see what was coming, one might be able to protect oneself from
its worst hazards. Even better, one might be able to exploit opportunities that would
provide greater happiness. Under these circumstances, observations that these
prognostications were no more than fairy tales would strike those addicted to them as
blasphemous. If anything, enigmatic forecasts were more sacrosanct.

So it has always been. So today it remains. Some people look back upon our
remote ancestors with a distain, but we are as superstitious as they. We may have the
advantage of science and a long history of recorded experience, yet when unsure of our
situations, we too resort to updated versions of soothsayers. After all, most contemporary
Americans continue to believe in ghosts and guardian angels. A majority likewise place
faith in prayer and good luck charms. Even the profoundly secular boast a belief in
UFO’s. What is more, and indeed more problematic, they frequently rely on the
pronouncements of gurus who claim to foresee social trends. These self-appointed
pundits may not know one end of a sheep’s scapula from another, but this does not
diminish their pretensions. In an age where science has produced a host of technological
wonders, they sponge off of science’s prestige. Labeled futurologists, these new-fangled
fortunetellers proclaim a familiarity with natural laws that enables them to foresee what
others do not.
No less fond of building castles in the air than their predecessors, contemporary wise men paint graphic pictures of the marvels just over the horizon. Until recently their prognostications were regularly on display at World’s Fairs. Every few years, nation states and major corporations descended on an obliging city to erect temporary palaces within which to flesh out utopian musings of the better times to come. Under futuristic domes, they raised gleaming plastic spires upward toward synthetic skies in which private flying machines darted between highways suspended in mid-air. Meanwhile, below these cut-away houses were kept tidy by human-looking robots serving eternally friendly residents. Someday everything would be this astonishing, for as General Electric never tired of reminding its customers, progress was its most important product. Never mind that predictions of thermonuclear power stations had not yet come true. Wasn’t it sufficient that Dick Tracy’s two-way wrist radio was about to appear in the guise of cell phones?

In fact, most predictions about the future have been notoriously off the mark. We tend to forget that the best scientists of their day assured the Wright brothers that heavier than air machines were impossible. Nor do we recall the confident predictions of the fathers of the atomic bomb that their invention would one day dig a plethora of Panama Canals. For that matter, few recollect the promise of the Concorde. Where, indeed, did those projected fleets of supersonic airliners go? Charming visions though many of these were, they remained visions—doomed to a limbo of mental constructs. One of the things that distinguishes our species from others is our ability to dream. Mind you, ours are not modest dreams, but bright Technicolor spectacles, which, though entrancing, are often fanciful. Dreams, it is true, can be the kissing cousins to substantial programs. They can
be projections upon which it is possible to build. Nonetheless, they can also be ephemeral. However solid they appear, they are not always capable of realization.

Such is the case with many avant-garde prophecies. Most are simply not achievable. Not only will they not happen, but a majority never can. This isn’t a grave problem when designing an airliner. In this instance, the worst that occurs is that the thing does not fly, in which case it is possible to go back to the drawing board to come up with something that will. Nor were my gypsy colleagues assurances about meeting “Mister Right” especially perilous. If he failed to materialize, another prince charming might chance by. No, the real problems arise from social prognostications. Because these involve the fate of entire societies, they can entice people to implement policies that produce millions of deaths. This is no idle speculation. During the past two centuries well-meaning ideologues have generated numerous utopian visions upon which nation states have staked their futures. As a result, battalions of innocent bystanders have been promised justice only to be lured into bondage and misery. Innumerable others have been rolled over by the dystopian dreams of their neighbors. Just ask the Poles or Russians. Just ask those who lost their jobs as a result of financial policies intended to get the poor into homes of their own.

When social visions fall short, it is not the same as when a novel’s central plot unravels. A story that fails to hold together leaves a bad taste in the mouth, whereas an abortive ideological promise can tear the flesh off bones. Ironically, because social projections tend to be simplistic, they are exceedingly prone to failure. What makes this more dangerous is that such forecasts are predisposed to being uni-dimensional. Because simplified ideas tend to be inspiring, they are the stock-in-trade of would-be
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prophets. Social charlatans know that complications confuse people. Intricacies leave potential adherents unable to follow along. If disciples are to shout themselves hoarse at political rallies, they require slogans, not academic disquisitions. What is necessary is something effortless to grasp; an idea so stirring that all can partake of it without expending effort. Assuming that this is so—and eons of experience suggest it is—we human beings are in mortal danger from our own yearnings. Because virtually every one of us demands uncomplicated answers, it is easy to subscribe to bad ones. Entranced by comforting fairy tales, we march, shoulder to shoulder, to our destruction. For what seem the best of reasons, we become good Nazis or card-carrying Communists. The next thing we know we are convinced that non-Germans, or counter-revolutionaries, must be eliminated so that truth and justice can prevail.

To avoid this fate, we must not only seek good answers; we must distinguish these from bad ones. We have to realize when we are being seduced by our own vulnerabilities and aspire to the toughness of mind needed to cope with the complexities of the real world. While the future is not totally opaque, given that it is only viewed through a glass darkly, it is essential to recognize our limitations, especially when it comes to social projections. Only then can predictions serve our actual interests.

**Television Fables**

One of the more intriguing visions of a utopian future was provided by the Star Trek television franchise, especially Star Trek—the Next Generation. Though easy to dismiss as mere entertainment, the series’ popularity offers insights into our longings. Unlike much science fiction, the crews of the various starships Enterprise have been lauded for an optimistic forecast of the future. Their creator, Gene Roddenberry,
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conjured up a sanguine image of what was to come. Unwilling to settle for a universe inhabited solely by hostile monsters, he viewed humanity as inherently perfectible. Boldly going where none had gone before, his protagonists made mistakes, but they were also avid learners. When tested by skeptical aliens, they demonstrated that, although curious about their surroundings, they had no interest in corrupting outsiders. Truly dedicated to a prime directive that instructed them not to interfere with other cultures, they were futuristic relativists who came to observe, not destroy.

But the Star Trek crews demonstrated much more than this. They also displayed the basic desires of most utopians. Theirs, it became apparent, was a world with little internal conflict. Although regularly challenged by the ignorance, or enmity, of non-humans, within their own hermetically sealed vessels they were remarkably peaceful. True, Captain Kirk, the leader in the first series, was permanently eager to flex his muscles, yet by the Next Generation Captain Picard was more cerebral. Wise in the ways of interpersonal relationships, he could, with a few well-chosen words, defuse most antagonisms. His objective was to understand what was happening and then behave rationally and generously. On Kirk’s ship, the remarkably popular Mr. Spock exemplified a similar rationality. By Picard’s time, however, this was the norm. Generally each member of his crew knew his station and strived to fulfill it to the best of his/her abilities. So non-competitive were they that the second in command, the redoubtable Mr. Riker, regularly turned down offers of promotion. Rather than leave the sacred band of brothers of which he was an integral part, he opted to remain available for further lessons from his captain/mentor.
Another emblematic aspect of the Star Trek lifestyle was an absence of material shortages. On the Enterprise, there was no poverty. Technology had advanced so far that anyone could have any physical object he or she desired whenever it was wanted. One had merely to utter a few words into a replicator and it magically appeared. Thus, the captain could order a cup of Earl Grey tea or a visitor from a more primitive culture a flagon of hometown grog—it didn’t matter which. Nor was there an appreciable difference in the comfort level of the various quarters. From the captain to the humblest crewman, each occupied a commodious apartment furnished in whatever style the resident chose, that is, as long as it was starship modern. If this turned out to be unsatisfactory, they were free to resort to the holodeck to summon up whatever exotic world-scape was desired. Starvation was unthinkable—as was going unclothed, unsheltered, or without entertainment. As long as one was on board ship, each of these was provided without the vulgar mediation of monetary exchange.

Generally speaking everyone on the Enterprise was personally fulfilled. Though individually different, on their off-hours they were free to pursue their respective hobbies. Hence Mr. Riker could indulge in the pursuit of suitable female companionship or practice his trombone, while Mr. Worf could savagely fight imaginary adversaries on the holodeck or the android Mr. Data pretend to be human by dressing up as Sherlock Holmes. No one aboard vegetated in lonely isolation because all were motivated to explore whatever struck their fancies. Fortunate to have overcome the petty dissentions of the twentieth century, it may even be said that they lived in greater safety than their ancestors. Although each week placed in mortal jeopardy, within their own world a predictable security prevailed.
How far humanity had evolved was revealed when the Next Generation team stumbled upon a company of cryogenically preserved earthlings from the twenty-first century. Of the three, one was worried about her long deceased family, the second about a long gone musical career, and the third about resuming control of a long crumbled financial empire. From the perspective of their hosts, this was puzzling. Largely divorced from their own families, they converted their fellow crewmembers into a surrogate family. Nor were they tempted to resort to alcohol to assuage the pangs of failing to attain celebrity status—as was the country/western musician. Most perplexing of all was the businessman’s desire to recover his financial fortune. Since money was no longer a source of social power, this seemed as quaint as hoarding cowry shells.

Not that ambition had been banished from the decks of the Enterprise. In another episode Picard is given the opportunity to relive his life as a more accommodating person. Confronted with the necessity of replacing the prosthetic heart he received due to a fight when much younger, he wishes that he had been wise enough to be less pugnacious. Unfortunately, he soon discovers that such a lack of assertiveness when translated into a Starfleet career would have meant that he would never have been promoted to a command position. Forever cautious, he would have been overlooked as someone who did not possess the audacity for leadership. In other words, Star Trek personnel were expected to be risk takers. It was merely that they did not have to take risks in pursuit of wealth or social status.

To put all of this in a more general context, the Star Trek universe utilized strategies common to a multitude of utopian visions. It achieved the abolition of conflict and physical want by banishing disparities in wealth and status. On the Enterprise no one
was poor because no one was rich. Except for items of personal use, property had been eliminated. Thus, what sense did it make to stockpile food when it would instantly materialize for anyone who desired it? Likewise, why strive for a more spacious dwelling when one could always be assigned a suitable habitat? Under the circumstances, to exhibit a superfluity of possessions was as pointless as flaunting racial distinctions in a world where new races were regularly discovered on one’s doorstep. This was comparable to trying to prove one’s worth by amassing the biggest pile of pebbles, while living on a mountain of pebbles. What is more, the Ferengi, a big-headed, big-eared alien species, routinely displayed the foolishness of such endeavors. They quested, above all, for profitable ventures. As crass capitalists, wealth, not knowledge or glory, was the cynosure of their efforts. Vain and petty, they calculated everything in terms of monetary gain. But who would want to be like them? Aware of the price of all things, they knew the value of none.

Similar considerations applied to social status. Everyone on board the Enterprise respected captain Picard. In times of emergency they trusted his judgment and innate sense of fairness. However extreme the circumstance, he did not lose his head or compromise his sense of proportion. Picard was captain because he deserved to be. More experienced and better temperamentally suited for the position than anyone else on board, others wished to emulate, not supplant him. Never a bully, nor inclined to pull rank, his leadership was rarely resented. In a sense, his higher status was not regarded as “superior.” Although more dominant than others, he did not pretend to be better. It was merely that he had a job to do and he intended to do it to the best of his ability. Social class distinctions, as opposed to earned gradations of command, were in this respect as
unthinkable as property disparities. They made no sense because all human beings were essentially of equal worth. Indeed, there was an implied equality of all species. Not to put too fine a point on the matter, arbitrary status had been abolished as thoroughly as property. It too was a relic of a barbaric past. Rational creatures could, and did, live without it. They learned to make do with honestly achieved distinctions.

In fact, despite its allures, all of this is fantasy. It is a modern-day fairy tale that springs from the imagination, not the realities of the human condition. The notion that property ownership and social status are the primary sources of personal unhappiness has a long pedigree. Social thinkers have routinely pointed to them as the foundation of interpersonal friction. According to this line of thought, without property there would be no reason for people to be envious of each other. Lacking the possession of objects, there could be no unfairness regarding who gets what because no one would get anything. Correspondingly, without social status no one could harbor pretensions of superiority. With no disparities in worth, how could any anyone claim that greater merit justified treating others badly? The answer was simple. For justice to triumph, all that was needed was to outlaw property and social status. People would then recognize their intrinsic humanity and accord everyone else the dignity he/she deserved. Universal peace would similarly prevail; as would universal happiness.

The problem with this thesis is that neither property nor social status ever were, or ever will be, eliminated. They cannot even be neutralized. Both are integral parts of being human. The best that can be done is moderate their effects. As hierarchical creatures, people inevitably jostle for position. Each of us wishes to be superior to others. We may not seek to be at the very top, but we all want to be respected. Each of us hopes
to be important; which is to say, a winner. As importantly, none of us wants to be at the bottom of the pile. This desire is built into our genetic heritage. It is so pervasive, and so natural, that intellectuals habitually discount its presence. Ironically, a tendency to downplay our aspirations for distinction—that is, to disguise our interpersonal ambitions—makes these more difficult to detect. Similarly, property ownership is as normal as breathing. Cleaving to physical objects is not a plot invented by rich people so as to deprive the poor of their patrimony. Casual observations quickly reveal that even small children will declare a favored blanket their own and tenaciously fight to protect it. As Mr. Burns, the acquisitive boss of the Simpson show, learned to his chagrin taking candy from a baby can be frustrating. Little fingers are nearly impossible to pry loose from a highly desired prize, while little lungs generate ear-splitting howls of protest. Real life human beings have no intention of giving up either property or social status. Even were it possible to convince them this was rational, it is not something they do.

The result is that neither human conflict nor human unhappiness can be resolved by eradicating property or status. Both are here to stay. Any predictions about the future predicated on their abolition are a charade. However attractive they sound, they are contingent upon people ceasing to be people. They require a “perfectibility” of the human condition that is neither imminent nor likely. Human beings are the way they are not merely because this is the way we evolved, but because this is what enables us to survive. Even some of our most annoying foibles are essential for our continued existence. In any event, most projections of an idealized future are impractical. Though appealing, they are not where we are headed. Yet this has not stopped futurologists,
politicians, or ambitious laypersons from pursuing the impossible. Nor has it dissuaded tyrants from attempting to impose their fantasies upon others.

**Philosophical Fables**

One of the most durable of futurologists was the ancient Hellenic thinker Plato. More than two thousand years have transpired since his day, yet he continues to be read with admiration. For better or worse, untold generations have turned to his speculations, as recorded in the *Republic*, for inspiration. Sometimes openly, often secretly, they have longed to emulate the philosopher kings he argued would be the best rulers for an ideal society. Plato assumed that reason ought to be the measure of communal governance. People, if they were rational, would obviously wish to be presided over by someone wise enough to make the best choices. They would place their fate in the hands of someone with the intelligence, the knowledge, and the good will to maximize everyone’s happiness. Since not every person possesses these talents, or, as importantly, exhibits the moral commitment to be fair-minded, it makes sense to delegate collective responsibility to “the best and the brightest.” In Plato’s view, only a person devoted to lifelong learning exemplifies this dedication. For understandable reasons, this vision has been particularly appealing to the intelligentsia. Convinced that they personally measure up to Plato’s standards, they assume they are best suited to lead. Transfixed by a desire to improve the human lot, they neither recognize their own, nor their hero’s, limitations.

Amazing as it may seem, contemporary thinkers who consider themselves democrats are generally unaware that Plato was an aristocratic apologist for his social stratum. Because he was Athenian, they assume that he is linked with the city’s democratic traditions. In fact, he aspired to convert his homeland into something akin to
Sparta. Caught up in the crosscurrents of the Peloponnesian Wars, he sought to raise his community’s standing by installing an elite comparable to that which ran the state that defeated his own. Sparta, it must be understood, was a perpetually armed military camp. It was ruled by a small cadre of citizens dedicated to becoming the best soldiers in the world. Although they controlled the wealth of their territory, they lived in self-imposed penury. It is not for nothing that we have adopted their name as a synonym for frugality. The Spartans were indeed spartan in their lifestyle. While still small, young boys were torn from their mother’s sides to live in male dominated surroundings. In order to make sure they were never spoiled, they resided together as if on a permanent military campaign. Their chief source of sustenance, for instance, was a kind of gruel so foul that non-Spartans declared it the reason why Spartans did not fear death.

What Spartan boys did in these camps was practice military techniques. Fighting was encouraged, as was self-denial. Future warriors were expected to be aggressive, but also self-disciplined. Stealing, for instance, was promoted; it was getting caught that was frowned upon. The objective was to become a winner who could bear pain with equanimity. This did not, however, include sympathy for one’s inferiors. If anything, lesser beings were ruthlessly exploited. The Spartans, one must understand, could afford to be fulltime soldiers because their physical wants were met through the labors of helots. These were essentially Greek slaves that were bound to the land. Their job was to be compliant and subservient; to farm and be artisans, but never exercise power. Terrified into submission, if they showed initiative, they were cruelly extirpated. This, in fact, was one of the tasks of teenage boys. In order to prove that they had acquired an
appropriately aggressive spirit, they were set loose to assassinate overly assertive helots. Roaming the countryside at night, they killed whomever they deemed a threat.

Given these arrangements, it cannot truly be said that the Spartans believed in equality. Among the soldier citizens, equity did apply, but even here distinctions persisted. Because the strongest and bravest were deemed the most worthy, a fierce competition for an aggressive reputation was customary. Moreover, the Spartans considered themselves superior to non-Spartans. Although ostensibly concerned only with defending their patrimony, victory in the Peloponnesian Wars tempted them to become the overbearing masters of conquered cities. Nor was their vaunted anti-materialism all it seemed. True, they did not build, or desire to build, the architectural landmarks erected by their neighbors. True also that they dressed simply, spoke plainly, and possessed few objects of wealth. All that a good Spartan required was a red cloak to hide the blood of battle and a shield upon which to be carried home if he did not prevail in combat. Nevertheless, the Spartans owned a great deal of worldly goods. Respected members of the community were, at the very least, wealthy in land and helots. Moreover, those who possessed these objects could convert them into social influence. What members of the community valued, given their militaristic traditions, might differ from their more commercially oriented neighbors, but this did not mean that they were oblivious to the benefits of ownership.

If Plato obtained his way, the Athenians, and all who value rational statecraft, would embrace a rigid parsimony reminiscent of the Spartans. They too would cease pursuing wealth in favor of strict equity. They too would value direct action over verbal gymnastics. In fact, both history and logic suggest this was a pipe dream. Within Plato’s
Republic, wisdom, not riches, was supposedly the goal; as were stability and justice. Given that a philosopher king presided over political matters, decision-making would theoretically be as fair as Solomon and utterly free of interpersonal jealously. But then again; perhaps not. One way in which Plato would have enforced equality was by taking babies away from their mothers. In order to ensure that no one obtained an unfair advantage, expert nurses were to be instructed to raise all children by identical standards. This way every infant would have access to the same loving attention and the same material advantages. In the end, this was expected to enable the best to be groomed as future philosopher kings, the next best as military guardians, and the rest as ordinary citizens. All would subsequently accept this inequality as innate because all were to be told that rulers were born with an admixture of gold in their souls, guardians with silver, and the remainder with bronze. In other words, things would turn out as they did because of the operations of a divine providence, not human voracity.

Nevertheless, all of this is brazen nonsense: every bit as fictitious as the idyllic life aboard the Starship Enterprise. The orderly working of this system was no more preordained than that of Sparta. Spartan hegemony, it must be understood, did not last very long. Within little more than a generation, it fell apart. Actually, it not only fell apart; it ceased to exist more thoroughly than the Athenian democracy. Ironically, Sparta’s initial victory may be credited to its rival’s successes. Sparta would never have won the conflict had not other Greek states allied themselves with her because they feared an Athenian hegemony.

Be that as it may, what reason is there to believe that the best persons invariably rise to the top in a Platonic state? Given human rivalries, isn’t it more likely that an
assortment of competitors will each consider themselves worthy of the honor? What also of the vaunted wisdom of the king? Being human, he cannot have been omniscient. Nor would he have been immune to the arrogance of power. Then too, what of the guardians? With all of the military power in their hands, wouldn’t they have been tempted to operate like a Praetorian Guard? In Rome this meant that soldiers assigned to protect the emperors overthrew them when dissatisfied. As many subsequent philosophers have observed, Plato never solved the problem of who would guard the guardians. Beyond this, how would Plato have prevented an accumulation of wealth? If a commoner were particularly successful in business, couldn’t he have bought his way into a higher stratum? During the Middle Ages many merchants clearly did. Why couldn’t the same have occurred in a Platonic Republic?

Nor, in the real world, do mothers voluntarily surrender their babies to be raised by impartial nurses. Indeed, in the real world, few nurses are oblivious to status or property differences. And as to real leaders, how many are so disinterested as to be unmindful of their personal interests. Nor are many so emotionally detached that their decisions are always rational. As we know, in the actual world, people lie, cheat, and manipulate to get ahead. They regularly conspire to get more than their fair share. How, one may wonder, would Plato’s theories have overcome these predispositions? Merely to assert that they would cannot make it so. Moreover, given the millennia that have passed since it was written, were the Republic’s recommendations feasible, they would surely have emerged somewhere. Were they as perfect as advertised, someone somewhere would have found the means to implement them.
Approximately five hundred years ago another utopian thinker suggested that they had. His name was Sir Thomas More. Educated in the ideals of the late Renaissance, trained as a lawyer, and socially successful enough to rise to the post of chancellor in Henry VIII’s England, he wrote of a newly discovered island in which similarly sensible social arrangements prevailed. Named “Utopia” (hence the designation used to denote an ideal place), the term can be translated either as a “good place” or “no place.” It was, of course, a figment of More’s imagination, but one intended to instruct his peers on how their own society might be reformed. As has become standard for such constructions, his community banished both property and social status. In his world, gold and silver were so disdained that utilitarian implements like pots and pans were made of them. In his world, leadership was also held in such contempt as to be assumed only as a duty. Superior people took on administrative positions because these needed to, not because they desired the approbation. Moreover, they did so with the understanding that these responsibilities would soon pass into other hands. All told, this meant that jealousies were held to a minimum and that the utopians lived with a deeply satisfying sense of tranquility.

So collective were their habits that the utopians took their meals in common. They together prepared nourishing meals that were subsequently consumed in good fellowship. In doing so, none flaunted a more lavish table than his peers. Nor were any tempted to live in isolated splendor. There was, sad to say, one small fly in the ointment. These remarkably egalitarian meals—were served by slaves. Thomas More might believe in equality, but, in his world, this did not include bondsmen. In his England, he had no intention of relieving himself, or his family, of the attendants that made their lives
less burdensome. Nor, of course, was he personally willing to denounce the wealth
derived from his occupation. Sufficiently impressed with religious communalism to wear
a hair shirt under his vestments, he was nevertheless a man of his times. As a
consequence, believing in an equality before God did not imply that he was on a par with
all others. Thomas More was convinced that he deserved to be chancellor. Furthermore,
so intense was his devotion to Catholic theology that he considered his own judgment
superior to that of the king. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to dismiss More as a
hypocrite. He was a genuine idealist. Whatever others thought, he knew that his little
book was fiction. He also knew that it could not be realized in contemporary England.
For him, his speculations represented an aspiration. They were a goal at which to aim,
not a reality to be implemented.

Nor should More’s imagination be confused with the politics we know today. It
is one thing to contemplate a world from which selfishness has been banished; it is quite
another to live in it. More did not try to do so; nor did Plato. In a sense they were
professional dreamers who had little difficulty distinguishing fact from fiction in their
daily lives. Some religious thinkers, it is true, have been less scrupulous. When they
envisioned a world to come, they were convinced it would one day arrive. Whether
contemplating a celestial heaven, or one here on earth, they considered their prophecies
more real than the mundane reality before their eyes. Although that of which they spoke
was imperceptible, this was, no impediment to conviction. If anything, for them, the
intangibility of their visions proved them more substantial than conventional reality.

When contemplating of heaven, of course, most religious thinkers imagine a place
where material possessions are, by definition, absent. Heaven is, of its very nature,
immaterial. It is a place where every need is met, not because people are rich, but because they don’t have to be wealthy. In overcoming the crass appetites of an earthly existence, celestial happiness is more instantaneous. Merely being in God’s presence, and singing his praises, is enough to gratify those who have been saved. Nor is status a problem. Those whom God has chosen for salvation have achieved the highest position to which any mortal can aspire. There are, to be sure, angels who outrank them, but having attained the greatest perfection of which they are capable, they will not envy this distinction.

Heaven on earth is a bit more problematic. While awaiting salvation, the faithful are urged to live pious lives. This means obedience to God’s commandments. Money should not matter because money is not the criterion that determines the final judgment. Nor should status carry weight, for it does not please God. Almost every religion recommends a life of humility. The truly pious are expected to love their neighbors as themselves. A world in which everyone accepts the true faith is thus one in which humankind is transformed into a large, loving family. A kind of primitive communism will prevail in which no one seeks to outdo anyone else. People will not only sing from the same hymnal while in church; but also in their daily lives.

And yet—and yet—universal love has been preached for even longer than Plato’s speculations have been read. How then has it eluded us? Despite all the exhortations; despite all the resolutions; despite all the blood spilled on its behalf; universal love has never become the norm. Remarkable as this is, it is even more remarkable that people have not concluded it is impossible. Indeed, the devout remain dedicated to spreading the word. They still imagine that if they pursue brotherhood with sufficient diligence, the
scales will fall from the eyes of the wicked and they too will join the family of God. These hardy believers cannot accept the proposition that human avarice cannot be eradicated. Like pacifists, they fantasize a world in which once everyone recognizes the truth, they will refrain from evil. They cannot imagine that in a place inhabited solely by sheep some individuals will be tempted to transform themselves into ravening wolves.

Among the wolves in sheep’s clothing discernible among us are preachers who grow rich on donations extracted from naïve believers. Also numbered among the wolves are cult leaders who manipulate vulnerable followers into submitting to their personal authority. These pretenders present themselves as patriarchs dedicated to love, whereas they are actually dedicated to fleecing defenseless followers. Even when sincere, as were the Shakers, religious extremists promote beliefs that are generally impractical. The Shakers, of course, perished thanks to an extravagant devotion to celibacy. Unable to reproduce, once they no longer attracted converts, they disappeared. Worse still, self-appointed prophets can be downright vicious—witness the excesses of the Inquisition. To disagree with Torquemada was to be condemned to the flames. The truth is that religious super-families are no more familial than secular ones. Any group, when it gets sufficiently large, must cease being completely loving. Sooner or later some of its members aspire to become more equal than others. Unhappily, when large, its constituents cannot maintain sufficient contact to recognize each other’s humanity. Despite professions of love, their relationships become less personal and often cruel.

Marxist Fables

Karl Marx was no fan of religion—organized or otherwise. He dismissed it as the opiate of the people. Nor was he a fan of utopian solutions. He considered these
unscientific and, therefore, insubstantial. In contrast, he declared himself a man
dedicated to hard truths. Yes, he would be a socialist, but a scientific socialist. Not for
him fables; he would pursue that which was possible, and indeed inevitable. For Marx,
religious promises of a heavenly reward for virtue were a disingenuous tool for
convincing workers to desist from competing with their bosses. If laborers could be
persuaded that earthly success was selfish, whereas unselfishness was rewarded by
salvation, the hope of eternal happiness would anesthetize them to the iniquities of their
situation. Similarly, he thought of utopian socialists as naïve do-gooders; that their
isolated communities were no more practical than a life dedicated to prayer. Built on
hope rather than natural law, these too were destined to fail.

According to Marx, the central truth about human societies is that they are
organized around class conflict. During different periods of history various coalitions
compete for dominance. They do this largely over economic matters, which is to say,
over the factors that matter most to people’s daily lives. Those who control the primary
means of production thereby get to call the tune. Thus, during the Middle Ages when
agriculture was the chief form of wealth, those who owned the land—namely the
aristocrats—set the standards. They controlled the government, the arts, and religion.
While the newly emerging bourgeoisie might resent noble pretensions, they did not have
the power to resist. Instead, they had to tolerate taxes and confiscations they could not
prevent. Later on, once the Industrial Revolution kicked into high gear, the capitalists,
which is to say, those who owned and ran the factories, became the dominant stratum.
They got to keep the lion’s share of profits generated by a glut of mechanical innovations.
Although the workers, a group Marx called the proletariat, produced the goods that
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generated wealth, they retained only a small fraction of the fruits of their labors. Since their bosses owned what was manufactured and sold what they chose, they returned to the workers only enough to sustain their operational capacities. The result was that a tiny minority grew obscenely rich, while the mass of humanity grew progressively poorer. Chained to their workbenches by the need to provide for their families, they had neither the time nor the resources to correct this injustice.

To make matters worse the capitalists engaged in a concerted campaign to keep the downtrodden in their place. If they were to continue to exploit their workers, they needed forestall rebellions. Using religion to deflect envy was only one of their tricks. Another was what Marx called “the reserve army of the unemployed.” If workers had the temerity to ask for more money, their bosses simply reminded them of the jobless persons clamoring to take their places. Waiting just outside the factory gates, these luckless souls would happily toil for what ungrateful employees spurned. Should this tactic fail, the capitalists, who now controlled the government, could call upon police—or even the military—to restore work-floor discipline. This enabled them to break strikes and work stoppages at will. Given this disparity in power, it was better for the ordinary person to accept his/her lot.

To this proposition Marx, and his colleague Frederick Engels, replied: Hogwash! In the Communist Manifesto they heroically asserted that factory workers had nothing to lose but their chains. Instead of accepting the role of wage slaves, they should rise up to displace their masters. Numbers were obviously on their side. Once they achieved a solidarity commensurate with their needs, the bosses would be powerless to stop them. They could then establish a “dictatorship of the proletariat.” Now in charge of the means
of production, they would assign these to be organized by the government. Later this would evolve into a communist society in which even the government would wither away. At this point, capitalism would have been assigned to the dustbin of history and everyone liberated from its stultifying grasp. Thanks to the intelligentsia, i.e., political agitators such as Marx and Engels, workers would have been educated as to their rights and abilities. By this means, they would pierce the false consciousness holding them back and bring the benefits of truth and justice to all humankind.

In this new communist millennium, both property and social status would be eliminated. No one would own more than anyone else because everything would be held in common. While the government would at first administer the factories, they would be a proxy for the people—who, in turn, would control the government. Eventually the workers would realize that ownership was an artificial legacy from the past. At this point each would work according to his abilities and receive according to his needs. No one would envy anyone else because no one would seek an unfair advantage. Much as on the Starship Enterprise they would take only what they needed. Nor would there be pretensions to superior status. With government relegated to a historical curiosity, there would be no point to seeking political power. Each person would be free to choose what he wanted to do, when he wanted, without anyone presuming to dictate his schedule. A true equality would thereby emerge. Both greed and competition having become obsolete, each person would pursue his/her dreams without fear of contradiction.

Once again, however, this idealized prediction is a fantasy. Marx claimed that he was scientific, that he was merely extrapolating from the lessons of history, but never in the past had there ever been an egalitarian society such as he envisioned. Never have
people been as unselfish or affluent. Indeed, whenever they have attempted to institute anything comparable, their efforts backfired. Take the French Revolution. Its motto was “liberty, equality, fraternity,” but its outcome was nothing of the sort. Within years of overthrowing the king, the civil chaos grew so alarming that its leading lights sought to re-establish discipline. In the name of equality, they quickly repealed liberty. Anyone who dared to threaten the power of those who had taken charge was introduced to the summary justice of the guillotine. Initially this may have applied to aristocratic counter-revolutionaries, but the practice soon devolved upon anyone who disagreed with the policies of the reigning government. So great was the bloodbath that it has come down to us as “the terror.”

Nor did an officially communist revolution, when it came to pass, prove less sanguine. The Russians, or the Soviets as they preferred to be called, found so many counter-revolutionaries hiding under the bed sheets that they felt compelled to exterminate them by the millions. Untold numbers of peasants were starved to death for resisting the impositions of their masters, while millions of others answered a midnight knock on the door to be whisked away to the Gulag by the secret police where they were worked to death. Many thousands of others, largely from the political elite, faced show trials during which they were forced to admit complicity with enemies of the state before being purged with a bullet. Scarcely ever in history have regimes been as blood-soaked as those of Joseph Stalin, MaoTseTung, or Pol Pot. These dictators might profess a desire to rid society of inequality, but the effect of their rule was to impose a lack of freedom more pervasive than previous regimes. Better organized and more technologically advanced than their predecessors, they were more draconian.
Apologists for communism claim these were aberrations. They maintain that tyranny is not synonymous with collective rule; that democratic socialism is not only feasible, but is our real future. Yet this is not the case. For reasons analogous to those that would have undermined Plato’s Republic, governments with the power to control a society’s means of production have neither the wisdom, nor the forbearance, to treat people fairly. Modern governments are just as likely to fall victim to an abuse of power, and an arrogance of judgment, as were the ancients. When the state obtains a monopoly of economic and military power, the temptations facing those in charge are enormous. And make no mistake about it—there is always someone in charge. No large-scale society has ever existed without a ruling clique. In the case of socialism, because there are no countervailing sources of authority, there is no one to guard the guardians. Should they become paranoid, as is likely when subordinate members of the ruling class compete for advancement, who will be left to stop them? Stalin killed those who tried, as did Mao and Pol Pot. Such leaders become so autocratic that Mao was able to force his nation into a disastrous Great Leap Forward and, when chastened by his subordinates, into an equally disastrous Cultural Revolution.

Not only do maximum leaders protect their perquisites with an iron hand, they botch social planning. Because they have accumulated greater clout than others, they presume to manage countless lives. In Russia this was achieved through five-year plans. At the time, this was thought supremely rational. Many Westerners envied the efficiency believed to accrue from centralized scheduling. In fact, there was little efficiency of any sort. Central planners turn out to be no wiser than decentralized entrepreneurs. In truth, they have neither the local knowledge, the moment-to-moment flexibility, nor the
personal motivation to maximize effectiveness. Although the Soviets could be well organized in focused areas such as military equipment, overall they barely fed their people. Not only did they not bury the West, they could not even make a decent ballpoint pen. So severe were the shortages that a favorite joke of unmotivated workers was that they pretended to work, while their bosses pretended to pay them. Many years of promises and propaganda, to the contrary, the selfless “Communist Man” never emerged. What materialized instead were unprecedented levels of corruption and cynicism.

**Marxism-Lite**

One might imagine that with the example of communist failures before our eyes people would be dissuaded from following their path. This, however, would be wrong. Paradoxically, the most avid Marxists now reside in the bastions of capitalism. Today it is liberals, and more particularly radical liberals (who prefer to be called progressives), who wish to institute the property-less egalitarianism heralded by socialist prophets. They vow that they have learned from the mistakes of their predecessors; hence that they can, and will, bring genuine justice to all. Often loath to identify themselves with the ideals of discredited totalitarians, they nevertheless share their worldview. Not quite willing to agitate for a revolution, they promote a variety of reforms expected to accomplish the same objective. The fact is that they too hate private property and wish to see it eliminated. By the same token, they hate pretensions of superiority and intend to see these expunged.

The central mechanism liberals use to advance their agenda is the welfare state. They do not ask the government to expropriate property; they merely want it to be strong enough to protect the little person from the uncertainties of life—specifically exploitation
by the powerful. Nor do they wish to outlaw leadership; they merely want it concentrated in their own hands. Conceiving of themselves as an updated version of Plato’s philosopher king, they advocate a nanny state dedicated to rational egalitarianism.

Among the means they propose for restraining the depredations of the greedy is confiscatory taxation. Every bit as hostile to business people as were the Marxists, they too seek to reduce disparities in wealth. Ownership rights will still exist in their societies, but these are curtailed by diverting excess income to the needy. Centralized regulations also inform people what they can, or cannot, do with their property. No one, for instance, is allowed to destroy the environment in the name of profit. Similarly, industries will be controlled by cap-and-trade, while physicians will be submerged in a centralized medical system.

These tools will also be used to undermine status differentials. Liberals theoretically believe in the rule of law. Instead of some people being allowed to intimidate others because of their wealth, universal rules administered by an impartial central authority will ensure that no one can lord it over others. With courts equally available to everyone, those who dare to overstep the line will be called to account. Beyond this a myriad of government programs will be installed to empower the previously powerless. Equality and justice will be served by teaching people the skills to fend for themselves, by providing the resources to become property owners, and by organizing political constituencies to redress imbalances. Even families and gender relations are to be reconstructed along egalitarian lines. Unfairness of every sort will be stamped out via sensitivity training and, where necessary, affirmative action.
By now it may be suspected that this vision is too good to be true. The liberal prophecy of an egalitarian future in which everyone holds hands and sings Cumbaya is no more achievable than its communist counterpart. Just as the selfless Communist Man was a myth—and just as the universal love of the religious reformers was illusory—so too is the fabled justice of the welfare state. Once more the old bugaboos of the Platonic worldview rear their ugly heads. Welfare states are no more capable of disinterested rule that were Greek city-states or communist utopias. Human beings who possess all the foibles inherent in being human must administer them too. To begin with, there is the recurrent problem of who will guard the guardians. Once some segment of society is given the power to regulate the business of another, the temptation to abuse it is ineluctable. The American Founding Fathers understood this and attempted to contain it through a balance of powers. No single part of the government would be allowed to run roughshod over the others. Liberals, of course, attempt to follow this example via laws and administrative procedures. What they forget is that these devices are not intrinsically impartial. Since they must be interpreted before they are applied, they too can be abused. Consider the Internal Revenue Service. Were it left to its own devices, there is no telling how arbitrary it might become. Consider too the Louisiana Purchase, the Cornhusker Kickback and the Union Exemptions that were contemplated on the way to state run medicine.

As dangerous as is a monopoly of power, so is the arrogance of power. Would-be philosopher kings—and, make no mistake about it, the liberals who would create, and run, government programs believe they are superior to the common ruck—can be seduced by this presumed superiority. They really do assume that they can make better
decisions about how to spend social dollars than the average family. In their view, the ordinary person is too ill-informed and selfish to make sensible choices. He or she would rather purchase a large automobile or big screen TV than invest in a secure retirement. He or she also prefers a Caribbean vacation to providing a clean environment. Someone with a larger purview must, therefore, intervene to protect people from themselves. This, of course, would be the liberal executive, the liberal legislator, or the liberal Supreme Court justice. Well educated, unsullied by the pursuit of wealth, and embedded in a social movement dedicated to progress, these scions of the intelligentsia can be trusted to defend the collective welfare. To those not of this stratum, this may sound arrogant, but not to them. They truly believe that they are “the best and the brightest.” Although program after favored liberal program has failed to deliver on its utopian promises, they are convinced that, given free reign, they will be able to rescue others from capitalism. That their projections might be corrupted by their insularity is inconceivable. Anyone with intentions as pure as theirs, and intellects as keen as theirs, could not possibly be wrong.

One of the things about which Marx was surely mistaken, and where liberals have apparently miscalculated, is the distribution of wealth. The working class did not become impoverished with the advance of market economics. Today’s proletarians are richer and freer than ever. Indeed, so prosperous have they become that most consider themselves members of the middle class. In Marx’s universe a catastrophe would eventually push working people were over the edge into poverty. Then, once this occurred, they would be galvanized to overthrow their tormentors. Liberals too expect destitution to draw ordinary workers into their political fold. Once normal people realize how handicapped
they are relative to their bosses, they will vote for their real benefactors. Yet this too has
not happened. Millions of workers today have the impertinence to vote Republican.
Clearly, given this irrationality, something had to be done. Just as the Bolsheviks did not
wait for an economic collapse to launch their putsch, liberals instigate excuses for a
takeover. While they continue to resort to class warfare during election cycles—never
tiring of warning of capitalists plotting to revoke social security—they have also sought
other means of arousing disaffection. Among these are environmentalism and race and
gender relations.

Some years ago liberals vociferously protested a governmental failure to reduce
levels of arsenic in drinking water. Although an earlier Democratic administration had
delayed doing so, now that a Republican was in charge this refusal was intolerable. The
new administration fought back by demonstrating that the revised regulations would, at
the cost of billions of dollars, save, at best, one or two lives per year. This, however, did
not settle the matter. Liberal dudgeon was aroused and this counter-argument was taken
as evidence of conservative insensitivity. Didn’t the capitalist reactionaries perpetrating
this travesty understand there was a crisis? Couldn’t they see that the air quality was
deteriorating, that the water was undrinkable, and that global warming threatened to wipe
out our species? Something had to be done; something drastic. Trillions of dollars
needed to be spent to defend against the impending disaster. This was what any
compassionate administration should do.

As has been pointed out by skeptical environmentalists, spending billions to save
one or two lives diverts funds that might be better expended elsewhere. What
commentators have been less keen to assert is that it also diverts funds away from
business and into liberal pockets. Indeed, unproductive environmental projects can only be supported by taxes taken from capitalist sources. Thus, to build a water treatment plant that produces absolute purity, public utilities must be forced to raise their rates, thereby cutting back on their own infrastructure. This is, in essence, a method of redistributing wealth without openly declaring the intention. It is, therefore, an indirect means of promoting government dominance. By blunting industrial influence, a larger proportion of social resources is channeled into social projects controlled by social organizers. In the end, rather than property considerations being the arbiter of what is done, the presumed welfare of the nation is given precedence.

The same strategy is also visible in the civil rights and feminist movements. They too seek to fan the flames of crisis in order to mobilize social forces against commercial dominance. If a majority of citizens can be persuaded that intolerable discrimination is being perpetrated against African-Americans, women, or homosexuals, they may vote in favor of governmental projects intended to correct this injustice. Claiming, for instance—against virtually all the evidence—that capitalism causes these inequities furnishes an excuse for expanding big government. It provides a continuing incentive for exaggerating such wrongs as do exist. It also provides a rationale for programs whose efficacy is never demonstrated. All that is needed is to argue that they are intended to instill justice. That something like affirmative action does not produce equality, but generates a form of second-class citizenship, is never considered in the rush to dismantle market-oriented solutions.

Like Marxism itself, this sort of Marxism-lite makes promises it cannot redeem. Though it projects a world in which people worry less about getting rich and more about
providing social justice, it does so disingenuously. While its predictions have been no more accurate than Marx’s, this is disguised in a blizzard of scare tactics. According to the liberals the sky is falling, hence we must act lest we regress into a fascist hell. Unless we do, people will be tortured by avaricious elites, sea levels will rise to inundate coastal cities, and sun-baked dust bowls will overtake amber waves of grain.

**Technological Fables**

Oddly technology has been indicted both as the bane and salvation of humankind. Its friends and critics alike assume that we have entered a post-industrial society in which technology will either free or enslave us. This sort of futurology came into vogue once it was clear industrialization had irreparably changed social conditions. By the mid-twentieth century it was obvious that the family farm was obsolete and that the factory, which replaced it, was fast pursuing it into oblivion. Fewer people were doing jobs working with their hands and more entered service occupations. Earlier theories of social organization suggested that this would result in widespread impoverishment, but that is not what occurred. Thanks to new inventions, including automation, production rose. As John Kenneth Galbraith declared, we were fast becoming an affluent society. The question was what to do with this abundance.

Galbraith, a good liberal, argued in favor of increased social services and those who advocated a War on Poverty agreed with him. More flamboyant, however, were the hippies. These children of the prosperous middle class, in the 1960s, inaugurated a festival ambience that is today looked back upon with nostalgia. Having been raised in relative opulence, they assumed that the machinery which provided these resources would run automatically. They would not have to work in order to eat, nor sweat in order
to provide a roof over their heads. All that was required was for people to love one another. Commercialism was obviously crass, whereas art and literature were progressive. Mere physical objects, that is to say, property, was not something an enlightened age should celebrate. Nevertheless, material goods would continue to tumble off the assembly lines without college-educated artists soiling their hands. In other words, the success of technology enabled them to be anti-technology. Likewise, they could be adamantly pro-equality while dressing in jeans and lounging in communal crash pads.

Some, such as Charles Reich, in writing of the “greening” of America, perceived a new consciousness arising. Profoundly anti-pragmatic, he, and his ilk, were equally anti-rational. No doubt someone else, someone presumably hiding behind the scenes, would invent the machines to relieve humanity of their toils. Someone else, someone evidently less reputable, would run these devices. None of this, however, was well thought through because the hippies distrusted linear thought. They preferred to get stoned. Marihuana and LSD were their deities. These would put them in touch with a nobler reality. These would also enable them to love everyone. As any decent person could see, their superior wisdom would result in the egalitarian lifestyles lauded by earlier generations. “Tune in, turn on, and drop out.” This was their mantra. Somehow everything would work out for the best.

The hippies, of course, were spoiled children who expected parental support for the rest of their pampered lives. Yet they were not alone in believing that technology would enable modern humans to do whatever they desired. Another, and lately more dominant faction, is pro-science and pro-technology. It argues that advanced equipment
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will profoundly alter our living arrangements. Transfixed by the wonders wrought by automobiles, television sets and cell phones, they expect greater miracles to come. One of their shibboleths is that we are entering an Information Age. As new means of communication come on line, these are expected to fuel fresh insights. More people will become knowledge workers and, in the process, escape the drudgery of the past. In doing so, they will not have to worry about property because affluence will become so general that scarcities will disappear. Just as on the Starship Enterprise, everyone will be able to have whatever he or she wants whenever he or she wants. Moreover, given this unprecedented wealth, no one will be able to lord his possessions over anyone else. With everyone equally rich, none will be able to impose an iniquitous status on others.

The putative linchpin of this paradise is the computer. It is expected to provide the intelligence to run this brave new world. Ever alert and open to continuous upgrading, it will furnish the data necessary to organize an enhanced future. Indeed, human beings themselves will approach an apex of perfection thanks to rubbing shoulders with this wonder machine. Sitting before flat screens and speaking into a device that understands the spoken word, they will have instant access to whatever they need to know. They will, essentially, become smarter than any previous generation. Each and every person will be able to be a philosopher king. He/she will be more rational, better informed, and thanks to facebook more effectively in communication with everyone of whom he/she is aware.

Years ago the broadcaster Edward R. Murrow bemoaned the fact that television was not living up to its promise. He told his audience that this was a technology not only capable of entertaining, but of educating. Not long afterwards, Newton Minnow, then
chairman of the FCC, complained that the airwaves had become a vast wasteland. Far from educating people, the networks anesthetized them with numbing situation comedies and insipid game shows. Fast-forward several decades and social gurus predicted that cable television would provide the intelligent programming the mass media did not. Because its multitude of channels would narrowcast, they could afford to provide shows aimed at a smaller audience and still make a profit. One of these outlets was optimistically baptized The Learning Channel. It would put on programs designed to teach a variety of edifying subjects. Except in the long run it did not. In order to make a profit it switched to concentrating on what people wanted to watch, which in its case meant programs on extra-terrestrial visitations and ghostly infestations. Viewers were not upgraded; they were merely supplied with what they demanded.

The same is likely to apply to computers and the Internet. It is already clear that a great deal of computing power has been dedicated to playing games. With graphics and interactive capabilities continuously improved, these amusements are regularly modified to provide the novelty users demand. Quick reflexes and an aggressive disposition, not intellectual curiosity, are plainly what these indulge. While the worldwide web may not be as exciting, it is about as intellectually stimulating. People build shrines to themselves on my-space, engage is shopping or gambling, text vacuous political opinions on twitter, and peruse the latest innovations in pornography. Only incidentally do they engage in serious research. Even here the results are disappointing. For some, research has come to mean plagiarizing materials from strangers. For others, it has created a sound-bite mentality in which they look up odd facts as the spirit moves them.
The catch is that technology is going to change our lives, but not us. It will alter our social arrangements, but not a substitute for understanding our social nature. Indeed, it always operates within a context of social imperatives. There is little doubt that technology will bring us greater prosperity and more information, but, of itself, cannot dictate what we do with these. Events are proving that it is possible to be affluent and unequal; to be exposed to information and remain ignorant. Unless other things change, technology might have effects opposite those the pundits expect. It may, for instance, make us dumber. With information ostensibly available at our fingertips, people may be persuaded that it makes little sense to read challenging books; that with immense computing power available on an i-phone, it is foolish to commit multiplication tables to memory. By the same token, technology will modify, rather than eliminate, the criteria people use to determine status. Who knows, some day being a nerd may be fashionable.

Then again, maybe not. Maybe the in-crowd will simply turn to eggheads for hire. To be blunt, more likely than complete egalitarianism is a modified ranking system. More probable than an absence of property is a revised set of criteria regarding how value is appraised.

**It Doesn’t Take a Village**

Back when Hillary Rodham Clinton was first lady, she popularized a West African adage. As she seldom tired of reminding the electorate, “it takes a village to raise a child.” Parents cannot do the job alone. In her version of the proverb, however, the literal village was replaced by the nation. It would take all of us banding together in support of government programs to provide children with the emotional, and physical, resources to which they are entitled. Jane Jacobs came to a similar conclusion, only her village was the urban neighborhood. She too was wary of the isolated family and wanted
people to move back into city environments where their neighbors could watch over the young as they played in the streets. Even Ross Perot, when he ran for president, got into the act. His village was going to be an electronic town meeting. Utilizing the power of both television and the computer, he would bring everyone together to decide important issues. They would all have little buttons with which to vote on questions of general interest. The result would be a participatory democracy much like that which formerly existed in the New England villages.

Mario Cuomo provided a slightly different version of a humane future when he addressed a Democratic national convention. This former New York State governor harked back to his Italian heritage to promote family values. All of us, he reasoned, should belong to one huge, mutually supportive family. Weren’t we all Americans? Hadn’t we all a need to recognize each other’s humanity? Didn’t we essentially sit in the same boat? This message so resonated that talk of Cuomo for president instantly became the rage. Surely we should emulate the loving encouragement his immigrant family furnished him. One reason for this reaction was that most people remembered a time when extended families were the norm; when they could walk to Grandma’s house to share the warmth of a Thanksgiving dinner. Why couldn’t we go back to that? Why shouldn’t we return to a time when people kept their front doors unlocked and their hearts open? Wouldn’t a world of front porches and emotional generosity be more comfortable than our current impersonality?

All this wistfulness tugs at the heartstrings. Most of us wish it were based in fact. Yet as we look around, the world seems more callous. Clearly, our extended families are more centrifugal. Parents and children seem to fly apart to separate corners of the nation
as we watch. Just as clearly, more people live alone or in isolated nuclear families. Even the villages we say we want are disappearing. They are being replaced by suburban enclaves in which neighbors are strangers to one another. Separated by manicured lawns and moved about in buttoned-up automobiles, suburbanites scarcely know how to talk to each other. Today people seem to rely on a kaleidoscopically changing cast of friends. Temporarily tied to jobs in corporations that offer little loyalty, they are on their own and know it.

Political philosophers once spoke of a time, long ago, when people, in order to reduce the damage of interpersonal conflict, got together to create a Social Compact. They agreed that they would live by certain rules because these benefited everyone. Later generations were required to honor this agreement because it was in their interest to do so. And yet there never was such a compact. People never literally got together to pledge their troth. The Social Contract was a political fiction. It was a convenient means of gaining assent for existing political arrangements. The same can be said of Hillary’s village or Mario’s super-family. They exist in the imaginations of their defenders, not the real world. The real world is too large to be a village or super-family. As is well known, the United States has a population of over three hundred million and the world of over six billion. This is too many people for everyone to know everyone else. Ours is of necessity a world full of strangers; strangers nevertheless dependent upon one another for survival. No analogy between the government and a village or family can overcome this. Nor can the government replace their emotional closeness. Whatever the politicians promise, this is not logistically possible.
We are, in some respects, more alone than our ancestors. Still, we keep imaging a future in which this is not so. Instead of acknowledging the direction society has been heading, we interpose a fantasy version of the villages and families we imagine our antecedents had. This, however, cannot protect us from fate. It may give us a fuzzy feeling, but it also makes it difficult to cope with reality. It may even lead us down very nasty pathways. To repeat, the world is not becoming one big family; nor is it becoming a huge village. Despite advances in technology, the world will never become flat. We know this from experience, yet we refuse to relinquish our radiant hopes. To many of us, there does not seem to be a choice. Were we to do less, we would abandon the prospect of a better future.

Except that there is an alternative to fairy tales. We can do what Marx promised, but did not deliver. We can look toward the future with an unjaundiced eye. If we honestly attempt to understand human nature and how our history has unfolded, we may be able to make more accurate predictions. One thing is certain; our species has demonstrated its plasticity. People have been able to produce a multitude of lifestyles. Nevertheless, we are not infinitely plastic. There are limitations to the kinds of lives we can live. Some of these boundaries are built into our biology; others have developed in the course of social evolution. If we are honest with ourselves, we must acknowledge that each of us is born with circumscribed potentials onto a vessel that is already in motion. We may be able to alter its direction, but we did not start the craft on its way, nor will we dictate its eventual destination. All we can do is make the best of our current circumstances.
In the following chapters we will discover that we are moving toward a professionalized world. Such a world contains both opportunities and challenges. Fairy tales aside, ours will be a universe where neither property, nor social status have been, or ever will be, extinguished. Thus, we can expect social conflicts, shortages, and unhappiness to persist into the indefinite future. Indeed, every one of us will be complicit in ensuring that they do. Perfection is not part of the human condition. —And it never will be. Nonetheless improvements are possible. Personal and public professionalization fit this bill. They can provide the means of coordinating our activities with the optimum outcomes for the largest number of individuals. They can also enable us to work together toward our individual and collective goals, while maintaining considerable control over our personal lives. What this entails, however, must await a more extended discussion. The causes and consequences of our impending professionalization have to be examined in greater detail. Nothing less will explain our real future. Nothing else can provide the evidence that this will be so.
Chapter 2

Our Social Nature

Broken Dreams

Chimpanzees are smart, but they cannot speak. They do not possess the voice boxes to do the job. Cheetahs are fast, but they cannot run long distances. They do not have the stamina to do so. Bees can manufacture honey, but not key lime pies. They are physiologically constructed to do the former, not the latter. All of this is fairly obvious. No one contests the fact that various animals are built to perform some tasks, but not others. With human beings, however, it is often thought to be different. We are conceived of as something apart from the animal kingdom, subject only to limitations of our own making. Sometimes this is expressed by saying that if we can dream something, we can do it. As long as it is possible to imagine a circumstance, it is assumed that if we put our minds to it, we can achieve it. After all, weren’t we able to fly despite the skeptics who declared we could not? And didn’t we make it to the moon, fulfilling John Kennedy’s heroic promise in less than a decade?

This said, we have not been able to fly unaided. To get off the ground, we still require mechanical assistance; be this a flying machine or rocket ship. Those who insist we can achieve any dream whatsoever know this is not the case. Unlike little boys who climb atop a roof so as to imitate Superman, they remain on terra firma. Adults of normal intelligence understand that putting a cape around one’s shoulders will not result in levitation. Nevertheless, they fail generalize this to their social dreams. They continue to assume that if they can imagine a utopian arrangement, they can bring it to fruition. Instead of recognizing biological and social limitations, they blame hidebound human
enemies for frustrating their ambitions. If only these selfish fools would stand aside, a brave new world would surely arrive. Similarly, if only progressives were more assertive, they would surely prevail. Moreover, in failing to recognize that their visions are dreams, they grow irritated with those believed responsible for their disappointments. Theirs, they insist, are not broken dreams, but subverted necessities. An egalitarian, property-free society has not emerged—not because it cannot—but because loathsome people benefit when it does not.

What utopians leave out of their calculations are our social limitations. They are prepared to ostracize their intellectual opponents based in a conviction that they are obstructionists. While even congenital optimists recognize that human beings cannot fly unassisted, these idealists do not perceive social arrangements as bound by comparable restraints. With flying, it is easy to see that we do not possess wings; with social status, however, it is not apparent what induces us to generate social rankings. Physiology is clearly heritable; parents who possess five fingers tend to have children who possess five digits. Behavior patterns, on the other hand, are less visible and, therefore, seemingly less subject to genetic control. Yet social behaviors too are hedged in by natural restrictions. Chimpanzees do not speak, partly, because their throats will not allow them to, but neither will their brains. Efforts to teach our nearest relatives to use sign language have had only modest success. Hand signals get around voice box problems, but not more subtle limitations. Chimps simply do not have the mental wiring to engage in syntactic communications. They may be capable of stringing simple sentences together, but despite years of practice cannot deal with the past tense or subordinate clause.

Although it has become a cliché that chimps outperform human children during their first
few years, by the age of four humans draw so far ahead that their verbal accomplishments are never again approached.

This is not to denigrate chimpanzees; it is to highlight the biological substrates of human social behavior. How the physiology of our brains shapes our linguistic behavior is not obvious; but that it does should be apparent. While we cannot see the switching circuits in our brains that make such achievements possible, we know they must be present because linguists have demonstrated that all human languages share common traits. To begin with, none of us creates language from scratch. We all start out with the advantage of mental equipment that evolved for this purpose over many hundreds of thousands of years. We also share the advantage of parents who are language speakers. Beyond our biology, we are social learners. Indeed, we are primed to be social learners. It is not merely that our parents are present when we are young; we are also geared to pay special attention and imitate what they do. Infants play verbal games with adults, gurgling in response to what they say and shaping their sounds to match.

If this can be agreed upon, if language can be acknowledged as both biological and social, why aren’t our social arrangements also acknowledged to be intrinsically both biological and social? If the way we talk is limited by the way our brains and voice boxes operate, and also by what we acquire at our parent’s knees, why isn’t the way we organize our interpersonal relationships shaped by similar considerations? Yet many people seem to believe not. They routinely suppose that they can reconstruct human societies any way they imagine; that reorganizing human relationships is, as it were, a social engineering puzzle. In effect, all that is needed for a positive outcome is logic and discipline. People do not come to this conclusion with respect to language, how fast
humans can run, or whether homo sapiens can spin webs in imitation of spiders. Doesn’t it correspondingly make sense that human nature applies to our social nature; that it too follows rules over which we have limited control? If so, the question becomes; What is our social nature? And, if we cannot be whatever we want, what are our limitations?

The New Communist Man turned out to be a fantasy; so did the androgynous human being who is neither male nor female. Dr. John Money thought he could raise a mutilated boy as a girl, but his experiment ended in a tragic suicide. No matter how carefully people are coached, they turn out individually selfish and gender distinctive. The same applies to the possibility of non-hierarchical or property-less societies. These too can be imagined, but not actualized.

Other animals likewise have social limitations. Consider wolves. They are social creatures, but their packs are relatively small. Once these grow past a certain point, they split up. Bears, however, are not social creatures. They fish side by side when the salmon run, but at other times are fiercely territorial. Horses are social, and live in herds that munch grass on defined patches of turf, but they do not offer each other food. Because grass is available to any animal that can reach down for a bite, they do not treat it as transferable property. Chimpanzees, in contrast, when they team up to catch monkeys, regard their quarry as property. The one who snatches and kills a prey animal shares it with its team members, but not others. Meat is a scarce commodity that takes effort to acquire; hence is assiduously guarded and discriminately apportioned. We are not so different. We too have a unique social character.

As social generalists, human beings have more leeway than most animals, but not infinite room for maneuver. As omnivores our diets are very broad, but they do not
include grass. We can digest both meat and asparagus, whereas a steady diet of hay would prove fatal. We also tend to live in families, yet these can be enormously varied. Sometimes they are nuclear; sometimes extended. In some communities they follow a patrilineal model with one’s identification derived from one’s father’s kin, while in others a matrilineal plan is preferred. In no society, however, has unrestrained love ever been adopted. The patterns differ, but something specific is always present.

When we contemplate the directions in which civilization is headed, we must therefore consider which channels are possible. These are not infinite. Thus, some are surely based on biology. For example, a variety of physiological constraints shape our interpersonal relationships. Inherited sexual preferences, for instance, push us in some directions, but not others. But this is not the end of the story. Socially learned constraints also bind us. History, for example, has bequeathed us technologies that limit our options. We can today fly to the moon, but not engage in teleportation. In short, we must explore both our human and social natures. What is more, lest we founder on a sea of broken dreams, we need to hazard predictions of our fate based on these. First, however, we should determine the potential boundaries. It is these that will constrain our options.

A Hierarchical Animal

Marvin Harris tells the story of an anthropologist studying the Khoi-San people of southern Africa. After many months of following his informants, he resolved to provide them with a token of his appreciation. Since these desert-dwelling, hunter-gatherers prized succulent meat, he decided to purchase a fat ox from a nearby farming community. This, he expected, would please them because their usual source of protein came from
leaner game animals. From their perspective, domesticated beef was particularly savory. To the anthropologist’s surprise, when he informed his hosts of his intension, they expressed dismay that the animal he selected was scrawny and unpalatable. Alluding to it, they assured him that he had made a mistake. Later on, after the animal was slaughtered and consumed, the anthropologist expressed surprise at the relish with which it was devoured. He could see that the meat was both ample and well larded with fat; hence was treated as a great delicacy. Why then, he asked, had it been disparaged? Why, when his companions knew the animal was unusually large and well nourished, did they proclaim it otherwise?

Harris makes a good deal of the tribesmen’s answer. He observes that the form it took was a consequence of the community’s egalitarian structure. These hunters asserted that it was their custom to denigrate the accomplishments of their fellows. If someone were particularly lucky on the hunt, they did not want him to come into camp bragging of his prowess. This might lead him to believe that he was better than the rest, which would be intolerable. The objective was, therefore, to prevent a person’s head from getting too big. Harris remarks that this was clearly a mechanism for maintaining egalitarian relationships. It was a means of ensuring that the customary equality between adult men remained undisturbed. What he does not stress is that the Khoi-San are under environmental pressures to cooperate. The harshness of their surroundings is such that unless they come to each other’s aid, all might perish.

But there are two additional lessons to be learned from this Khoi-San practice. The first is that individual hunters are prone to boasting of their accomplishments. When they make an attractive kill with unusual skill, they want to receive credit for the feat. In
this, they apparently hope to demonstrate that they are better than their peers and, therefore, should be accorded higher status. The second lesson is that their peers do not appreciate this. They do not relish being placed in an inferior position and immediately seek to neutralize the aggressor. If anything, this demonstrates, not that egalitarianism is the normal human condition, but the reverse. Plainly, there is a natural human inclination to seek superiority and an equally natural impulse to resist it. In other words, although they can be cooperative, people tend to seek an hierarchical advantage, and, for parallel reasons, oppose its imposition. They take umbrage because they prefer to be the ones with an edge. The simple fact is that virtually every person wants to be special; virtually everyone relishes being best. We human beings both seek and enjoy higher status. Conversely we abhor lower status and actively attempt to escape it.

These propensities are so natural that it might seem perverse to mention them. Yet it could have been otherwise. People could have been non-hierarchical; they could be more like earthworms. They might even have been like schooling fish. A chief earthworm does not lead other earthworms around, nor a paramount sardine dominate a shoal of sardines. Schooling fish may appear to follow a lead fish, but should the mass change direction, which creature is in front also changes. In theory, people too could be indifferent to the individual in charge. It is hypothetically possible that we would make no distinctions regarding relative status. That we do says something profound about our social nature. Should this be overlooked, recall that even on the starship Enterprise there were distinctions in rank. Captain Picard might treat every member of the crew with dignity, yet these others were aware that he was the captain and accorded him the
appropriate deference. Indeed, newly minted ensigns tended to be in awe of his status. Once in his presence, they stammered out their responses lest he criticize a mistake.

So hierarchical are we human beings that we create ranking systems for fun. As any child knows, the games we play are about winning and losing. The point of baseball, basketball, or a simple foot race, is for some individuals to come out ahead of others. Furthermore, in demonstrating superior skill, the winners expect deference. They, as well as the losers, agree that they deserve respect, even adulation, for a notable victory. Every schoolboy is aware of this state of affairs; hence the importance of who gets chosen for which side when teams are formed. As the players stand around awaiting the captains’ decisions, the objective is not only to wind up on the winning side, but to be chosen early enough to attain superior status on one’s own team. Because the players tend to be selected according to how much they are liable to contribute to victory, those picked first are assumed to be the best. So salient is this fact that I remember a Junior High School touch football game from a half century ago. Since I was one of the smallest boys in our class, I was accustomed to being picked at the tail end. But this day was different. One of the biggest players in the yard had been watching pro-football on television and this gave him an idea. He decided that because I was small and agile I might make a good running back. To this end, he chose me in an early round and soon afterwards I found myself racing toward the goalpost, football in hand, convoyed by a bevy of super-motivated blockers. The feeling was one of elation. I too was a winner, worthy of every bit of the admiration proffered by my larger teammates.

Contemporary proponents of egalitarianism, however, often assert that status was invented by elites in order to justify their advantages. They imagine that once these
privileged few are stripped of their positions, equality must perforce prevail. Neglected in their calculations is that even children, such as I once was, create ranking systems. Even the very young behave in ways that institute inequality; even they revel in being better than their peers. This is so because all of us, high and low, are hierarchical animals. We, each of us, participate in the social mechanisms that perpetuate status distinctions. Particularly telling is the fact that if the top of the social ladder were miraculously eliminated, those on the lower rungs would diligently strive to keep the remaining disparities in place. Dominance and submission are, in effect, two sides of the same coin. Both result from “tests of strength” in which almost everyone participates and from which all derive their relative positions. Indeed the involvement of the entire community is needed if there is to be a higher and a lower. For unless those at the bottom acknowledge that they are lower, the posturing of those at the top could not, of itself, keep them there.

The nature of tests of strength can be seen among the Khoi-San. Skilled hunters, they compare their achievements with other hunters, so that their peers will be intimidated into submission. Just as dominant rams seek to validate their superiority by clashing horns with other rams, so do humans—with the proviso that people do so over a broader range of “strengths.” Among rams, stronger individuals convince the weaker that they should not keep up the head banging. Once persuaded, the latter voluntarily desist from further contests. The losers accept an inferior status, backing off to allow the winners access to the ewes. Among humans, prowess at hunting, on the battlefield, or in the economic arena, has comparable effects. In modern societies, people up and down the social class scale seek areas in which to demonstrate their relative competence. The
schoolyard is not the only place this happens. It also occurs in beauty contests, political elections, and virtually every occupation. There, when superiority is established, the losers back off. They acknowledge their inferior position and allow the victors the fruits of success. Then, if they can, they look for someone else to dominate.

Why a momentary advantage created in a test of strength persists to create a ranking system owes to a significant corollary of these victories. Losers, it must be noted, do not meekly acquiesce in defeat. If they can find an opportunity to reverse a negative decision, they will. Usually, however, they do not do so immediately because the initial victory gets institutionalized. It is quickly built into the ways people think and act. Upon losing, the loser (and those who witness the contest) concludes that the winner was stronger; perhaps too strong to challenge. Winning thus creates reputations, which influence subsequent events. Not only does this reduce succeeding confrontations, but it makes it more likely that the winner will prevail the next time there is a conflict. The challenger, having been convinced this other is stronger, will be handicapped by his doubts, whereas the winner’s confidence provides additional strength.

This is also why we human beings work so diligently to acquire the trappings of social power. If we can attach the symbols of supremacy to ourselves, we can thereby acquire what amounts to a reputation for strength. Becoming rich, and therefore able to afford a large automobile or splendid mansion, bespeaks the power to defend these resources. Rich people do not have to go out to beat up on every poor person in order to gain their deference. The accouterments of wealth are sufficient to tell the less affluent, especially those who do not personally know them, that they are not to be trifled with. Symbols of potency, in effect, communicate strength without the necessity of doing
battle. As such, they are comparable to the roars of male lions—i.e., frightening without being physical.

This business of seeking higher status via actual or simulated contests may seem fatuous, but is extremely serious. The social esteem thereby acquired is intangible, whereas its consequences are real. It can even make the difference between life and death. During periods of famine, for instance, the less powerful rarely challenge the rich for scarce food supplies because they are convinced they have no hope of victory. In the end, the poor generally decide to expire quietly in their hovels. Hierarchies, while they obviously have dire consequences for individuals, tend to have positive ones for the community as a whole. Individuals may die because they are perceived as losers, while the group survives. Fair or not, because people decide not to fight over limited resources, less blood is shed. Similarly, because they accept hierarchical distinctions, social order is maintained.

Many social scientists describe the outcomes of ranking systems as functional, that is, as contributing to the survival of the larger group. They cite a number of positive effects of hierarchy. One of the most important is an allocation of scarce resources. When people know their place, they can distribute these without tearing the community apart. Second, there is an improved ability to coordinate complex social activities. When people acknowledge who leads and who follows, they better understand which shared plans to implement. Next, hierarchies facilitate the protection of the community from outside challenges. Strong leaders know that it is their job to defend others. There is also likely to be a reduction of internal conflicts. Powerful leaders can be social arbiters. They settle squabbles by mandating solutions. In addition, hierarchies stimulate
individual effort. In their quest for upward mobility, people often produce achievements they would not otherwise contemplate. Lastly, sexual selection promotes the interests of the genetically most able. They are more likely to spawn offspring that survive, thereby improving the biological stock of the group. To reiterate, when some people are acknowledged to be more powerful, they can organize group activities such that all are better off than otherwise. They can, for example, arrange irrigation projects, as well as legal systems based upon concepts of justice. An each-man-for-himself attitude, in contrast, might lead to fragmentation or internecine warfare. It would reduce human beings to the condition of earthworms.

If any of this has the ring of truth, it suggests why the Marxist ideal is a fairy tale. Marx knew that we human beings are social animals, but he refused to believe that we are hierarchical creatures. He would never have admitted that our tendency to construct ranking systems has, in large measure, enabled us to manage the community projects without which we could not have mastered the globe. Even hunting bands would have been imperiled had they not deferred to the leadership of proficient hunters—the pursuit of larger prey being almost impossible for loners. In Marx’s world people eventually adopt a dictatorship of the proletariat in which there is no need for leadership. Imperative coordination, in which some people give orders to others, is presumably unnecessary where everyone voluntarily does what is needed. But how are they to know what is needed, or, as importantly, agree on a common objective? If no one is in charge of large-scale projects, how can there be an overarching plan that all follow? Worse still, if no one is in charge, isn’t it likely that people, with the best of intentions, will pull in opposite directions? Among nomadic foragers, unless someone calls communal signals,
the members of the band might literally head off to different points of the compass, thus leaving the group without the manpower to hunt. Within modern mass societies, the effects could be so chaotic that foodstuffs would not reliably make it from the farm to the supermarket. In either case, the conclusion would be starvation.

What is more, in the Marxist utopia, no one is envious of anyone else. No one seeks to establish superiority, because in the absence of property there is no point to doing so. Yet if an inclination toward tests of strength is part of our biological legacy, there is an entirely different reason for competing over precedence. Irrespective of what people own, all want to be the best. Moreover, this motive is not concentrated in one social stratum. If rich and poor alike desire preeminence, joint ownership of the means of production will have little effect on the levels of social competition. It might alter the nature of that over which people compete, but not the impulse to win. This, in turn, guarantees that interpersonal conflict is not destined to disappear. Those determined to win generally make an effort to do so, even though this inflicts pain on the losers. Were this urge to go unregulated, the damage could be massive. Marx notwithstanding, our potential for conflict needs to be managed. As an hierarchical species, we never stop jostling for position or intimidating one another into submission. The best we can hope for is to develop techniques that moderate these tendencies.

A Property Exchanging Animal

Those utopians who believe property can be abolished usually think of it in terms of land or factory ownership. They bemoan the monopolistic aspirations of aristocrats who want to control every piece of agricultural territory or capitalists who hope to produce every manufactured item. This, however, is contingent upon an artificial
understanding of the nature of property; one that unnecessarily commits us to the types of property recently decisive in determining social power. The idea of ownership, in fact, goes back farther than the Industrial or Agricultural Revolutions. Our remote, pre-human ancestors initiated a penchant for claiming the right to dictate how certain physical objects will be dispersed. That is my spear and not yours. This piece of meat is mine, not yours. Such, indeed is what property rights are inherently about. At stake is an individual’s ability to control how particular articles are used. If this is mine, then I can dispose of it as I wish—and you cannot. Should you attempt to interfere, I can stop you, either by myself or in cooperation of with others who recognize my right. Ownership, in short, is about control.

But if ownership is about control, it does not have to be about land or factories. We all understand this in our personal lives. When I say this coat belongs to me, I am claiming the right to wear it and the corresponding right to prevent you from doing so. Moreover, in our society we all claim ownership of wardrobes full of clothing. We similarly profess proprietorship of houses, cars, books, jewelry, and circular saws. Clearly most of what we possess is smaller than a breadbox. This was also true for our remote ancestors. Engaged neither in farming, nor manufacturing, they were concerned with controlling what mattered to them. As hunters and gatherers what made a difference for their survival was jurisdiction over foodstuffs and the tools needed to acquire these. Just as chimpanzees are jealous of the meat they capture, so were the early hominids. They were also careful about how they shared this scarce resource. They would likewise have been alert to guard their weapons. The best stone for spear points and scrapers was not universally available. Neither was the skill to shape it into the effective implements.
Should one person attempt to appropriate another’s spear, it is unlikely that this would have been taken kindly. Nor would other members of the village be neutral. They would have come to the aid of the victim in the expectation that if they did not, the same neighborhood tough would steal their spear points. It is not for nothing, that every society has rules against theft.

Our remote ancestors also had rules about territory, with individual bands having the right to hunt in some places, but not others. These regulations, however, were less associated with specific persons. In any event, the idea that particular objects are associated with particular persons has a long pedigree; so long that these associations have acquired strong emotional correlates. We care when others appropriate our objects. Just try to steal a security blanket from a small child, or a lollypop from Maggie Simpson, if you wish to ascertain how much. Just try going for a drive in your neighbor’s Corvette without asking permission. Beyond this, who owns what has a huge impact on how societies are organized. This is true of modern communities, where it can determine who lives where, but also preliterate bands, where it shaped hierarchical arrangements.

Here too anthropology provides a useful illustration. Back at the beginning of the twentieth century a set of investigators set out to produce an ethnography of the Yir Yoront. This was a small tribe of Australian aborigines still living a stone age way of life. As hunter-gatherers, they wandered the bush in search of sustenance, dependent upon tools crafted of stone. Their cutting implements, however, were not flaked from cores; they were ground from hard materials such as granite. Chiefly prized were stone axes. These took a great many hours to manufacture; hence the tribe did not possess very many. Given this paucity, the anthropologists decided to reward their informants by
providing them with steel axes. They knew these would be appreciated and would motivate people to share secrets they might be inclined to withhold.

What was not initially recognized was how this would influence interpersonal relations. The axes, because they had hitherto been rare, were not equally distributed throughout the community. They were owned, not by everyone, but by a few of the elder males. When others needed them, they first had to obtain permission from their owners. This privilege was paid for in terms of deference. Women and younger males were obliged to acknowledge the seniority of the village elders. Once the steel axes made an appearance, all this changed. Now it was the social inferiors who controlled the best cutting implements. This quickly degenerated into what previously would have been considered insolence. And with this came a breakdown in communal discipline. The social rules were turned upside down merely because of a modification in property rights. As a result, Yir Yoront society fell apart.

There is another aspect of property rights that must be underlined. To control a piece of property entails being able to transfer its control to another. The object can be bestowed as a gift, or, more frequently, exchanged for another piece of property (or service). In addition, the ability to effect such transfers was dramatically increased with the invention of money. This fungible medium enabled strangers to swap goods; sometimes without meeting face to face. Ultimately it became possible for individuals to support themselves by way of such transactions. Indeed, in modern market based economies, billions of people do so. They are literally dependent for the food on their plates on others who are willing to trade surplus products. This sort of exchange has so
proliferated that it has become the foremost basis of international organization. Yet this too is part of our social nature.

Nevertheless the transfer of material objects is disparaged as much as is property itself. It is said to foster selfishness because those skilled at trading, or at producing items for trade, may acquire a disproportionate share of goods. They can grow rich; very rich. Utopian property-haters assert that this obscenity can be cured by the simple expedient of redistributing ownership rights. If property cannot be abolished, equalizing its allocation will have the same effect. The problem is that this can only be accomplished by way of force. Because people tend to cling to what they own, goods must be coercively removed if they are to be bestowed on the less fortunate. To make matters worse, human nature and the dynamics of the marketplace being what they are, those with the skills and desire to accumulate excess wealth are apt to do so again, therefore necessitating a new round of expropriation. Nowhere has it ever been possible to institute a definitive reallocation of property such that poverty and affluence are eliminated. In the long run, exchangeable property rights, coupled with a desire for superior status, have always introduced inequality.

Some moralists, of course, declare selfishness the bane on our species; they claim that money is the root of all evil. If they had their druthers, they would reeducate humankind to be more generous. Nevertheless selfishness has its advantages. A tenacious desire to accumulate property is as functional as is an impulse to create status differences. In this case, people are biologically and socially impelled to defend the resources that enable them to survive. If they did not, for instance, develop an attachment to food items or the means through which these are acquired, others would surely purloin
them—for what might be trivial purposes. In this way, passersby intent on nothing more than amusement could destroy essential pieces of meat, weapons, or land merely because they were unguarded. This could literally result in starvation for those individuals, and families, that did not possess an impulse toward selfishness. Humans who are utterly indifferent to protecting what is theirs soon find themselves with nothing to protect.

Yet selfishness need not be total. Those who seek to accumulate property are not automatically condemned to inordinate greed. Despite myths such as that of Midas, few people want everything around them to mutate into gold. Selfishness does not preclude generosity; nor cancel out altruism. Perhaps the medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides said it best. He advised those who would lead a good life that if they were not for themselves, no one else would be. Wise individuals had to be assertive, including about their property rights, if they were to get what they deserved. On the other hand, in a tag line that is generally overlooked, he advised them that if they were only for themselves, What were they? To be human meant being part of a community, which implied defending its rights as well as one’s own. Good people care about themselves, but also about others. Not only is this not contradictory; it is mandatory. In a similar vein, anthropologists and sociobiologists are fond of observing that norms of reciprocity are part of our biological heritage. Without thinking about it, most people tend to balance their accounts with friends and relatives. Rather than be deemed a “user” and shunned by their associates, they tend to give in equal measure for what they receive. This just seems fair. It just feels natural.

In any event, a utopian attempt to eliminate property is not only doomed; it is misguided. So important has the marketplace become that it cannot be replaced. What is
more, were ownership expendable, doing without it would still be a mistake. Our ability to exchange goods is the foundation of our prosperity. Were we able to survive without swapping goods, we would do so under diminished circumstances. Gone would be our automobiles, cell phones, and vacations in the Caribbean, replaced with penury. One of the most amazing ironies of utopian futurology is that it is promoted by individuals who live in the most affluent period in all of recorded history. Never before have as many people been as well off. Nonetheless, in the name of egalitarianism, these erstwhile reformers are ready to sacrifice this on the altar of an ideal that denies the impulses of the people they purport to save.

A Role-Playing Animal

In a room full of strangers milling around at a cocktail party, certain questions are predictable. When people who don’t know each other engage in small talk, they typically begin by asking who this other person is, or more specifically what he or she does. Were we still roaming the African Savannah as nomadic foragers, this would be absurd. The other guy, the one nibbling on a joint of meat, would be a hunter and you would both know it. Today, this other, whether dressed in a suit or jeans, could be almost anything. Once upon a time, we might have guessed: butcher, baker, or candlestick maker, but today, technology being what it has become, he (or she) is more likely to be a computer programmer, patent attorney, or medical technician. Yet this is a tiny sample of the possibilities, for we are in the midst of an exploding social division of labor, one in which many hundreds of thousands of jobs are being created and occupied by our friends and neighbors. So vast has this partitioning of livelihoods become that most of the time, unless a person is occupationally engaged, we cannot tell what he/she does for a living.
When sociology got started some hundred years ago, its original practitioners noticed what ordinary people sometimes forget. They recognized that human beings are role-playing animals; that we do not all perform the same jobs. The tasks that need doing are divided up, with some individuals specializing in this and others in that. This occurs at work, at home, in our religious organizations, and in the political arena. So familiar is the phenomenon, and so identified do individuals become with their own corner of the tapestry, that it colors our self-images. People think of themselves as doctors, lawyers, or college professors. The work in which they engage becomes a prominent feature of who they are and helps determine everything from whom they marry, to how they spend their leisure time, and what makes them happy. So natural is this tendency that small children engage in it without instruction. Their parents do not teach them to play house. They instinctively assign one of their number to be the mommy, another the daddy, and a third the baby. This enables them to practice diverse parts and learn how to fit them together.

As significantly, the social division of labor keeps proliferating. Not only do the distinctions become finer and finer, but our specializations become both more complex and esoteric. Often the only people who understand what is entailed by a particular specialization are those who occupy it; hence only airline mechanics understand how to overhaul a jet engine or computer programmers how to adjust the program they have written. This has a number of consequences. One of them is that we, as a society, can be more skillful at a larger number of tasks. With each person having a greater opportunity to master his/her area of expertise, these become very technical. This enables role players to exchange for the the fruits of proficiencies they could not independently master. Moreover, this is a major reason why the modern marketplace is so potent.
Because so many people integrate so many diverse specialties, each can be vastly more prosperous than isolated individuals dependent solely on their personal skills. It enables them to live in opulent domiciles, drive powerful machines down concrete highways, and fly aluminum airships across broad oceans.

Another consequence is that individuals have more trouble deciding where they will fit into this mix. A contemporary conundrum bedeviling almost everyone from the very young to the increasingly old is: What will I be when I grow up? Hunter-gathers never asked themselves this question. Nor did the children of farm families a scarce two hundred years ago. They knew exactly what they were destined to become. Since then, however, we have introduced so many different jobs, most of which are invisible to the persons who eventually adopt them, that they do not know what might be required, much less what they would enjoy. Often the only way to find out is by experimenting with one sort of work and then, if this fails, with another. Nevertheless, adults must decide on something. Despite their anxieties, they are not allowed to be eternal adolescents. At some point, they must dedicate themselves to acquiring, and performing, a particular repertoire of activities.

Yet there is another problem built into this challenge. It is not as if people can become whatever the spirit moves them to be. Not only may they not possess the abilities to do that of which they dream, but other people may not allow them to achieve their wishes. In the Marxist utopia, everyone is free to be whatever he/she wants. In the real world, the one we inhabit, this is not so. Not everyone is able to be a professional basketball player. Some people are not tall enough, others cannot jump high enough, and still others cannot get the ball to go through the hoop. But even if they were proficient at
these activities, they confront many thousands of others who believe they are better. The end result is that, with only a few hundred positions available in the National Basketball Association, most athletic ambitions are frustrated. At some point, the aspirants come face to face with others intent on ensuring that they lose. The sad fact is that because some roles are more prized than others, the competition to occupy them can be brutal; almost as brutal as the competition for hierarchical preference. This guarantees that many hopes are stymied.

Theoretically, in a communist society, where one is able to fish in the morning and go to the factory in the afternoon, all that is required is the desire it to do as one wishes. In the real world, however, would-be basketball players must devote many hours to practicing their jump shots. By the same token, would-be doctors had best be prepared to burn the midnight oil so that they can commit the details of human anatomy to memory. They also need to pass grueling examinations designed to test whether their abilities are as robust as others who covet the same role. This implies that millions of people will be thwarted. Irrespective of their best efforts, they will not measure up. Nonetheless, they have to do something. This secondary choice will feel like a consolation prize, yet even here there is likely to be competition for the plum assignments.

Still, this does not end the trials entailed in role-playing. Whatever specialties an individual assumes, these will not be played in isolation. Because roles are integrated with other roles a host of role partners have something to say about how a person performs his piece of the whole. If I am a teacher, I will have students who are only too happy to tell me how to teach. If I am a husband, I will have a wife who cares about
whether I take out the garbage. Our role partners regularly demand what we do. What is worse, we are liable to have multiple partners who disagree among themselves. Students make contradictory demands. Worse still, my department chair may disagree with them. The saving grace is that we can return the favor with counter-demands. A teacher can resist his/her students and insist that term papers be fifteen, not ten, pages long. They do not get the final word.

There is a label to this process. The unending series of demands that shape specific role performances are called “role negotiations.” These create dialogues that not only determine what we do, but make it possible to adjust our activities so they mesh with what the others are doing. No prefigured schemes, such as the five-year plans constructed by Marxist commissars, could possibly account for the myriad of details, including mistakes, that must dovetail if a whole is to be reasonably efficient. The Russians never managed this feat. They could never figure out how to assemble the correct number of tractors needed to produce the bread required to feed their population. Role negotiations, despite being bothersome, handle this sort of muddle reasonably well. They allow for the continuous adjustments that fixed plans rarely contemplate.

If this were not enough to give us pause, because internalized role scripts guide role performances, these too can cause difficulties. What people do, whether this is teaching sociology or milking cows, does not always respond to the immediate demands of others. We also make demands of ourselves. What we are asked to do during role negotiations is transformed into interior patterns of beliefs, emotions, and values. These then guide us when our role partners are not around. Because these patterns of internal demands become stabilized over time, they ensure that our behaviors are reasonably
predictable. This is important because if others are to coordinate with us, they must be able to foresee what we will do. My students, for instance, must know that they can depend on me to come to class on time. They must also be convinced that I will grade their term papers or they will not write them.

The problem here is that internal role scripts can become too stable. The internal directives according to which people operate are normally conservative, that is, they tend to remain the same over time. Unfortunately they can become set in concrete, in which case it may be impossible to be flexible when elasticity is imperative. Later on we will discuss some of the mechanisms that people can use to become unstuck (i.e., resocialization), but for the moment let suffice it to say that too much rigidity can be troublesome. If I insist on buying the same kind of coffee at the supermarket, even after my wife has requested a different brand, she will not be pleased. Similarly, if I refuse to edit this book, because I fall in love with my words, it may be unintelligible. It may not even get published. Sometimes flexibility is imperative.

Also important is an ability to negotiate successfully. Poor negotiators are unable to carve out good deals; hence they get stuck in unsatisfying roles. They get caught up in spirals of demands and counter-demands that degenerate into desperate struggles in which no one wins. Instead of compromising, or problem solving, they refuse to make adjustments. In this, they increase their chances of losing. Thus, husbands who never make deals with their wives wind up in the doghouse, or worse still in divorce court. While those, like the Unibomber, who seek to force the whole world to comply with their wishes, end up in prison.
Those who would opt out of role negotiations have few alternatives, except to become a hermit—assuming they can discover an unoccupied piece of ground. Even so, they are liable to be disappointed. Because we human beings are role-playing animals, these dropouts are almost sure to nurse a grudge against humankind. They will privately mourn the fact that they could not succeed in occupying a place of honor among their peers. If all this sounds confusing, it is because it is. One of the reasons people have such big brains is to help cope with the complexities of living in a social world. As society grows in size and technological sophistication, these convolutions become bewildering. Yet this too is a fact with which futurologists must grapple. What lies in store for us is not an Eden-like paradise in which everything is laid out along neat pathways. To the contrary, we must be prepared to decipher role puzzles destined to become ever more challenging.

**A Loving Animal**

Hierarchies, property rights, and role-playing are all fairly cold-blooded. They lack the milk of human kindness. If they were the sum total of our social natures, trying to improve our lot might not be worth the candle. With potential conflicts cropping up in every direction, there would be little tenderness anywhere. Where then is love? Where then is interpersonal bonding? Is life really destined to be series of long, lonely struggles? Sadly, for some people it is. They are so consumed with besting their rivals for power, money or roles, that they do not have the time for more mushy pursuits. Fortunately, it does not have to be this way. People can be concerned with each other’s welfare. Not that life is ever an unending love-in. Things go wrong between people even in the best of circumstances. They have misunderstandings; they set divergent priorities;
they get sidetracked by competing demands. Still and all, people can care about one another. They can be devoted to each other’s welfare and luxuriate in the glow of interpersonal affection.

Indeed, most people cannot live without love. To be cared about by at least one other human being is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Not only does it hurt when no one cares; for the very young it can prove fatal. Babies tended by emotionally detached caretakers lose their will to live. They may, at first, protest against custodians who leave them alone or feed them insensitively, but eventually they become listless. Soon this turns into depression and they lose their desire to eat. In the end, they literally starve to death rather than endure the pain of being alone. Conversely, a loving relationship provides an incentive to stay engaged. It does so for babies and adults alike. Who has not been stimulated by the infectious grin of an infant responding to the adoring attentions of a parent? Little in life is happier than the broad, gurgling smile of a neonate at play within a family in which it is welcome.

Love is not only real, but it is specific. We love particular individuals and revel in the fact that they love us. Psychologists call this attachment behavior. They note that babies crave being picked up by only some people. Strangers may actually find it impossible to comfort them, discovering that their attentions elicit tears rather than smiles. Correspondingly, a fearful child may cling tenaciously to a trusted caretaker. A powerful bond having been established, only she is trusted to kiss a scraped knee or offer a comforting French fry. The same applies to adults, where whatever the pretensions of pornographic filmmakers, sexual partners are not indiscriminately swapped. Men and women tend to develop loving relationships with particular partners.
It is the comfort of these others for which they long in moments of stress; these others
they hope to embrace after a lengthy separation. As importantly, it is these specific
individuals in whom they invest the time to know and trust.

One of the many conceits of utopians is that someday everyone will love
everyone else. They assure us that in the future every human will recognize every other
person as equally human and, in a sense, a sibling under the skin. When that moment
arrives, we will presumably value their happiness as much as our own. As newly minted
lovers of humankind, we will become one extended family; one huge village of peaceful
compatriots. At that instant, we will be able to turn to any other human being and
embrace all with identical fervor. When that happens, no one will ever be lonely or have
worry that others might intentionally hurt them. —But wait. Doesn’t this sound
peculiar? It should. We human beings are not like a colony of ants. We do not respond
to others as interchangeable workers because we happen to have been stimulated by the
appropriate chemical. We do not, as a familiar lyric advises, simply love the ones we are
with. People make distinctions between individuals and treat them differently. Thus,
some are regarded as relatives; others as friends; and still others as colleagues.
Moreover, a segment of these will be liked, whereas others are loathed. This is the way it
has always been and will remain, that is, unless our biology is radically altered. In fact,
the pundits who claim to be lovers of humanity have a way of being indifferent to the
needs of particular others. History has demonstrated that they are prepared to sacrifice
the happiness of millions for the sake of their ideals. Far from loving their fellow human
beings, it is a mental image of perfection they adore.
Human society is such that people play favorites. Those with whom they have bonded are apt dealt with better, or worse, than strangers. They are rewarded with smiles, gifts, or occupational sinecures. Much depends on the history of attachments the parties share. Mothers, for instance, shower their children with advantages they would not consider bestowing on another parent’s offspring. Plato thought he could equalize social benefits by separating mothers from their infants, yet women who insist on remaining close to their own infants routinely defeat this strategy. They want to cuddle their babies, to nurse them, and to share joyful grins. In the process, they develop a concern for this specific child. They become emotionally attached such that a physical departure causes suffering. Just ask those mother’s who are required to leave their youngsters on the first day of kindergarten. Just ask about the bittersweet pangs of those who watch their offspring graduate from college.

Formidable attachments also develop between adults. Two strangers meet, are attracted to one another, and decide that they want to learn more about this appealing other. Soon, they spend more time together, and eventually decide that they are so in love they should devote the rest of their lives living as one. In this, they have traversed what seems to be a biological adventure. Indeed, social scientists refer to this progression as “courtship.” And while the details vary from one society to another, a general pattern cements the feelings of formerly unrelated partners for one another. It converts them into intimates, who, in a sense, build each other into their respective lives. When this occurs, not only are others excluded from their relationship, but the two will find separating as painful as do mothers and infants. Disconnects, of course, occur. Yet these tend to be stormy. Divorce, in particular, follows a predictable course that reverses the bonding
produced by the courtship process. Central to this sequence is a period of mourning during which the partners sever their emotional affiliation. Like courtship, this disjunction takes time, but unlike it is punctuated by anger and disgust. Divorce tends to be painful; with the depth of distress an indicator of how tenacious adult bonds can be.

Nor are adult attachments a luxury. Not only do they provide what has been referred to as a haven in a heartless world, but they afford an essential source of security for the next generation. Adults who love each other demonstrate this favoritism, in part, by listening to one another. At the end of a long day, they come home to share their triumphs and tribulations with a partner who cares. In the best of circumstances, this provides them with an ally in what can be a dangerous universe. Normally, of course, there are conflicts about how to cooperate, but when successfully resolved they strengthen the union. Among the beneficiaries of this collaboration are the couple’s children. When a man and a woman care enough to settle their differences, they are rewarded with effectiveness in child rearing. This, in turn, provides their young with the security of having two parents. Single parenthood, however devoted the parent, can be so demanding, it places a strain on family bonds. A stable collaboration counteracts this by supplying each partner with breathing space.

This being the case, reformers who advocate free love, the dissolution of the traditional family, or a socially equalized upbringing for the young are seriously misguided. In the hope of eliminating favoritism, they would convert everyone into an isolated monad. Rather than allow some individuals to receive more help than others, they would impose a situation in which no one receives reliable assistance. To reiterate, life, as even President Jimmy Carter affirmed, is not fair. We should not, therefore, seek
complete fairness at the expense of happiness. This would be to chase a phantom to the
detriment of an actuality. Once again, our social nature imposes limits. While it is true
that too much favoritism can be a problem, the solution is to moderate our excesses; not
to throw the baby out with the bath water. We want certain rules to apply to everyone,
but that cannot mean that every relationship should be made the equivalent of every other
relationship. Not even the prospect of a universal heaven on earth could make this
chimera attractive.

A Moral Animal

During the depth of the Clinton impeachment, many of his supporters took to
chiding his opponents by claiming that he did nothing wrong because, for as was well
known, “everyone lies and everyone cheats.” Sophisticated people must understand that
politicians are entitled to distort the truth and that men cannot be prevented from
tomcatting around. Despite this apparent amoralism, most of the individuals who made
these statements were themselves perfectly moral human beings. Few were habitual liars
or cheaters. As research shows, most people are honest most of the time. They may
make small misrepresentations on their tax forms or abscond with pencils from work, but
they assiduously avoid major fraud. Nor are they inclined to be unfaithful spouses. The
overwhelming majority of men never break their marital vows and those that do are
almost never serial offenders. And a good thing too, for modern society could not
function without a large measure of trust. Unless people could count on others to uphold
their responsibilities, it would be impossible to depend upon strangers for the social
contributions without which we could not survive. If every exchange of property were
bedeviled by misrepresentations and every interpersonal attachment undermined by
deceit, we would all need to look over our shoulders so frequently that ordinary business would grind to a halt.

This is not to say that people are perfect. Nor is it to imply that they are never tempted to be unfair. The opposite is, of course, true. This is why we need social rules. If people were allowed to do whatever they wanted, whenever the spirit moved them, they would often cause gratuitous harm. In their rush to amass more goodies, they would impulsively shove each other with such gusto that countless bones and untold hearts got broken. Yet some postmodern theorists are unfazed by this prospect. They advocate a society in which moral relativism prevails. They claim the moral rules are essentially arbitrary; hence that each society and individual must construct these to suit themselves. What is right is right for those who make the rules, but not necessarily others. Each community, or person, should mind its own business and not presume to judge the standards of others. This attitude is often enshrined under the heading of tolerance. It is said that this is the only humane way for people to treat each other in a world where there are no absolutes. Many utopians say what is needed is “unconditional positive regard.” Everyone is supposed to accord everyone else the intrinsic respect he/she deserves.

This, at least, is what is said. It is not how people operate—or could operate. A thoroughgoing moral relativism, in which no one judges anyone else, would require a tolerance of genocide, slavery, and the mutilation of female genitals. In reality, few, including the most zealous relativists, are prepared to go this far. When it gets down to concrete issues, they recognize that some behaviors must be forbidden. They understand that there have to be shared rules, which are vigorously enforced, if certain horrors are to be avoided. Murder, for instance, must be outlawed, as must theft and rape. Then again,
they are. This has been so for all of recorded time, in every society of which we have knowledge. Morality is not a recent invention; nor the social exception. Codes of behavior are part of our social nature and have evolved from the mechanisms lower animals utilize to maintain discipline within their communities.

Nature has equipped us with a wide range of tools for maintaining moral order. To begin with, morality is both an external and internal phenomenon. Its rules are socially proclaimed standards that invite sanctions if violated. But they also become internalized directives, enforced even when no one else is around. A little voice in our heads reminds us that we should leave some cookies for others. While it is true that social norms can, and do vary—that they are interpersonally negotiated in a manner not very different from the way social roles are negotiated—there generally emerges a consensus that permits social stability. Not everyone may agree as to what constitutes rape, but enough do so that violators are apprehended and punished. By the same token, most men are aware of when they cross the line to coercive sex. Thus they take “no” for an answer because they believe that a failure to do so would be wrong.

Why they do this is a consequence of the emotional devices used to enforce moral rules. Anger is one of these. When people violate an important standard, they can generally count on others to become irate. Members of their community frown in disapproval. They hostilely demand that the violator desist. Then they aggressively, often physically, prevent consummation of the infringement. A second emotional mechanism for imposing social control is shame. People deemed to be behaving badly are ridiculed into submission. They become the butt of negative attention until they cease rule breaking. Perpetrators may also be subject to open revulsion. They are treated as if
they were a piece of putrid meat to be avoided at all costs. To some, this may sound like a modest response, but it is usually sufficient because we human beings are programmed to respond to condemnation. We hate having others angry at us, shaming us, or treating us with disgust. Rather than permit this, we comply with what is demanded. Furthermore, we develop an early warning system that alerts us when rejection might occur. Instead of waiting for others to get angry, we react to an internalized version of their earlier irritation. We call this inner wrath “guilt” and take it seriously. Internalized shame likewise takes the form of embarrassment and disgust emerges as a sickening feeling in the gut. These too can be very insistent, so insistent that they are usually sufficient to prohibit most offences.

Beyond this, societies find moral violations so momentous that they have devised institutions for maintaining control. Among hunter-gatherers it is not uncommon for people to use witchcraft. They assume that the natural world is suffused with spirits, some of which do good and others ill. This enables them to call upon a variety of ghosts to sanction evildoers. By casting the appropriate spell, they elicit the aid of deceased relatives in visiting illness on someone who has done them wrong. And since the persons against whom the spell is cast also believe in ghosts, they grow unwell. This shared culture prevents mischief before it can occur. The mere prospect of witchcraft keeps most people within moral bounds most of the time. In more sophisticated societies, religion is used for the same purpose. Believers fear that if they break a deity’s commandments, they will have to pay a penalty in another life. Requiring them to swear oaths, which if violated, ensure divine wrath, further reinforces this apprehension. The faithful fear that if they abrogate their pledges, they invite eternal retribution. Finally, the
The advent of police forces serves comparable ends. In this case, moral rules are formalized as legal codes enforced by courts and penal facilities. Under these circumstances potential lawbreakers are held in check by contemplating the penalties awaiting them.

This being so, the question is not whether moral rules will be required to maintain control in the future, but what form they will take? A review of the past indicates that the kinds of behaviors societies have found significant enough to regulate have mutated over time. These have varied with the nature of the society and the things valued. In Homeric Greece, for example, physical courage was celebrated, whereas fearfulness was spurned. To fight manfully with bronze weapons could result in being accounted a hero, while running from battle converted a man into an outcast driven aimlessly from one hostile shore to another. This outcome can contrasted with the disgrace imposed upon General George Patton during World War II. Despite his stunning victories on the field of battle, after he slapped a hospitalized soldier on the face for cowardice, Patton was stripped of his command and forced to apologize to his troops. Unlike the classical soldiers he so admired, he lived in a democratic society that valued the dignity of the individual fighter. In this environment, most citizens believed it as important to respect personal rights as to defeat the enemy; hence the firestorm that erupted when news of his blunder leaked out through the newspapers.

Ours, it turns out, has become an increasingly middle class world. As a result, the rules according to which we operate have become increasingly middle class. This was the buzz saw that clipped Patton’s wings. Because middle class citizens believe in the dignity of the individual, they would not tolerate demeaning an enlisted soldier. If anything, this sort of attitude promises to be more prevalent in the future. The question
is, therefore, what sorts of rules are likely to prove necessary as an expanding market place increases our prosperity and delegates authority more broadly. It seems certain, for instance, that people will grow more responsible; that, as they become further professionalized, they will be held more accountable for what they do. The reason for this is that if those with greater influence do not exercise care, they can cause substantial distress. It is thus imperative that they internalize a desire to make competent choices. By the same token, it is essential that they be trustworthy. In a world where people are mutually interdependent, there is a greater need to rely on the good intentions of others. Were strangers not presumed to protect each other’s interests, it would be necessary to expend more energy in verifying their intentions. Each person would have to double-check every piece of work others did in order to ascertain if it were honest. But this would make the wheels of commerce to seize up. People would either be so busy spying on each other they would have little time for anything else or they would refuse to do business with those they did not personally know.

One way or another, morality must intrude. The utopian confidence in a perfect social order is a chimera. Selfish human beings will occasionally overstep the line. Even when they intend to be fair, they can misperceive the interests of others. This is why morality must be a social phenomenon, not merely a personal one. It is why the shared rules through which we monitor and restrain each other’s actions are interpersonally negotiated. Such negotiations, in being subject to multiple inputs, average out our respective needs. As a consequence, a Solon-like lawgiver cannot be delegated to hand down moral standards applicable to all. No single person, or committee, would ever be wise enough to compute all of the variables needed for an integrated whole. The
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alternative is that more of us are apt to participate in negotiating what is needed. As a result, we must become competent moral negotiators, that is, if we are to optimize our joint requirements.

**A Socially Cognitive Animal**

Aristotle proclaimed that we were rational animals. Himself a man of intellect, he assumed that an ability to reason distinguished us from lower animals. In this, he was only partially correct. Our ability to understand the world around us is indeed far greater than any other creature with which we share the planet. Ironically, it is also limited by another advantage we possess over competing species. Not only are we rational; we are social. What we think is influenced by what other people think. The cognitive maps that enable us to navigate an astoundingly Byzantine environment are the joint creation of millions of people, most of whom are no longer alive. Isaac Newton famously attributed his scientific discoveries to having been able to stand on the shoulders of giants. We too must acknowledge a similar debt. Not one of us could independently have acquired all of the knowledge upon which we separately rely.

The flip side of this legacy is that we draw as much on fantasy as fact. When the authorities upon whom we depend are mistaken, so are we. This includes our confidence in individual opinions, but also the *conventional wisdom* of our peers. That which most members of our community hold to be true tends to be accepted without a careful review. If, for instance, in the old South everyone believed that blacks were not as intelligent as whites, even smart people were apt to agree. Moreover, this propensity to conform with majority opinion has not changed over time. It is why people still read Plato. It is why, despite the obvious disconfirmation of Karl Marx’s central prophesies, millions of
intellectuals continue to regard themselves as Marxists. As has frequently been observed, many a hardheaded individual, who prides him/herself as being an independent thinker, is, in reality, the captive of a long-dead philosopher.

Here then is another social truth of which we must be cognizant. If accurate foreknowledge is to be attained, it is necessary to be released from the irrationalities to which we are heir. This is particularly so with respect to ideologies. Because the world is so uncertain, both individually and collectively, we crave unconditional answers. We want to know why things are the way they are and what we need to do to make events turn out as we wish. Ideologies furnish such certitudes. They assure us that there is no choice but to jump on the “global warming” bandwagon. Whether provided by politicians, theologians, or social scientists, they assert insights supposedly beyond question. Not only do true believers insist that these are correct, but they punish those who disagree. These others are castigated as counter-revolutionaries, heretics or holocaust deniers and ostracized from polite society. Independent thinking is not only discouraged; it may be severely chastised. Not unnaturally, this encourages people to turn off their brains. Rather than face uncertainties alone, they impose a requirement not to think on themselves. This way they do not have to worry about arriving at the wrong conclusion.

Independent rationality, that is a rationality that takes account of the opinions of others but reserves the right to review the facts, takes courage. It is not the norm, but it needs to be for those who presume to predict the future. What will happen is not necessarily what others agree will happen, but where the trends are leading us. These must be assessed, if not objectively, then, at least, with as much dispassion as can be
mustered. Rather than accede to social influence because it is pervasive, it must be possible to stand back to assess what is transpiring. It must be feasible, for instance, to recognize how our hierarchical, property exchanging, role-playing, moral, and cognitive natures are playing out in within the historical environment in which we find ourselves. What we observe may not be what we were told, or desire, but nevertheless the way things are. Nor will an effort to be dispassionate automatically result in accuracy. As human beings we can always be mistaken. The best we can do is to correct our errors—when we recognize them as errors. But this too takes courage, since recognizing mistakes is itself frightening. Not only does it remind us that we may be inferior to our compatriots, and therefore at their mercy, but also that we are at the mercy of a universe we do not fully control. Still, there is little choice, for if we do not fix what is broken, we are destined to wallow in our mistakes. The up side of this is that if we honestly work in tandem toward uncovering the truth, in time, we may get closer to it.

Lastly we human beings are emotional animals. Far from being detached thinking machines, we are passionate creatures. We love; we hate; we fear; we are surprised. Moreover, we do not experience these feelings in isolation. Our passions are social tools. When we get angry, it is usually because we want to influence someone else to do something. Likewise, when we are afraid, we send ripples of fear out to those who surround us; fears that impel them to action. At the very least, these sorts of emotion are communicable. Furthermore, in some cases, how we express of them is determined by the way others allow us to. There are only some ways that adults can get safely angry. In any event, whatever shape our future takes, it must encompass our shared emotions. This need not, however, be a source of regret. Our emotionality brings a certain amount of
unpredictability with it, but this is a good thing. No future state could be truly utopian if it did not permit us to be a tad unpredictable.
Chapter 3

Social Solidarity

Small to Large

College students hate history. Certainly mine do. Whenever the subject comes up, a large proportion drifts away. Either their eyes glaze over or dart off in a direction other than mine. Later, when I grade their exams, this lack of interest is confirmed. Why, I hear them grouse, does anyone need to know this stuff? Isn’t it over and done with? Most of the students, especially the younger ones, are more concerned with the present. Whatever happened before they were born is beyond their influence or concern. Since nothing they do can change the past, there is no point in obsessing about it; there is definitely no point in memorizing names and dates. Yet not even the future is of much concern. It too seems to be beyond their control and hence a waste of time to ponder. Some have vague ideas about what they would someday like to achieve, but few perceive a connection between what once was and what they will eventually do. With the past safely tucked beyond reach, its power to shape events appears nil.

Most futurologists are not as shortsighted. They understand that there are causal connections between now and then. They, on the other hand, appear to have a love/hate relationship with history. When its messages suit them, they celebrate these; when they do not, they ignore or distort them. Most of those who predict the future are more concerned with validating their forecasts. As a result, they cherry-pick. Utterly selective in their observations, they notice only what they are primed to notice. This means that instead of adjusting their predictions to fit what they discover, they reinterpret the past to conform with their prognostications. Contemporary Marxists have, for all practical
purposes, made an industry of historical revisionism. Unwilling to allow their cherished ideologies to be torpedoed by ugly facts, they enthusiastically reconstruct these so that they point in the direction they believe things are headed. Thus, if Marx’s confidence in the pauperization of the working classes is contradicted by a growing, broad-gauged prosperity, they exploit every downturn in the economy to prove that the predicted crisis is just over the horizon. Then, when there is an upturn, they remain silent.

Aside from the fact that no one likes to be wrong, one reason this sort of revisionism has flourished is that history is multifaceted. So much has happened, so much of which remains beyond reclamation, that it is impossible to be certain what has actually occurred. The best that can be managed is to honestly, and open-mindedly, examine the past. This may be painful, but those who allow emerging details to disconfirm long held convictions, or at least modify them, stand a better chance of uncovering the truth. This suggests that if we are to comprehend how our futures are molded by the past, we need to be flexible. History is what it is, and the limitations it imposes are what they are. How these unfolded may nonetheless produce surprises. In particular, because social history has not attracted much attention, the consequences of our social natures, as embedded in actual events, have been misunderstood. Important trends have been overlooked, in part, because they have been taken for granted.

One of the central truths about human societies is that they have grown from very small to very large. Whatever else has been the case, it is absolutely certain that our remote ancestors lived in comparatively minute, nomadic bands. It is, of course, equally certain that most modern humans live in massive settled societies. A relative handful continue to forage in the Amazon jungle or Kalahari desert, but they are dwindling in
number, each year being driven closer to extinction by the inroads of civilization. Nevertheless, once upon a time, wandering groups of hunters occupied the entire inhabited sphere. They were the social norm. Indeed, so prevalent were they that their members could contemplate nothing larger. With each of these groups encompassing between fifty and a hundred and fifty individuals, they were larger than contemporary chimpanzee troops, yet small enough for every individual to know every other. Ferdinand Toennies, over a century ago, drew attention to this phenomenon. He postulated that it was the crucial distinction between our forebears and ourselves.

Thanks to Toennies, entry-level sociology students are today required to memorize two technical terms. Multi-syllabic Germanisms, these at first intimidate, but subsequently enlighten. Toennies argued that there had been a progression from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft societies. These words are respectively translated as “community” and “society”, but have long since acquired technical connotations. A Gemeinschaft society is one of the compact arrangements we occupied at the dawn of human evolution. As hunter-gatherers, our ancestors could not afford to congregate in large groups. Because the carrying capacity of their hunting territories were circumscribed, too many mouths to feed would have forced some to go hungry. Conversely, if there were not enough hunters present, the chase was bound to go badly, with starvation a possibility. This gave rise to groups sizeable enough to support themselves, but which split apart once they reached an upper ceiling.

These modest sized bands had other implications. The most important of these were that everyone knew everyone and that most of the transactions were face to face. These earliest humans lived among friends and relatives. As a result, they got to know
each other very well. Each person’s quirks were recognized by the others and could therefore be factored into their relationships. This ensured that everyone was aware of who was the best hunter or the most prolific gatherer. They were likewise conscious of whose temper was on a hair-trigger and whose knowledge of roots and berries could be relied on to cure a bellyache. If something went wrong, they recognized whom to consult and whom to avoid. This was essential because they were dependent upon their own devices for survival. Necessity impelled them to work in concert—at least most of the time.

A Gesellschaft society could scarcely be more different. Although its members are still dependent upon one another, most never personally meet or get to know each other’s quirks. Indeed, many of their most significant transactions are not face-to-face. Unlike hunters who directly deliver a piece of meat to the woman who will prepare it for consumption, the modern farmer does not transport a bushel of wheat to the lawyer who will later ingest it as a sweet roll. The farmer and the lawyer are barely aware of each other’s existence, never mind the particulars of how their fortunes are entwined. This, however, does not prevent them from performing the tasks upon which they mutually rely. Nor does it interfere with either motoring down a highway surrounded by thousands of anonymous others, whose driving ability is counted upon to avoid accidents. Similarly, people who have never before met, casually greet each other on the street or sit comfortably side by side in a classroom, as if they had always been intimate. They do not fret that this next person might be a serial killer, even though they know nothing about him.
The mystery is how this happens. How did our species go from one sort of society to the other? If we evolved to fit into the first, how do we manage to subsist in the second? As psychologists have demonstrated, we remain biologically oriented toward smaller groups. The overwhelming majority of us only feel comfortable with a few close friends. It is these specific others in whom we confide and in whose company we relax. They are our face-to-face compatriots; our restricted Gemeinschaft neighborhood within a larger Gesellschaft universe. The reason we feel at ease with these friends and relatives is that we have taken the time to get to know them and they us. We have, to put the matter succinctly, bonded with them. On the other hand, we have not correspondingly connected with strangers beyond this circle. They are not perceived as trustworthy familiars whose eccentricities are known to us. Nevertheless, neither do we experience a startle reaction in the presence. More significantly, we constantly rely on them for essential services. Yes, we reserve our deepest secrets for familiar comrades, but we also depend upon supermarket clerks to supply us with groceries untainted by food poisoning. Though we are not personally acquainted with these individuals, we are confident that they are purveying safe products. But how is this so? From whence does this confidence come? And why is it so broadly present in Gesellschaft societies?

As we have gone from small to large communities, something has evidently happened; something dramatic, but something not well understood. Obviously a new sort of social glue developed to hold us together. Whatever enabled members of hunting bands to cooperate with each other cannot connect millions of strangers. Something else must be at work, but what is it? This has become one of the enduring questions in sociology. Emile Durkheim dubbed this the issue of social solidarity and it remains with
us. For our purposes, it is critical that whatever form the future takes, it must occur within an integrated society. The trend from small to large will surely persist; hence the need for something that facilitates bonding between strangers is crucial. The problem is in determining what form these attachments will take. Will they be akin to those that once held families and villages together? Or will they differ? And if so, how?

**Sociology 101**

It is virtually impossible to pinpoint the beginnings of sociological thinking, but ever since the writings of Talcott Parsons it has been conventional to start with the speculations of Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes was a seventeenth century English savant. Like many of his better-educated contemporaries, he served as a tutor for the children of aristocratic families. Among his students was the future Charles II of England. At this point in history, the Stuarts had recently been expelled from the throne and were licking their wounds in France. Charles I had lost his fight with parliament and paid for his obstinacy with his head. Yet England had not settled down. The disruptions of the civil war continued to roil the landscape. These were shortly to grow worse with the passing of Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector. Cromwell, whatever his excesses, governed with an iron hand, hence when he left the scene, there was no one with the prestige to succeed him. Hobbes, however, had an answer. While in exile with the Stuarts, he wrote a little book entitled *The Leviathan*. In it, he postulated the need for a strong figure to hold the body politic together. As an ardent monarchist, for him this figure would be a king. In due course, his fondest wishes were granted when his pupil was invited to cross the channel to resurrect the crown. The English had grown weary of anarchy and were
prepared to resume familiar habits, even if this meant accommodating what had of late been regarded as a deposed devil.

Hobbes began his musings by wondering what made it possible for human beings to abide together in any sort of society. Toennies was later concerned with what enabled Gesellschaft communities to prosper, but Hobbes asked a more fundamental question. He marveled that any human community could maintain its integrity. Even Gemeinschaft aggregates seemed to be in danger of falling apart, assuming that people exhibited the qualities Hobbes believed they did. For him, human nature was basically selfish. Each person wanted to amass the greatest resources relative to others. Each wanted the most land, the biggest house, and the splashiest clothing. Moreover, since humans were inherently dangerous, they possessed the power to inflict grievous injuries as they competed for precedence. In Hobbes’ pregnant phrases, this would result in a “war of all against all” so brutal it would ensure that life would be “nasty, brutish, and short” for everyone, including the winners. Even they would have to worry that someday a greedy rival would defeat them.

During the past decade I have routinely asked my introductory sociology classes if they believe human beings are fundamentally selfish. Time and again, the results of this survey come out the same. In every case, upwards of ninety per cent fervently assert that they are. Along with Hobbes, they are convinced that most people are motivated to acquire more than their fellows. They also agree that most people are dangerous and if allowed total freedom, would do considerable damage. If this is correct, if people are naturally and perilously egotistical, what can be done? Can our terrifying selfishness be controlled?
Hobbes believed that, once upon a time, people summoned the wisdom to gather together to agree upon being ruled by someone stronger than themselves. In order to preserve the peace, they entered into a compact in which they consented to support a “leviathan.” One of their number, who would function as a relative giant, was delegated to protect them from their own impulses. This person, who in Hobbes’ view had to be a monarch, gained his potency from the support of his subjects. They and their progeny provided him assistance, not only because this was in their interest, but because they pledged to do so. The difficulty with this scenario is that it engages in bootstrapping. In a Hobbesian state of nature, there would be no reason for the participants to keep their word. The whole notion of promise keeping implies the prior existence of moral rules. But if the effectiveness of these rules depends upon the enforcement power of a monarch, this reduces the argument to a vicious circle. There could, in this case, be no compact to sponsor a king without the previous existence of a king to enforce the compact.

What then to do? A century later Jean-Jacques Rousseau provided the classic statement of an alternative. If in Hobbes world people were basically selfish and needed to be constrained by a powerful government, in Rousseau’s they were basically good, but had lately been corrupted by the state. Originally a poor boy from John Calvin’s Geneva, Rousseau had earlier made his way to Paris determined to seek his fortune. When he arrived, he found the ancient regime doddering its way toward what would shortly be the French Revolution. Decadent aristocrats remained in charge, but with the Industrial Revolution knocking at the gate, he and large proportion of Frenchmen recognized that the rituals of the monarchy were an anachronism. Bloated grandees might still be able to confer unearned privileges upon their favorites, yet the unfairness of this practice was
apparent, even to its beneficiaries. Rousseau’s was simply one more voice demanding reform. His, however, was more elegant than most. The public, therefore, paid attention when he contended that humans were essentially loving, but had been made selfish by an obsolete system.

To begin with, Rousseau proposed modifications in how children would be raised. If instead of being plied with useless knowledge, they were allowed to follow their instincts, they were more likely to mature into loving adults. If, at the same time, property rights were abolished, the need to compete for social preferment would be eliminated. The tender impulses of the very young would thereby be preserved.

Rousseau believed that a government would remain necessary, but that its character would be markedly different. Rousseau, like Hobbes, believed in a social compact, but this would result, not in a leviathan, but a state dedicated to implementing the “general will.” The goal was to realize the shared wishes of the many. In deciding to work together, ordinary people would essentially create one large, loving family in which the interests of all were equally valid.

The fallacy embedded in Rousseau’s proposals would take time to expose. Indeed, many Americans, especially elementary school teachers, continue to be entranced by them. They cannot conceive of anything wrong with universal love or instinctive cooperation. Along with the hippies of old, they ask that love be given a chance. Nonetheless, if our social nature is both hierarchical and property-oriented, the flower power of collective affection is destined to remain a fantasy.

Ironically Adolf Hitler furnished the most potent antidote to this Rousseau inspired vision, for he too was a devotee of the general will. According to the Nazi ideal,
the elemental longings of the German people needed to be embodied in a führer. As their paramount leader, he would focus their ambitions and enable them to achieve the supremacy they deserved. He would be the incarnation of their will and, by utilizing the intensity of his own will, execute their desires. For a while, many millions of Germans zealously believed Hitler represented their shared longings. It was only after the war he launched went wrong that they concluded the persecutions he visited upon his enemies were his idea, not theirs. The problem with the general will as revealed by this reversal was that it was imaginary. There were no central beliefs in which all Germans concurred, nor any magical connection whereby a gifted leader can infallibly decipher what they want. Hitler’s maniacal desire to exterminate the Jews, Gypsies, and Slavs was, in truth, a personal obsession. Others might share it, or, after having imbibed years of propaganda, adopt it, but it was never a part of the soul of a nation. No human group is ever that consistent; nor any human leader so insightful he can selflessly represent what is essentially a myth.

Despite this flaw, more than another century was to pass before Rousseau’s suppositions would be replaced by something more sociologically sophisticated. Into the breach stepped an academic student of society. Another French national, Emile Durkheim, although the secular scion of a Jewish rabbinical family, was primarily loyal to France. Moreover, having been raised on the borderland between France and Germany in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War, he had seen his homeland humiliated. Blaming this defeat on disunity, he was determined to restore the nation to its former glory. His means of achieving this would be a patriotism grounded in an awareness of mutual interest. The unfolding Dreyfus affair, during which a French army officer of Jewish
decent was unjustly accused of espionage, only reinforced Durkheim’s desire to understand what held modern nations together. It was this impulse that led him to explore the roots of social solidarity.

Unlike Hobbes, Durkheim was convinced that small-scale communities possessed a mechanism for maintaining their integrity. He believed that hunter-gatherers cooperated with each other because they could understand their peers. Since each individual performed essentially the same tasks, with all of the men hunters and all of the women gatherers, they could sympathize with their respective situations. Each could imaginatively put him/herself in the place of the others in order to figure out why they were doing as they did. Durkheim called this phenomenon *mechanical solidarity*. His analogy was to a machine in which all of the parts meshed together because they were milled to be identical.

Durkheim contrasted this sort of integration with that exemplified by contemporary mass societies. He concluded that market based civilizations were held together by what he called *organic solidarity*. The analogy was to a living organism. He noted that all large animals are composed of many organs, each of which performs a separate function that meshes with those performed by other organs. The heart pumped blood, the lungs brought in oxygen, the legs specialized in locomotion, the brain engaged in planning, and so forth. None of these tasks could, of itself, sustain the vibrancy of a large animal, but in conjunction kept themselves, and the creature of which they were a part, alive. This, thought Durkheim, was how modern societies operate. They too are composed of sub-groups that perform a variety of functions. Farmers, lawyers, soldiers, and professors contribute their specialties to a division of labor that sustains the
collectivity and from which they individually benefit when it prospers. This explains why they cooperate. Because they are conscious that their personal interests depend on reciprocating the contributions of the various constituents, they selfishly do so. The result is good citizenship based upon a community of need, not the coercive demands of a monarch.

This conception was a significant advance over the forcibly constrained selfishness of Hobbes or the fanciful selflessness of Rousseau. Nevertheless, it leaves much unexplained. How indeed does a complex division of labor result in organic solidarity? What are the mechanisms inducing cooperation? Do those participating in an organic community consciously recognize their dependence upon strangers? Do they perhaps collaborate because they appreciate their shared interests? But if so many of their transactions are not face-to-face, how do they arrive at this realization? Wouldn’t they be more aware of their personal situations and oblivious to the needs of outsiders? Durkheim does not say enough to illuminate the answers. Even so, he is correct that the social division of labor has elaborated as human societies have grown. He is also correct in suggesting that our interdependencies have something to do with our ability to work in concert. Yet how does all this operate? What are the mechanics whereby strangers cooperate—often without recognizing they are teammates? There must be some kind of force propelling them to do so.

**The Inverse Force Rule**

Different adhesives have held different societies together. No single mechanism has worked under every circumstance. Sometimes one predominates; sometimes another. Thus, multiple types of fasteners have operated in diverse communities. Which have
worked best at any given time has been subject to an historical progression. The conditions under which people live are largely responsible for what holds them together, but the dynamics of these patterns also have an impact. Where societies are at any given moment depends on how they got there; hence where they are liable to go in the future is contingent upon where they now are. In other words, the way people cooperate varies with the demands made of them, the coping strategies inherited from their ancestors, and the means whereby bonding occurs. This said, as a rule of thumb, the primary adhesives upon which communities depend have mutated as they have moved up in size. The larger the numbers to be integrated and the greater the distances between them, the more imperative has been the need for a shift in attachment mechanisms. As a result, societies have been subject to an “inverse force rule.”

The principal adhesive mechanisms should be familiar. The tools from which societies choose are based on none other than the basic building blocks of our social natures. Because we are hierarchical, property exchanging, role-playing, loving, moral, and socially cognitive animals, we rely on these dispositions, independently and in concert, to shape the ways we interact. Which of these is best suited to our immediate purposes depends on the challenges presented by our physical and social environments. In particular, Gemeinschaft societies respond to different pressures than Gesellschaft ones. Not surprisingly, what works best between strangers differs from what motivates intimates.

At this point a physical analogy may be instructive. Physicists have discovered that corporeal matter is held together by a variety of forces. Although scientists are still in pursuit of a unified field theory that accounts for everything, as of now their
explanations depend on four discrete forces. Two are the so-called strong and weak nuclear forces, a third is the electro-magnetic force, and the last is gravity. Common sense would suggest that the strongest of these must be gravity because it holds the universe together, whereas the reverse is actually true. The nuclear forces are far more potent even though they operate over shorter distances. A simple thought experiment can illustrate how they compare. Imagine dropping a heavy object from a tall building. As that item falls it accelerates toward the ground. Attracted toward the center of the earth by the gravitational forces generated by its own and the planet’s mass, it would seem that nothing could stop it until it reaches the core. But something does stop it; something stronger than gravity. When the object strikes the sidewalk, it comes to an abrupt halt. The atoms on its surface come in contact with the concrete and are repelled. Instead of interpenetrating each other, they remain distinct. In fact, it is not the strongest force that achieves this feat; it is an intermediate one, namely, electro-magnetism. The repulsion of the electrons encircling the respective atoms is sufficient to hold gravity at bay. Tiny though they are, when the distances between them become minute the power with which they push each other apart is enormous.

What happens within the nucleus is even more unimaginably powerful. Electrons can, in fact, be displaced from their orbits by such mechanisms as chemical reactions. When a spark ignites a mixture of hydrogen and oxygen, the atoms combine to form water. This is accomplished when the outer electrons of one are exchanged with those of the other. Within the nucleus nothing so simple will do. Protons and neutrons cannot be pried apart by chemical energy. It takes more than heat to initiate nuclear fission; it takes disruption by another nuclear particle hurled into them with ample force. To accomplish
the same objective for a proton itself takes even more energy. Unless one has access to a particle accelerator that can fling one particle into another at speeds normally associated with the interior of the sun, it is not possible to produce a meson shower from the fractured target. Until modern times no one imagined that this could be achieved, because no one possessed the means.

The moral here is that the stronger physical forces operate over smaller distances, whereas the weaker ones reign over longer ones. Something similar applies to human societies.¹ While the analogy is not exact (because social forces are not as discrete as their physical analogs), there is enough of a parallel to make the metaphor useful. In general, the mechanisms that create hierarchies are stronger than those that create social roles, whereas the distances over which roles operate tend to be greater than those over which hierarchical tests of strength apply. Similarly, the attachments characterized as love relationships tend to be very potent, yet their influence tends to fall off quickly the more space intrudes. Social cognitions, in contrast, are not nearly as compelling, whereas their reach is extensive. Somewhere between these extremes lie the potencies of property exchanges and moral rules. These have significant power, but are intermediate scope. All in all, this makes different forces appropriate for societies of differing extents. The more compact they are, that is, the shorter the distance between their members, the more central the role of the strong forces. The more widely distributed, i.e., the greater distance between their members, the larger the contribution of the weak forces. This, in a nutshell, is the Inverse Force Rule in action.

¹ Mark Granovetter has made an analogous point in distinguishing between strong and weak ties within social networks.
Strong Forces—Hierarchies

Let us explore the situation of small societies to see how a strong force, namely hierarchies, helps hold them together. We can begin in the highlands of New Guinea. Its residents are not hunter-gatherers, but they are not far removed. Most are slash and burn farmers. They survive by growing root crops on patches of land reclaimed from the forest by burning the natural vegetation. This provides nutrients for soils from which heavy rains normally leach them out. Semi-domesticated pigs are also allowed to forage in uncultivated stretches of jungle to supplement their meager diets. After several years, however, the gardens become impoverished and the roots upon which the pigs survive depleted. It thus becomes essential to move to a new piece of territory on which the cycle can be repeated. The problem is that this may encroach upon another community. Alas, each will be jealous of its prerogatives, lest it lose its means of subsistence. Even if friction does not arise, as the populations of these groups mount, sooner or later there will not be enough land to support all. Somehow an equilibrium must be reached that allows them to endure. The solution that has evolved is a concomitant of social hierarchy. We have a name for it; we call it war.

It must sound strange to describe warfare as a mechanism for achieving social stability. Violence and solidarity seem to be contradictory. There is, however, an explanation, but first it is necessary to elaborate upon the relationship between war and social hierarchy. Hierarchies, it will be recalled, are founded upon tests of strength. Two individuals compete to see who will win and hence exercise power over the other. Warfare can be compared with tests of strength. Indeed, it is variant of them. In this case, two communities compete to determine which is the strongest. Once this is
established, it creates a relationship between them, in particular, an association based on dominance and submission. In the case of New Guinea, when one band defeats another, the losers back off, thereby enabling the victors a broader choice of farming locations. The losers are thus restricted to a narrower choice, which means that their numbers are bound to be reduced by malnourishment. Recall that one of the functions of hierarchy within a community is to allocate scarce resources without tearing the group apart. Warfare accomplishes something similar between communities. Sadly, it achieves this at the expense of the losers. But so do within-group hierarchies. They also provide benefits at the expense of the losers. The battles that result in winners not only establish relative ranks, they reduce the level of violence between the parties thanks to their inequality. Because those who are defeated lose the will to resist, a period of time passes by before hostilities are resumed. In essence, peaceful relationships are enforced by a fear of sustaining further defeats.

Among hunter-gatherers fights over territory are also common. They too are consumed with a need to protect the source of their nutrients. On the one hand, these conflicts provide an incentive for the men of one band to stick together so that they can defend its prerogatives against the pretensions of rival bands. On the other, these clashes maintain the intensity of combat at acceptable levels. Often what occurs is that warfare becomes ritualized. The competing groups gather together at appointed times, employ only traditional weapons, and accept defeat according to standardized criteria. For example, all of the players may understand that the first side to experience the flow of blood automatically leaves the field. Sometimes these understandings are violated, as when Shaka Zulu instructed his tribesmen to use their short spears to impale enemies who
were initially shocked at this contravention of the customary rules. This enabled the Zulus to expand their territory, but only for a time. After a while his foes caught on. Ordinarily an equilibrium between opposing groups is restored. Rather than go to extremes, something less violent is tacitly agreed upon, such as the absorption of one group into another, and the competitors return to a sustainable level of carnage.

Typically, when new forms of social organization emerge that inter-communal tests of strength are at their most ferocious. Take the Assyrians. Starting from a small city-state in the northern part of Mesopotamia, they rapidly expanded to establish the area’s first significant empire. This was achieved by engaging in annual expeditions against the surrounding political entities. Since most of these others prized their independence and had no intention of voluntarily submitting, they had to be terrorized into acknowledging their inferiority. One way the Assyrians accomplished this was by building pyramids of skulls outside the gates of conquered cities. This sent the message to those next on their list that it was best to capitulate without a fight. It also communicated to those who had already submitted that it was unwise to change their minds and reopen hostilities. Inter-communal hierarchy building thus specializes in face-to-face terror. People are obliged to submit because they are frightened into doing so. This makes tests of strength ideal for organizing relatively small social agglomerations. When the parties see the consequences of violence with their own eyes, they are induced to accept an immediately perceptible diminution in status.

At this point the reader may be wondering about warfare between modern nations. Obviously such conflicts have not disappeared, despite political proclamations, such as Woodrow Wilson’s, of a “War to End all War.” If anything, some recent conflicts have
been genocidal. Yet herein lies the explanation of this apparent inconsistency. As
societies have grown more impersonal, the level of intimidation needed to achieve
victory sometimes rises. When death can be delivered at distance, if it is to be effective it
has to be more destructive than when dispensed eyeball to eyeball. Two combatants with
swords are apt to be terrified by the prospect of cold steel ripping into flesh, whereas a
pilot dropping bombs on a prostrate city might as well be playing a video game. The
same applies to those being bombed. Since they cannot personally identify their
assailants, it is more difficult to know to whom to submit. Clearly modern warfare has
not lost its ability to impose power arrangements. The two world wars prove as much.
But they, and the cold war, prove something else as well. In a world where the distance
between the players has increased, the level of violence, in some cases, has also
increased. War can no longer be the normal mechanism of maintaining social order it has
been in the New Guinea highlands. With nuclear weapons accessible to potential tyrants,
too many civilians are apt to be slaughtered. Other organizing principles must, therefore,
take precedence.

This line of reasoning also applies within nations. Nazi Germany and Stalinist
Russia demonstrate the extremes to which tests of strength can go within a community.
Because these regimes faced enormous resistance within their borders, they sought to
intimidate citizens into submission via barbaric forms of terror. For reasons not
dissimilar to those that motivated the Assyrians, they built the equivalent of pyramids of
skulls. Hitler’s concentrations camps and Stalin’s gulag consumed human flesh by the
boxcar load. Millions of individuals were tortured to death with little regard for their
humanity. After all, those ruling these empires were far removed from the blood baths
they ordered. Stalin is reported to have said that while the death of one human being is a tragedy; the death of millions is a statistic. For him, it was. This attitude, this impersonal lack of economy with human lives, makes totalitarian solidarity ever more dangerous. Modern technology being what it is, the destruction may be too great for the victims to recover.

And this is the point. We know how dangerous and bloody hierarchy can be nowadays. We see the death of millions and believe the toll is worse than ever. But it is not. The numbers may be greater, but that is because the population is greater. In proportional terms, the mechanisms that create and maintain hierarchy were more devastating in smaller communities. Believe it or not, the murder rate among hunter-gatherers was higher than in contemporary America. Likewise the wars between hunting bands or nomadic tribes often depopulated entire regions. They were genocidal, albeit on a restricted scale. Moreover, they were face to face. In contemporary societies, tests of strength can be devastating, but these power relations tend to be better organized and more predictable. There is less need to kill rivals because they have internalized hierarchical disparities more effectively. Today we have police forces. Families do not have to take personal revenge for insults. Long ago, in small groups, they did. This made interpersonal violence more up close and personal more of the time. As a result, people back then were much less hierarchically secure than now. In a world were everyone was armed, and where sorcery was the norm, keeping others in their place could be a full time job. So was being on guard against tests of strength that might prove fatal.
Social Solidarity 100

**Strong Forces—Personal Relationships**

There is another strong force that imposes social solidarity. Its potency arises out of interpersonal relationships—and most especially love. When individuals develop attachments to one another, they create networks of stability. The feelings of concern motivate cooperation because the parties genuinely care about each other’s welfare. Interpersonal attachments can be potent, largely because they are emotional. Human emotions are nothing to be trifled with. When intense, they are as compelling as a sword through the skull. Just try ignoring an angry face inches from your nose. Just imagine being unmoved by the twinkling eyes of a paramour. The problem is that because emotions exercise influence one-on-one, their range is restricted. While they can have cascading effects in which one domino tumbles into another, there is also an effect that the crew of the Starship Enterprise would have recognized as “replicative fading.” Copies of copies tend to become less crisp. The farther one is removed from the source of an emotional ripple, the lower its amplitude and the less effective its ability to motivate.

Among hunter-gatherers, emotional attachments are an enormously potent source of solidarity; one that is likely to be as influential as hierarchical tests of strength. Durkheim was wrong in supposing that the main reason foragers cooperate is that they identify with others who are similar to themselves. From their perspective, there are a plethora of differences. For instance, they tend to make more family-based distinctions than do modern peoples. They not only distinguish between mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles, siblings and cousins, but also between gradations of these categories. An uncle is not only an uncle, but a mother’s brother or a father’s brother. These
ramifications are significant because they influence how individuals are supposed to treat each other. Even though all of their relationships are intimate, behaviors as minor as how another person is greeted or as major as who is to provide food to whom, are regulated by family positions.

Moreover, the solidarity between bands is also determined through personal relations. Attachments between nearby communities are typically cemented by exchanging brides—and to a lesser extent grooms. Disputes over territory are moderated, in part, because parents are reluctant to go to war with the persons who have become their daughter’s family—much less attack the village in which their grandchildren reside. This was the same strategy as was employed by European nobility during the Middle Ages. They routinely exchanged relatives via marriage as a mechanism for trading potential hostages. Beyond this, having a relative in the other camp kept lines of communication open and thus tends to increase inter-communal sympathies.

Among more modern peoples, family attachments are also a source of social integration. Perhaps the most celebrated example is the Sicilian family system. Sicily, which sits in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, has been a tempting prize for foreign invaders ever since antiquity. Greeks, Romans, Carthaginians, Arabs, Normans, Spaniards and Austrians have been drawn by its fertile volcanic soils, productive fisheries, and strategic location. This placed the native peoples at a disadvantage. Time and again they were faced with the problem of maintaining their dignity in the face of insuperable power. Their solution was to turn inward and emphasize family relationships. Only one’s blood relatives deserved loyalty. Outsiders were to be kept out. Family secrets were never to be shared. To do so was a violation of honor; of
omerta. This code of family solidarity was also the prototype for the Mafia. As a shadow government that held sway in opposition to the official rulers, it preserved unity by organizing as a family in which honor was closely guarded. Those who broke this code of silence quickly discovered the penalty for treachery.

The trouble with this strategy is that family based solidarity has its limitations. The parties may care deeply for each other, but only identifiable others. This reduces the breadth of potential alliances. Among the Sicilians it meant that they were never able to muster sufficient force to expel the foreigners. In the contemporary political universe it means relying on fictitious relationships. The modern equivalent of family loyalty is nationalism. Peoples who share the same language, religion, and government may assume that they are related through a common ancestor. Myths about a legendary hero who founded the nation are circulated as if this validated their relationships. Thus, the Nazis sought to provide a gallant Aryan lineage for the German people. They even sent expeditions into central Asia to uncover fictitious antecedents. All too soon, of course, military reverses placed stress on these mythic connections and the Germans turned on each other. The same dynamic can be seen among African-Americans or women. Despite talk about being each other’s brothers and sisters, individuals who do not personally know each other have fallings-out. The distance between them reduces the warmth of their feelings and permits them to cheat each other with impunity. They say they are family, but they know they are not.

**Intermediate Forces—Moral Rules**

When empires began to arise out of the agricultural states of the Middle and Far East, something odd occurred. For the first time in history, there arose religions with
international pretensions. Where earlier faiths were restricted to the communities in which they developed, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism claimed universal sway. Most hunter-gatherers believed in spirits that resided in the hills and streams of their native territory. Even the Greeks prayed to Hellene speaking gods who lived atop a local mountain. In comparison, the Christian trinity, Mohammad’s Allah, and the Buddhist nirvana were available to everyone. Each of these dared to explain all of history for all time. They also incorporated stories about how the world began, why it exhibits the trajectory it has, and where it will end up. As meaningfully, they assert that the ultimate purpose of life is to follow a set of rules laid out by a sacred founder. Only in this is true happiness found.

Such formulae have provided a mechanism for unifying peoples over vast territories. Based partly on shared cognitions, but mostly common moral convictions, strangers can coordinate their behaviors although permanently out of each other’s sight. Morality is not as lively a motivator as personal relationships, but it is not far behind. Because it depends on internalized standards that are emotionally enforced, it can be quite compelling. Pangs of conscience can be ignored, but they are remarkably insistent. As almost every child knows, guilt and shame can be so persistent that they give an individual no peace until he/she complies with a particular demand. By the same token, communal standards, as expressed in religious rituals or bodies of law, can be too compelling to over look. Hundreds of communicants praying in the same cathedral, or a robed judge looking down from an elevated bench, can be intimidating. Together these internal and external factors provide morality its clout—and do so over broad areas.
The Roman emperors discovered the unifying power of moral beliefs when they adopted Christianity as the state religion. Arab tribes made the same discovery when they rode out of the desert with a sword in one hand and the Koran in the other. Nevertheless, the Jews have probably provided the most impressive testimony to moral solidarity. Originally residing astride a land bridge between Africa and Asia, they had the misfortune to control territory that had to be traversed by conquerors moving from one to the other. Their homeland was not as fertile as Sicily, but it was as strategic and therefore was subject to invasion, whether by Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Hittites, Greeks, Romans, Persians or Arabs. Unlike the Sicilians, however, the ancient Hebrews did not find a counter-move in family solidarity. They found it in religious piety. In accounting themselves the chosen people of a universal deity, they turned to Jehovah for salvation. Their prophets assured them that if they honored his commandments, he would provide protection. In order to facilitate their fidelity, his words were recorded in a sacred text; the Bible. This book also promised that if they chose to be apostates, they would be punished by fire and sword.

For nearly three thousand years this moral covenant preserved the Jewish community, albeit at great cost. Outsiders have been both impressed and repelled by Jewish solidarity. Clannish and stiff-necked, followers of the Old Testament refused to yield to extraordinary pressures. They endured the exile of ten of their tribes by the Assyrians, years of captivity in Babylon, a Diaspora initiated by the Romans, Medieval European pogroms, a Nazi holocaust, and an Arab invasion of the recreated state of Israel. Each time they have been diminished, but never destroyed. Though rootless wanderers, they continually gathered to pledge each other that one day they would reunite
to pray at a restored Jerusalem temple. The price of this unity has, of course, been continued persecution. It also restricted the size of their community. Almost as negative, because only believers are allowed to join the covenant, a need for doctrinal purity limits potential membership.

Nonetheless, orthodoxy implies that some will be nonconformist. Even religions with universal aspirations have difficulty remaining completely universal thanks to schismatic tendencies. Doctrinal differences arise to separate Sephardim from Ashkenazi, and reformed temples from Hasidic congregations. With distance, and distance invariably arrives with increased size, come challenges to orthodoxy and the dissolution of a united front. Christians encountered this as a once “catholic” church divided into Eastern Orthodox, Roman, and Protestant denominations. Protestants have been particularly prone to division, as Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, Quakers, Pentecostals, Congregationalists, and Unitarians jostled for priority. Even Moslems have had to contend with rivalries between Sunnis and Shiites.

In today’s world, moral adhesives are likewise represented by secular ideologies. Communists, fascists, anarchists, libertarians, syndicalists, liberals, and conservatives all put forward moral ideals intended to create communities of like-minded souls. Intent upon dictating political policies through joint action, each group imagines itself the sole custodian of eternal truths. Yet secular orthodoxies mutate with as much dynamism as their theological cousins. Each communion makes grandiose promises about the benefits it will deliver once in power only to have its credibility diminished when it fails to come through. This encourages innovative promises by newly minted factions which, should
they in turn flourish, will be laid low by their limitations. The problem with moralistic standards is that in a complex world whatever propositions are endorsed are bound to be finite. A rule pithy enough to proselytize the masses is invariably too austere to reflect the variations in every day life. Thus, communicants find it easy to concur that lying is wrong, but almost impossible to agree on what constitutes a lie, especially when the community grows large. Similarly, reformers may subscribe to a belief in tolerance, but be at odds about what to tolerate.

**Intermediate Forces—Property Exchange**

Although it has transformed our lives, capitalism is frequently treated as a piñata. People take pokes at the market economy because of its putative selfishness and lack of equality. They also heave great sighs of disgust about the shallowness of property ownership and the imperialistic tendencies of the wealthy. Would that all of this greed imploded in a frenzy of love and enlightenment! Nonetheless, property exchange has been central to the development of Gesellschaft societies. It has broadened human horizons, filled billions of bellies, and stimulated countless imaginations. Many of its beneficiaries fail to recognize its advantages, but they would not be what they have become were it not for a commercial revolution that began over two thousand years ago. From its origins aboard fragile sailing vessels plying the Mediterranean, through to the supertankers and cargo planes serving us, an expansion in trade has been a crucial stimulant to the development of large social entities. It has also been the foundation of greater learning and subtle interpersonal distinctions.

When the ancient Greeks looked out at the wine dark seas that surrounded their rock bound littoral, they at first perceived an opportunity for loot. Like the Vikings who
would one day emulate their success, they engaged in piracy in order to supplement the bounty of a stingy agricultural environment. In time, however, they realized that there was more profit, and less danger, in peacefully exchanging goods. In doing so, they discovered that the strangers with whom they dealt were human beings from whom they could learn. Eventually this stimulated their arts and sciences, while integrating them into trading networks that became worldwide. In time, Europe would trade with China and Roman gold would find its way into Indian pockets. Indeed, Christopher Columbus would stumble on a New World in hopes of profiting from the spice trade.

As has often been pointed out, what one possesses is not as important as the human relationships in which one is engaged. A physical object can never provide as much comfort as a loving spouse. Nor is what one wears as significant as whom one dominates or is dominated by. In fact, what one wears may matter most because it is an emblem of a personal status or communal affiliation. Nevertheless property does matter, if for no other reason than it stimulates exchanges pregnant with consequence. Despite this, merchants are regularly condemned as superficial. They are scoffed at as mere moneychangers, more entranced with counting coins than appreciating the finer things in life. Willie Lomans to the core, they prefer large sales to love or beauty. Trapped in warehouses or bank vaults, they see nothing beyond these. Or so say their accusers. Yet, this is untrue. While some business people are shallow, the demands of business have bound the world with the sinews that produced modern civilizations. Ironically, they are the source of the cultural goods they are supposed to despise.

On the surface, trading seems a sterile occupation that appears to involve no more than moving physical objects from one place to another. What this overlooks is that it
occurs between human beings who must trust one another. Trading partners do not automatically develop confidence in strangers. In the beginning, they are wary of being cheated or robbed. It takes many interactions before they feel secure. Only then do they relax in the knowledge that both parties have a long-term interest in fair exchanges. Property exchange is thus a means of developing stable relationships. These may not be as emotional as between intimates or hierarchical associates, but they are more extensive. This permits worldwide networks to emerge; networks in which the parties may not even communicate in the same language.

Another aspect of trading partnerships is that they increase mutual understanding. If trust is to develop, each side has an interest in appreciating the motives of the other. These merchants may look and sound different, they may live in odd structures and bow before unfamiliar gods, they may not even be the sorts of person one would want as family, nevertheless they break bread with one another. Moreover they engage in conversation during which they assuage their curiosity about each other. Those who earn a living through trade must be specialists in deciphering human behavior. They cannot afford to be reflexive in how they treat their customers. They must, in particular, determine the needs of their clients if they are to maximize profits. In other words, they must be mentally and emotionally flexible enough to adjust to changing circumstances. In order to achieve this, they have to be able to think along novel lines, which means they must be cosmopolitan thinkers. This, in fact, is the origin of modern educational systems, which teach critical thinking and tolerant internationalism.

The commercial revolution that enabled billions of individuals to depend on strangers for their livelihoods also sparked the industrial and scientific revolutions. As
markets expanded, methods were found to meet the growing demand. More efficient machinery, based on a better understanding of the laws of nature, provided the answer. Mechanical power replaced muscle power; hence the goods produced multiplied exponentially. People grew rich and life became more comfortable. Ancillary services, such as medicine and sanitation, also improved, resulting in increased life expectancy. Although these advances might seem to have little to do with merchants exchanging cargoes of wine for amphorae of olive oil, they are part of a step-by-step progression that permitted worldwide populations to expand.

Apparently unrelated has been the development of democratic institutions. The enemies of capitalism allege that market economies are antithetical to democratic rule. They say that a pursuit of riches concentrates power in the hands of bloated industrialists whose primary interest is squeezing every last dime from the poor. Here too the utopians have the facts wrong. History reveals that democracy is correlated with market-based systems. Decentralized commercial societies benefit from distributing authority more widely. In a world of traders, and those who produce goods for trade, decisions about what constitutes a good bargain often need to be made on the spot. Individuals have to be delegated the discretion to make choices lest exchanges be rigid and inappropriate. This requires that the ground-level players are motivated to make good choices, which is unlikely if they feel oppressed. Democracy, in essence, rewards people with greater control over their lives. It expresses a confidence in their decision-making abilities that encourages them to improve their skills. In so doing, it spreads the responsibility for maintaining social integration to the farthest recesses of the globe.
Weak Forces—Knowledge

Spectators at a football game are munching tacos, when suddenly a naked man scurries across the field. A pair of friends sitting in the cheap seats immediately look at each other in wonderment. The expression on their faces seems to say, Did I see what I think I saw? Psychologists call this phenomenon consensual validation. People confirm their perceptions by comparing them with what others perceive. In this, they join in a community of understandings. Ordinarily, this fact checking is limited by the scope of our ability to communicate with others. Among hunter-gatherers this means those with whom one has face-to-face interactions. As such, social cognitions would not seem a good candidate for achieving social solidarity. They appear better suited to generating agreements between people who are already close. Nevertheless, they are a weak adhesive. Believing the same thing as another person does not carry the same emotional clout as loving or fearing someone else, but it does carry some weight.

What those who discount the importance of shared understandings fail to notice is that these are largely symbolic and that symbols have broad currency. Words or pictures can be transmitted far beyond the range of a single conversation. Obviously any one party can spread a message to third parties and they to still others. In fact, thanks to modern communications, the reach of particular messages can be universal. At first, the written word, then the printed word, provided the technology to amplify our ideas. More recently, radio, television, and the Internet have furnished more effective megaphones. These have enabled formerly unrelated peoples to share elements of a common culture. What they hear from television newscasters or see at the cinema often reflects what came
from a single wire service or a small circle of movie producers. As a consequence, even when their languages differ, their perception of events can be strikingly similar.

Nowadays, certainly within the same nation, a person can travel thousands of miles and encounter a familiar scene. Instead of being disoriented, as would probably have been the case before the media revolutions, he or she recognizes the street signs and advertising slogans. Moreover, when he strikes up a conversation with a stranger, they may both be interested in the same celebrity gossip extracted from the identical national magazine. This sort of symbolic congruity even crosses borders. An American, for instance, can travel to Europe, almost wholly innocent of the local languages, and see movie posters almost exactly the same as those back home. She will not have to worry about starving to death or failing to find the museum she hoped to see. The locals may seem a little off-center, but not as if they are from another planet.

The presence of widespread symbolic interchanges is part of what is meant by referring to ours as an information age. Obviously, advances in communication have enlarged the span of information exchange. Sooner or later, what is known in one corner of the world is known in others part of it, that is, if they are plugged into the international symbolic network. But something more is meant by calling ours an information age. It is also assumed that there is more information to share than before. Today it is believed that most people are better informed than were their parents. They are presumed to know more about current events and possess greater general knowledge technology than their ancestors. Some go so far as to assume that people have become smarter than their forebears. With computers on every desk and i-phones in many hands, millions of us are a few clicks away from answering whatever question we might conceive.
This, of course, is not true. Human intelligence has not significantly advanced. The store of knowledge at our disposal has expanded, but that does not guarantee it is effectively employed. Nevertheless, the expertise upon which people now draw is impressive. Science, in particular, has expanded to an astonishing extent. From biology, to physics, chemistry, and the computer sciences investigators have pried into natural secrets many thought would never be deciphered. This too has contributed to social solidarity. First, the information generated by science is culturally neutral. Everyone can have access to it. In a sense, these facts serve as a fund that pulls people together. Since everyone looking through microscopes see the same things, they can agree on what they there. Second, science has improved our capacity to control events. No longer are human beings at the mercy of as many mysterious forces. Although countless enigmas remain, we can, for instance, predict the weather with reasonable accuracy. We can even begin to fathom the causes of diseases such as cancer. This means that it is less necessary to displace our anxieties on innocent bystanders. Instead of venting frustrations at enemies who did not cause them, we can be friendlier. Rather than divide ourselves from others, we can join in seeking solutions to common challenges. This too is a form of social solidarity; in this case it facilitated by shared understandings.

**Weak Forces—Social Roles**

Finally, we come to the most important adhesive holding modern societies together. It too is grounded in a weak force in that it does not stir passions to the degree strong forces do. Yet it too is suited to operating at a distance. This last mechanism for integrating individual efforts is the social role. More than the five forces previously considered, it is emblematical of modernity. Durkheim’s division of labor, indeed, his
organic solidarity, is best exemplified in the specific tasks with which people come to identify. These focus what individuals do, but because they establish networks of role partnerships, their influence has broader implications. So extensive is their impact that they are the *sine qua non* of contemporary civilization.

Indeed, modern market economies could not be so decentralized were it not for social roles. If people did not specialize in different, yet interlocking tasks, they could not develop the competence to make the local decisions needed for commerce to flourish. As significantly, were it not for the institutionalized specialties of a myriad of strangers, they would be at a loss for how to react in an otherwise unregulated marketplace. To cite a simple case, walking into a supermarket would be a bewildering experience were it impossible to distinguish the staff from the customers. Nor would moving through the checkout line be comfortable were it not for the existence of well-established ways of interacting with cashiers. Having grown up in this sort of society, we realize that we are supposed to place our food items on the counter, that the cashier will ring them up, and that we will have to decide whether we want them bagged in paper or plastic.

Role specialization is, as it were, a means of attaching labels to strangers. The ways they dress, where they stand, or how they speak alert us as to how we are supposed to address them. Even though we have never previously met, we understand what to anticipate, as do they. Among hunter-gatherers this sort of information is furnished by family relationships or hierarchical status. In a world inhabited by innumerable strangers, this would be impossible. We could no more keep millions identities discrete than memorize the encyclopedia. Moreover, the larger our communities, the greater the need
for smaller subdivisions. Lumping too many people into the same category strips each of them of their individuality and decreases their standing.

Role specialization also improves personal efficiency. Individuals who concentrate on a single set of tasks learn to perform them well. They become so proficient that we can take their competence for granted. This enables us to place confidence in the ministrations of persons never previously met. The reason this matters is that the trust required in a market dominated by strangers depends on more than a belief that these others will prove sincere. They may intend to make fair deals, but if they are unskilled at producing quality goods, they will not be able to deliver on their word. When the product in question was olive oil, this was a serious matter, but when it is a piece of electronic equipment it is more serious. Technological advances mandated a quantum leap in personal expertise. Furthermore, with this increase in skills has come a dependence upon abilities we are not personally equipped to evaluate. It is, therefore, critical that role performers be worthy of anonymous confidence. When we walk into a dentist’s office, it should be enough to know that this other is a dentist for us to entrust our mouths to his care. Were this not so, we would be playing Russian roulette every time we placed our welfare in the hands of an unfamiliar person.

This is where professionalization comes in. Professionals are, by definition, role players who are worthy of our confidence. They are theoretically so good at their jobs, and so dedicated to doing them well, that we do not have to know them personally in order to trust their work. They are, in short, self-motivated experts. Doctors, lawyers, engineers, architects, but nowadays also police officers and nurses, are expected to know more about their jobs than do lay persons and to perform them ably without external
supervision. We defer to their authority because we are sure that they deserve it. Years of historical development have assured us that each is adequately prepared for his/her mission. Far from being representatives of a Hobbesian war of all against all, we regard them as interchangeable allies. They are supposed to be on our side, even if we don’t know them. Because they presumably identify with their work, they should want to help. For them, what they do is theoretically the equivalent to a sacred calling.

This being so, professionals are expected to be self-directed. They are supposed to know what needs to be done and do it without prompting. Yet this requires a special type of person. Independent action is contingent on individuals who can figure out what to do in moments of uncertainty, and who possess the courage to act, although this may later attract blame should things go wrong. Not everyone has the emotional resources to stand up to such responsibilities. Not everyone has dedicated the efforts to achieve the requisite knowledge or emotional commitment. Professionals are, in this sense, social leaders. Within their areas of proficiency, they determine what will be done, with others freely accepting their guidance.

Unlike hierarchical leadership, which depends on specific chains of command, professionalized organizations rely on decision makers who do not have to be in contact with others in order to coordinate their efforts. The expertise built into professionalized roles need not be delivered from a dominant to an inferior. Professionals make their decisions, not because they were instructed to do so by a supervisor, but because they autonomously decide it is best. Their supervision is, in a sense, internalized during the socialization that converts them into professionals. In learning their unique responsibilities, they incorporate knowledge accumulated by innumerable predecessors.
They are also infused with the confidence to make decisions based upon this knowledge. This provides them with the self-assurance to tailor their interventions to particular conditions. Yet because their actions are not arbitrary, they can interface with other professionals without engaging in actual consultations. These others, having also internalized their roles, know what to expect.

Professionalized solidarity is, therefore, not based upon a consciousness that the parties are meeting each other’s needs. They mesh cooperatively not because, as per Durkheim, they perceive this to be in their mutual interest, but because they have personally adopted role behaviors that evolved to interlock. The engineer is not personally worried about preserving the life of the physician who crosses his bridge. Having been thoroughly instructed in the canons of his calling, he is concerned that the structure he designs will stand up to any of the stressors that might pull it down. Nor is the physician emotionally dedicated to curing this particular engineer when he appears as a patient. His concern is with adequately treating any patient who might come. Pledged to do no harm, his self esteem would suffer were he to slide into malpractice—as established by criteria imposed by generations of physicians. The services that professionals provide each other do not magically jibe. Nor are they mutually beneficial because they individually possess the genius to recognize what is useful. Professional role players do not invent the world anew. Neither are they so magnanimous that they care about other human beings more deeply than do non-professionals. Rather, they are heirs to behavioral packages negotiated to interlock. They are synergistic because they conform to this unconscious design. The result is that they make mutually helpful decisions because the competences they apply developed to be interpersonally helpful.
Professional self-direction is autonomous because it is grounded in a socially evolved network. Their respective measures taken are separately dedicated to the social plans of action into which they have been inducted. The secret of professional solidarity is that their individual motives have been shaped to fit interpersonal needs. Generations of learning and years of indoctrination go into producing persons who want to do what is beneficial for others. They do so neither from love nor fear, but from a healthy desire to be the best at what they do. Paradoxically, this provides the freedom to act on their own, while binding them to an extensive whole more tightly than could the coercive inducements of strong social forces. They, and we, are thus the beneficiaries of the inverse force rule.

**The Middle Class Confluence**

Despite the pitfalls of prognostication, the time has come to offer some conjectures. Regardless of the lures of utopianism, we must take a realistic look at the future. Given the various aspects of our social natures and the inverse force rule, what can be said about emerging social dynamics? The answers may be surprising. What lies ahead differs from what both liberals and conservatives imagine. Contrary to more conventional opinions, society is not becoming one huge church or an international village. We seem instead to be moving toward a professionalized world. We are mall transforming into a decentralized community of self-motivated experts. Many millions of individuals are assuming greater control over their personal, and our shared, destinies, and with this achieving more satisfying lives. Time will tell if this prediction is correct. Like all prophesies it will be confirmed, or disconfirmed, be events. In the meantime, some very robust forecasts are possible.
One of the aspects of modern society that is frequently neglected is that the middle classes have come to dominate it. Ours is, in fact, the first fully middle class society in the history of the world. Not only is it the first society in which the middle class is numerically ascendant, but also the first in which it sets the social agenda. Today’s standards are not those of the aristocracy, but of the middling sorts. Beyond this, middle class folks are the archetypes for where we are headed. The future will not be less, but more middle class. This being so, the mechanisms that hold society together will be dominated by what serves their purposes. What works for them will, in one way or another, be made to work for everyone else. This sounds chauvinistic, but it is the unvarnished truth. It is no more arrogant than asserting religious principles are fundamental to theocratic societies.

If this is so, it is possible to foresee how social solidarity is likely to develop. To begin with, as societies grow larger, the role of the stronger forces will further decline, while that of the weaker ones will expand. Whereas neither hierarchies, nor personal relationships will disappear, their nature and impact will be modified. The same can be said of communal cognitions and social roles, but in the opposite direction. In particular, science and professionalized roles should increase in influence. The intermediate forces, namely property exchange and morality will not disappear either. But they too will be modified as commercial transactions expand and as the rules that enable markets to flourish are adjusted to fit larger, more anonymous agglomerations.

For starters, hierarchies should grow less violent. War will not cease to exist, but will be better controlled. Periodic explosions are sure to roil the international community; nevertheless a concentration of military power in fewer hands should
provide the means and motivation to keep the cruelty within bounds. War, in short, is bad for business and political stability; hence should be contained where possible. No more will absolute rulers take their nations to war in order to accumulate glory.

Symbolic uses of power will, however, remain prominent. Modes of education, fashion, and leisure are apt to be quarried to develop indicators of superior power that can be converted into the weapons used to win tests of strength. So will skill at the tasks upon which economic power and political supremacy depend. Both technological and interpersonal dexterity will increasingly determine primacy. Those who master military/industrial technologies and/or the art of creating and maintaining social coalitions will rise to the top; thereby earning the respect accorded the more powerful.

On a smaller scale, hierarchies will be stabilized and domesticated within concrete institutions such as national governments, industrial corporations, and civic associations. These will not only specify who is on top, but also how tests of strength are to be carried out. Relationships based on dominance should still be prominent, but confined within defined areas. Those who achieve superiority will be allowed to control some events, but only some, and only in certain ways. Bosses, for instance, will not allowed to dictate whom their underlings marry. On a larger scale, social class will continue to replace social caste and estate systems. As societies swell in scope, and rely ever more on commercial efforts, they will require greater social mobility. Individuals must be able to move up and down based on their contributions to the whole. Neither the circumstances of one’s birth, nor myths about one’s inherent worth, can be allowed to supercede the abilities that underlie industrial efficiency and social cohesion.
Furthermore, social class arrangements are expressly suited to anonymous conditions. Gesellschaft societies are so massive that most people do not have an opportunity to compare their power directly with that of other individuals. The best they can manage is to evaluate the surface appearances believed indicative of power. They will thus continue to size up how another person is dressed, hoping to conclude whether he/she is an executive and therefore dominant, or an automobile mechanic and not. Under these circumstances, the middle classes will continue to increase in influence. Although individually less powerful than the upper classes, its members will persist in implementing most of the decisions that make a difference. As professionals, middle managers, and entrepreneurs, they will progressively manipulate the technologies and interpersonal alliances that get work done. Their standards should, therefore, become symbolic of power and emulated by those who wish to exercise it.

The scope of personal relationships is also likely to be restricted. Neither heterosexual love, nor marriage, nor parental attachments to children will perish; they will instead become more circumscribed. Once upon a time, families were the focus of political and economic activity. Who was related to whom determined who would be king or control the family domains. These relationships also shaped family businesses, including family farms. Today this is less so. As previously noted, families have been described as havens in a heartless world. They are places to which people retreat in search of emotional support. Men and women will therefore continue to bond so as to draw strength from their mutual concerns. As significantly, they will pass along these strengths to their children. Socialization of the young has probably become the foremost task of the nuclear family. Individual husbands and wives, who are less able to draw on
the support of extended families, collaborate to teach their offspring the technical and emotional skills needed to succeed as adults. For better, or worse, the expressive integrity of these smaller units is vital to instilling the self-direction essential for modernity. As such, people will become more professionalized in their personal lives. Here too they will become more dependent on a self-motivated expertise. They will, for example, understand more about personal relationships and human development so as to make better decisions regarding marriage and child rearing.

On a commercial level, the power of the marketplace is nowhere in retreat. Even among radicals who denigrate property ownership, few choose to live in poverty. More goods and services are traded than ever. As a result, the social division of labor is being carved up into innumerable specialized units. Money matters, wealth matters, and the jobs people perform matter. As custodians of economic power, members of the middle classes will benefit from these developments. In becoming society’s designated planners, they will get to make more decisions and derive the profits of doing so. This has not, however, made them irredeemably crass; it has instead further professionalized them. Competence, and the qualities that produce competence, are their cynosure. On a more basic level, the successes of commercialization have, for the moment, reduced starvation to an historic low. Famine has become uncommon even in the third world. This has enabled more people to concentrate on other goals. They instead focus their efforts on art and knowledge to a degree those preoccupied with subsistence cannot.

As to moral standards, these need to prop up a commerce-based professionalism. Individuals who make important decisions must become more, not less responsible. They also have to trust the role partners with whom they do business. As collaborators on
commercial, political, and social projects, they could not form stable associations were they unable to do so. Far from cynical assertions that “everyone lies and everyone cheats” most people need to be honest most of the time. They have to keep their word and refrain from theft even when temptations arise. They must also be committed to fairness, tolerance, and universality. Unless they are, they will smother the talents and negotiating skills, they require for success. Finally, they must be dedicated to the self-discipline essential for self-direction. Unless they are moderate in their habits and persistent in the pursuit of small improvements, there will be few advances. The asceticism of the early capitalists may no longer be necessary, but an ability to control one’s impulses so as to perform onerous tasks remains crucial.

The expanding value of science and technology probably does not need elaboration. The emphasis futurologists have placed on these speaks for itself. What anthropologists call “material culture” has clearly had an enormous impact. How we eat, sleep, move about, work, or entertain ourselves have all been drastically modified by improvements in knowledge and methodology. In a sense, these cognitive advances have been self-sustaining. By producing surpluses that allow people to seek innovations, they generate, and will continue to generate, more time and resources for self-improvement and fun.

Finally, as social roles proliferate and become more technically and socially sophisticated, they change the nature of those required to perform them. Subsistence farmers worked hard, but did not need to be as self-directed, or self-disciplined, as modern physicians. Nor did they require years of education or a nuanced understanding of strangers. Confined to a narrower universe, suffused with more predictable demands,
they could make do with traditional wisdom. Professionalized workers, in contrast, must acquire far more information. They also have to internalize a desire to perform complex tasks without external supervision. They must, therefore, as has repeatedly been asserted, become self-motivated experts. Less obvious is their need to become professionalized in their personal lives. As their universe becomes more decentralized, they will be thrown on their own devices more frequently. For instance, they must now choose their own spouses, negotiate the nature of their marriages, decide how to raise their children, organize their social lives, and make their own political and religious commitments. If these are to be done competently, they have to acquire the personal characteristics needed to do so. Though difficult, this is increasingly necessary.
Chapter 4

Professionalization

Discretion

The fourth armored cavalry division was supposed to come down from the north. That was the plan. While it did so, the third armored division, along with elements of the marines and airborne troops, were supposed to approach Baghdad from the south. The British were delegated to take Basra, whereas the American military would engage in a giant pincer movement that would crush Saddam Hussein’s vaunted Republican Guard between its spearheads. Unfortunately things did not work out that way. As war approached, the political decision to allow the fourth division to come ashore in Turkey was delayed. The military planners assumed this approval would be pro forma. Both they and the Turks knew it was essential in that the fourth’s heavy equipment could only enter Iraq by land. As the army’s most imposingly mechanized unit, its Abram’s tanks were too lumbering to get into position any other way. The problem was that the Turkish public was opposed to the American intervention. This forced the politicians into Byzantine maneuvers in order to gain parliamentary assent, which nevertheless looked likely succeed. But then the French weighed in. They were determined to prevent the U.S. from invading. This prompted a warning to the Turk’s who took it seriously because they needed French support if they were to join the European Union. The result was a parliamentary vote against allowing the Americans to pass through Turkish territory. The military action would have to occur elsewhere.

At this point, the U.S. forces were largely in place. The logistic preparations had positioned the third division, along with its equipment, in Kuwait just south of the Iraqi
border. The Marines, the airborne troops, and the British were also set to jump off from this area. Would the offensive now have to be postponed? Some observers concluded this was inevitable. Without the fourth division smashing down through Mosul and into Tikrit, it would not be possible to tie up the northern elements of the Republican Guards. This would require the remaining American forces to bear the brunt of a stouter defense. Besides, it would take weeks for the fourth to travel by ship through the Suez Canal to disembark in Kuwait. This being so, it could not be ready to participate in the assault.

Yet the invasion did go forward. It not only went forward; it did so with smashing success. The American planners were forced into making a myriad of adjustments, but executed them with aplomb. The southern forces moved north with what they had on hand and speedily pushed the Iraqis aside. Eventually the fourth caught up so that it could move into its assigned area. But this was only after the bulk of the Iraqi army had been defeated. All in all, this was one of the greatest military victories of all time. Never before had an expeditionary force this large traveled half way around the world to confront a foe so substantial and so well armed. Never before had a strike force moved this far and this fast to defeat so well entrenched an opposition. The Jeremiahs of the media second-guessed every step of the advance, ruefully predicting failure at each turn, but they proved wrong. Thousands of American troops were not slaughtered as they attacked the Iraqi trenches. Nor did they get bogged down in the back streets of Baghdad. Neither did clouds of poison gas suffocate them. Contrary to the smart money, the operation did not degenerate into a quagmire.

Worst of all, lamented the critics, was that the mission had been badly planned. Hours prior to the jump-off, many journalists insisted that there was no plan at all. A
horde of bullheaded generals, led by a cowboy president, simply rushed into a cavalry charge every bit as ill advised as Tennyson’s light brigade. Of course, a year earlier they said the same thing about Afghanistan. It too was supposed to be a quagmire. Hadn’t the Russians, with a much larger force, been humbled by the mujahadeen? And wasn’t the northern alliance a ragtag outfit that couldn’t possibly compete with the Taliban? Moreover, Tommy Franks was an untested commander, from Texas no less? Surely this was a fool’s errand; an undertaking conceived in haste and poorly thought through. But then the Taliban were defeated—more quickly than anyone imagined. They were expelled from the cities and their mountain strongholds by a combination of local Afghans, American Special Forces, and precision bombing. It had all gone so quickly that in retrospect it seemed a foregone conclusion. Nonetheless this changed few minds. Now it was Iraq that was said to have been poorly thought through. Clearly the conservatives in charge of the government were gung ho militarists so intent on humiliating Saddam that they had not reckoned on the obstacles to be overcome. They plainly had no strategy for victory. Nor had they a plan for coping with defeat.

What the critics did not understand was that the military, which marched off to war in Iraq, was not the same as that which bogged down in Viet Nam. In the interim it had become the most professional armed force in the history of human conflict. Lessons had been learned from the jungles of Southeast Asia. No longer were search and destroy tactics the order of the day. No longer were soldiers to be rotated in and out of units as individuals. Most significantly, no longer would daily missions be planned in Washington to be carried out by subordinates in the field. During the Viet Nam incursion the fear had been escalation. President Johnson and his advisors were terrified that if
they used too much force, the Chinese or the Russians would be obliged to enter the fray. What was done was, therefore, carefully calculated to avoid an affront. As a consequence, the particulars of the bombing campaign were determined in the White House. The president literally poured over maps to determine the next target. Much like Adolf Hitler during operation Barbarosa, despite his lack of military credentials, it was Johnson who had the final say.

In Iraq, these mistakes were avoided. George W. Bush understood that he was not a professional soldier. Although he served as a pilot in the Air National Guard, he realized that he had not been trained in military tactics or operations. These decisions were best left to people who specialized in making them. The generals, colonels, and lieutenants who were on the spot would be allowed to determine what was to be done. They had the expertise and local knowledge to make better choices than an amateur thousands of miles away. Moreover, they were close enough to the action to evaluate what was working and what not. If the tactics needed to be modified, they were there to alter them. Instead of waiting for orders to come down the chain of command, they could swing into action before it was too late. They could, in short, be responsive, flexible, and appropriate.

What the media folks who scorned the military planners did not understand was that the nature of warfare had changed. Rather than omniscient officers generating set piece designs to be carried out by obedient subordinates, the idea was to oversee a fluid combat zone. No longer were the troops to be marched out in parade ground formations that could be ordered around as if they were pieces on a real life chessboard. This was to be mobile warfare. The objective was to move swiftly enough to throw the enemy off
balance. Static trenches were to be avoided at all costs, lest the confrontation settle into one of attrition. But this could only be achieved through decentralized command. Yes, there needed to be coordination between the various elements, but there also had to be individual decision-making. Both officers and enlisted men required the discretion to take advantage of opportunities as they arose. They needed the intelligence and authority to operate semi-independently. Good judgment, and the courage to implement it, rather than reflexive conformity would win the day.

Not to put too fine a point on the matter, many of the media critics were trapped in a collectivist mentality. They considered themselves intellectuals who had a better grasp of the big picture than troglodyte generals. Much like Stalinist commissars, they thought in terms of five-year plans. Sitting in Moscow, or rather Washington and New York, they presumed to discern the future well enough to set forth a detailed outline of where things should be headed. In their minds, they could figuratively determine that this factory should meet that quota, which would forward its output to this other factory, which would therefore meet its quota, and so forth. Similarly on the battlefield, this unit would take that town, which would free up this other unit to overrun that battalion, and so forth. The planning was supposed to be comprehensive and impeccable. All of the parts would mesh together and move forward like a well-oiled machine. Furthermore, because potential obstacles would be anticipated, they could be brushed aside with little trouble. Anything less indicated incompetence. It was a sign of poor planning.

Real life generals, of course, understood that this was fantasy. They had been schooled in the reality that battle plans are usually thrown into a cocked hat once the shooting commences. Suddenly the men on the ground are confronted with the fog of
war and find it difficult to ascertain what is happening. Worse still, they find themselves knocking heads with an intelligent enemy. Actual enemies, as opposed to those inhabiting contingency plans, are capable of unanticipated adjustments. They are smart enough to throw curve balls because they too intend to win. In Iraq, this state of affairs was recognized by a general who told reporters that the adversary he was facing was “a bit” different from the one they had war-gamed. There immediately arose a clatter in the stateside media. The general’s remark was interpreted as meaning that the planners had been wrong about what to expect. The New York Times even misquoted him—leaving out the part where he said “a bit.” No wonder Americans were being killed. The men in charge were too dim to prepare for what was in store.

In fact, the American army was amazingly well prepared. With fewer resources than some thought necessary, in less time than most believed possible, Saddam was driven into hiding. At the same time that Viet Nam era pundits were bemoaning another “quagmire,” Iraqi tanks were being blasted to bits. Although embedded reporters were sending back accurate stories of ground troops stalled by a sand storm, they were not privy to what was happening in the air. It seems that the Iraqi generals also assumed that poor visibility would hamper American operations. They, therefore, took advantage of what they believed was adequate cover to reposition their heavy armor. In short order, columns of Iraqi vehicles were turned into rubble by American planes that had been observant enough to detect their movements and agile enough to hit them where they were. Once more discretion paid off. On the spot decision-making, not only by generals, but also by radar operators and fighter pilots turned the tide. None of these had to consult
Bush before taking action. None had to refer to a detailed battle plan before diverting forces to where they were needed.

The downside of this flexibility turned up after the major combat operations wound down. So rapidly had victory been achieved that loose ends remained. Although many potential problems had been foreseen, others had not. It turned out to be possible to prevent the Iraqi oilfields from being incinerated. It was also possible to avert a missile attack on Israel. Then too it had proved unnecessary to care for hordes of refugees, since the collateral damage was insufficient to produce them. This much was to the good. But it had nonetheless been impossible to guard the records of the Iraqi bureaucracies. The thrust into downtown Baghdad was so precipitous that there were not enough troops to do the job. Nor were the resources available to prevent extensive looting. This sort of disorder became so widespread, that it, rather than the victory, occupied media attention. How, asked those comfortably removed from the action, could a civilized military allow this to happen? Weren’t the authorities able to plan for something that these commentators could, in hindsight, so clearly see?

But worse was to come. Although there had been some celebrations when the Americans arrived on the scene, these were quickly succeeded by what was subsequently recognized as an insurgency. Mortar rounds would shortly fall into the American controlled Green Zone, improvised explosive devices would cripple armored vehicles, civilian guards would be kidnapped and then be decapitated, and car bombs would decimate crowds coming out of mosques. All too soon the body count was adding up and the critics were once more grumbling about poor planning. Why hadn’t the authorities foreseen this? Why didn’t they have enough troops to prevent it? Why wasn’t it possible
to train Iraqis to take over the burden of protecting themselves? When the president explained that part of the problem had been the pace of victory, they scoffed. When he added that the diversion of the fourth division allowed remnants of Saddam’s military to go underground, they were unimpressed. It made no sense that with the major combat activities concluded so briskly, large numbers of Baathists would go underground rather than be disarmed. If this were so, why hadn’t it been anticipated? Why, for instance, hadn’t the dead-enders been recruited into a reformed Iraqi army? That few experts had recommended a similar course with the Wehrmacht after Hitler was defeated made no difference. That was then; this was now.

It seems that those who crave predictability are uncomfortable when things go wrong and when ground level judgments are essential. They demand central control of what no one has the intelligence, or power, to control. In a mass society dependent upon complex technologies flexible management is indispensable. With so much happening, it is often necessary to adjust to changing circumstances. But this is only possible by allowing individuals discretion. Many millions of eyes and minds must be allowed to determine what no predetermined set of instructions can ever fully anticipate. What is needed is a multitude of decentralized planners, not a brilliant master plan. In order to achieve this, however, the separate decision makers must be competent at their tasks. They have to possess the knowledge and abilities to make good choices. They must, in brief, become professionalized.

The military attempts to achieve this objective through careful training. Individual soldiers, down to the squad level, are instructed on what to expect and then given comprehensive practice in facing it. To cite one small instance, where
marksmanship was once taught by firing at bull’s-eyes, it is now inculcated by shooting at human shaped targets. This allows those who have never been in combat to get the feel of what it might be like. On a more significant level, soldiers were, once upon a time, drilled solely on loading their weapons and shooting them in unison. This was designed to produce a lethal volley that could be unleashed at the discretion of the commander. Were this the practice today, it would result in suicidal failures. Military units would to be slaughtered en masse. Modern weapons are most effective when individually operated. They are so complicated that they take time, and motivation, to master. When placed in harms way, those controlling them are, of course, provided with general orders on how to proceed and with time-sensitive updates on the tactical situation, but they are also expected to exercise initiative. Trained to be self-confident, they are obliged to be independent tacticians. And this is precisely what they were able to do in Iraq. Time and again, ordinary American soldiers outmaneuvered a foe schooled in submissive obedience. Time and again, they recognized what needed doing and were able to coordinate their efforts to defeat less flexible opponents.

Analogous considerations apply to civilian life. Modern societies also require their members to be adaptable. On the job, at home, and when engaged in their civic responsibilities, they confront intricacies as great as those on the battlefield. As a consequence, they too must be capable of effective discretion if tragedy is to be averted. But skillful decision-making does not come naturally. It must be learned. Ordinary citizens have to be prepared to meet challenges that only they can overcome. Professionalization is designed to achieve this. By inculcating the skills and motivation to employ them, it increases the likelihood of appropriate choices. This suggests that
professionalism is apt to proliferate. More and more individuals will become independent-minded actors. More and more institutions will tie their fate to a professionalized workforce. In doing so, they will endorse the responsible course of action. They will opt for a decentralized suppleness over centralized stiffness.

**The Traditional Professions**

Medieval cities were no larger than today’s villages when universities began appearing within their walls. The primary mission of these schools was to prepare clergymen for ecclesiastical responsibilities. Unlike most of their peers, clerics needed to be literate if they were to interpret the Bible for the community. Soon lawyers and physicians joined them. This was so because they too were affiliated with the church; canon law and church operated hospitals then being the norm. In any event, those who attended the universities did so for at least quasi-spiritual purposes. They were said to possess a “calling.” God had visited them, perhaps in a dream, and selected them for his service. It was thus their duty to perform their assignments to the best of their ability. To do less, would be impious. It was to defy the Lord and risk eternal damnation.

These first professionals, that is, those who “professed” their occupations as a religious duty, included ministers, doctors, and lawyers. The reason they had been chosen for these responsibilities was presumably because they possessed unique qualifications. Perhaps God recognized their unusual holiness or uncommon intelligence. They could, therefore, be entrusted with tasks of extraordinary significance. What, after all, could be more important than safeguarding the souls of the faithful, their corporeal bodies, or the social order upon which everyone depended. In fact, those who took
religious orders, or became physicians, or lawyers, were frequently among the best and brightest. They could thus be entrusted with the fateful duties for which they trained.

The distinctiveness associated with professionalism has, in fact, endured into the present. Religious callings may have declined in prestige, but the rise of their secular cousins has more than compensated for this. Doctors and lawyers routinely appear at the top of surveys of occupational prestige. Almost everyone assumes that they are among the smartest, and most dedicated, members of the community. They are also among the most trusted. True, a certain cynicism has crept into contemporary attitudes, but this is contradicted by a near universal willingness to bestow authority upon them. When ill, most people consult a physician; when in legal trouble, they hire a lawyer. As clients, they grumble about being cheated; yet they seek out qualified practitioners and make sure to pay their bills. Indeed, it is widely assumed that doctors and lawyers deserve the compensation they receive. Since few others possess an ability to perform such complex tasks, they receive the deference due the powerful.

The source of this preeminence remains an intense socialization that, if anything, is more extreme than it was for their medieval predecessors. As was the case hundreds of years ago, today’s professionals are expected to master a unique expertise and internalize a desire to execute it. What has changed is that this competence is grounded in greater knowledge and, therefore, implies a greater the need for responsible authority. The spiritual element in professional training has almost vanished, but the need for a sincere desire to make good decisions has not. Doctors and lawyers are expected to perform with diligence, not because they are paid to do so, or because they are supervised by a superior who demands that they live up to their obligations, but because they personally want to.
The physician who is unconcerned about his/her client’s welfare is reckoned guilty of malpractice, whereas the attorney who loses a case through sloth may wind up disbarred.

The socialization that instills this dedication is noted for its rigor. Doctors and lawyers not only undergo years of preparation, but must meet unusually exacting standards. To begin with, they will not be admitted to training unless they demonstrate outstanding abilities. Their college grades have to be significantly above average or they can forget about applying to medical or law school. This provides an incentive to study hard. It also modifies the nature of their internal goals. Those individuals who are insufficiently committed do not devote themselves to achieving the necessary self-discipline. Successful applicants are likewise aware that they must behave themselves if they are to be selected. A criminal record, for instance, would foreclose their opportunities every bit as much as stupidity or laziness.

Once prospective doctors and lawyers enter graduate school, the pressures increase. The standards they are expected to meet are elevated further, with additional years of effort the reward for having done well. Would-be physicians are required to master reams of material. So many facts are involved that successful candidates are celebrated for their good memories. Would-be attorneys must also master countless details, except that these have less to do with science and more with the technicalities of legal precedent. Both groups are, in addition, subjected to tests of their capacity to perform under stress. In short order, medical students become interns who must make life and death decisions, often with little time to rest; whereas legal students are thrown into moot court where they are required to think on their feet. In either case, part of their professional education entails being required to make independent decisions. Although
they are still learners (and therefore unsure of themselves), they are obliged to perform competently despite their uncertainties. They must, in short, demonstrate grace under pressure or they will not be allowed to obtain their credentials.

As importantly, these demands alter the personal identifications of the participants. Professional training operates like a rite of passage. The pain and effort required to succeed do more than mobilize energies; they change the way people think about themselves. The result is something like learning how to drive. Before a neophyte gets behind the wheel, there tend to be doubts about whether managing so powerful a machine is possible. However, after being on a road a while, and perhaps having a few close calls, the student begins to feel like a driver. With teenagers, once this occurs, they start to think of themselves as adults. They have joined the ranks of those deemed responsible enough to control an automobile. With doctors and lawyers, graduating and obtaining a license create a similar transformation. They now begin to think of themselves as members of these fraternities and consequently as worthy of the authority attaching to them. Having gone through a baptism of fire, they conclude that they deserve the prerogatives that go with their new status. It is not merely that society has conferred this upon them; they confer it upon themselves, and along with it the intension to live up to its obligations. Even more than new drivers, who are now committed to following the rules of the road; to making the canons of their profession their own.

But the constraints on professionals do not end there. Once they have entered their respective fields, they find themselves embedded a community of related professionals. A newly minted physician learns that he/she is surrounded by other physicians who now regard him as a peer and who therefore expect him to live up to
professional standards. Sloppiness or indolence are regarded as “unprofessional” and hence are frowned upon. Other doctors do not operate as supervisors, but as respected, if critical, colleagues. Their opinions are accorded weight because they are best situated to evaluate medical competence. Moreover, fledgling physicians want to be regarded as capable. Having endured years of travail, it would make little sense to throw this status away for a momentary lapse. Beyond this, entering a community of professionals entails socializing with them and undergoing additional training in their company. There are conferences to attend, medical journals to read, and clinical meetings in which to participate. Forgetting that one is a physician (or lawyer) is difficult to do. The role is woven into the fabric of one’s daily life and demands a continuous application of effort. To do less would sacrifice one’s reputation for expertise, along with it the authority that is accorded the uniquely proficient.

Although few others in our society attain the exalted positions of doctors and lawyers, and therefore do not have as much to lose, the traditional professionals have laid down a marker to which others aspire. Their levels of expertise and personal dedication have become the model for those who wish to achieve comparable levels of authority. The extent of their own ability or training may not be as great, or their immersion in a professional community as deep, but they find themselves moving along an analogous pathway. They too are becoming more expert and internally motivated. They too endured a demanding preparation for their responsibilities. As a result, their attitudes also undergo a transformation. No longer are they content simply to follow orders. They too want to be worthy of social power.
The New Professionals

Some years ago, let us not be concerned with how many, I began my occupational career by working a summer for the New York City department of welfare. My job was to visit clients in their homes to determine if they had spent their welfare allowances wisely. This entailed reviewing their rent and utility receipts, and inquiring about how they were doing. On one of my excursions I found myself sitting across the kitchen table from a woman in her mid-thirties. Barely into my twenties, and the product of a sheltered upbringing, I was taken aback when she changed the subject and began talking about her sex life. After apprising me of particulars I didn’t really want to know, she paused, and looking me straight in the eye, asked if I didn’t understand that a woman had needs. In truth, I did not. For a moment, which to me seemed like an eternity, I sat dumbfounded. What was I supposed to say? Nothing came to mind. Instead I babbled something totally inappropriate, then sought as expeditious an exit as I could. This, no doubt, was what she intended. She probably realized how inexperienced I was and took advantage of my discomfort to protect private matters.

During this, my first venture as a caring professional, I was obviously anything but professional. I did not possess the expertise to know what I was doing or the dedication to persevere despite my distress. Years later, when I found myself serving as a counselor at a psychiatric hospital, things were different. This time I was not only older, but I had almost competed the requirements for a doctorate in sociology. More knowledgeable about the world and in better control of my emotions, I was certain could perform more adequately. And while this was confirmed in practice, I was in for some discomfiting surprises. For starters, it did not take long before my clients began sharing
their most intimate secrets. Once they discovered that I was trustworthy, many were
eager to unburden themselves of private information that had been tearing at their souls.
This time I listened and did not run away. I understood that it helped them to have
someone with whom to share their sufferings. Nevertheless, I wanted to do more. I
assumed that my job was to assist them in overcoming their troubles. It was, therefore,
disconcerting when a client imploringly looked at me to ask what he or she should do.
Most of the time I had no idea. Unlike Dr. Phil, I realized that I did not know enough
about their situations to presume to know. Still something had to be said.

What was worst about these moments was that there was nowhere to turn for
advice. Yes, I might afterwards talk about what happened with my fellow counselors or a
supervisor, but it soon became apparent that they knew less about a particular patient’s
situation than me. I could also read books about particular diagnoses or therapeutic
strategies, but these too turned out to be imperfect. Together these permitted me hone my
skills, but they were no substitute for on-the-spot guidance. Like it or not, when I was in
my office alone with a client, the two of us were truly alone. The door was closed, nor
were we not being observed from behind a two-way mirror. It was just the client and me,
and I had to make on-the-spot decisions. No one was whispering in my ear—except me.
If I did not know what I was doing, there was no one to give me useful directives on how
to proceed. Nor could there be. The realities of counseling are such that privacy is
essential if trust is to develop. As a consequence, a counselor must possess the expertise
to carry on and the self-confidence to do so despite inevitable uncertainties. When that
little voice in one’s head says, “What do I do now?” there needs to be an answer.
Counseling is representative of the new professionalism. While some of its practitioners are akin to traditional specialists, and others are less so, most exercise independent discretion. Psychiatrists and Ph.D. psychologists clearly receive years of preparation for their tasks, although most social workers and vocational counselors are not as well prepared. While many social workers obtain masters degrees, others halt at a bachelor’s degree. Nor are the requirements for their credentials as rigorous. Social work students are not so much noted for their intellects as their do-gooder mentalities. Once upon a time this was sufficient. Good intentions were thought to be enough to help people cope with personal problems. Even today, a desire to help is the *sine qua non* of a therapeutic relationship. A positive attitude remains the foundation of interpersonal trust. Yet nowadays something more is needed. Would-be counselors must be familiar with the backgrounds and symptoms of a wide range of clients. If they are to assist in fixing what is wrong, they must understand both etiology of a host of disorders and the range of a myriad of potential solutions. Those who do not possess this knowledge find themselves reduced to naïve moralism. When asked what to do, they enforce what they believe morally correct. Left to these inadequate devices, they have no choice but to pursue goals inculcated when they were children.

Professionalism has thus become more necessary for the “helping professionals.” Nor is it an accident that they have taken to applying this honorific appellation to themselves. To be sure, not all have moved as far in this direction as the traditional professionals, but the trajectory is clear. In a world full of strangers, they have discovered that they cannot rely on untutored instincts; that these alone leave them high and dry when confronted with novel difficulties. The result is that they too seek expand
their knowledge and to develop the maturity to apply it responsibly. Nor are they alone in this. Many other tasks now require an expertise and personal dedication unknown in former times. Sociologists frequently refer to the occupations so affected as semi-proessions in that they do not demand as much training or commitment as the established professions. This does not mean, however, that they are without significant mandates. Occupations such as those in criminal justice or nursing are far more rigorous than they once were. Each entails on-the-spot decision-making that cannot be performed without considerable preparation. Moreover, those who engage in them understand full well that they cannot attain further prestige or autonomy without professionalizing.

Let us contemplate the situation within the criminal justice system. When police forces were first being organized a century and a half ago, the concern was to hire men large enough to overpower street hooligans. In New York City those selected were sometimes referred to as “Irish giants.” Dressed in identifiable uniforms and suitably armed with a nightstick, it was generally enough that they were not felons. The original police officers knew little about the law and less about criminal investigations. Indeed, techniques such as fingerprinting had yet to be invented. It took private companies, such as the Pinkertons, to pioneer something as simple as criminal record keeping. Certainly no one conceived of sending police candidates to purpose-built police academies, much less to college programs in criminal justice. Most people were not even concerned with matters such as police brutality. It was sufficient that there be a thin blue line to intercede between the public and the criminals.

Many ordinary citizens assume that members of the police remain the next best thing to street thugs. They believe that those who join the force do so as an alternative to
becoming criminals. The ordinary cop is conceived of as an insensitive creature; in the
lingo of the 1960s, a “pig.” Many in uniform are thought to be intoxicated by power.
Given a little authority, they are eager abuse it by pushing civilians around. Only
recently has this image been belied by cameras mounted on the dashboards of police
vehicles. These consistently reveal that far from being sadistic bullies most officers are
amazingly self-controlled. Even when verbally abused by motorists who resent being
stopped for moving infractions, they maintain their self-discipline. They watch their
language, utilize moderate force, and despite massive provocations, do not return insults
in kind. Yet this did not surprise their peers. They understood that out-of-control
officers lose their positions. They eventually do something too egregious to be
overlooked.

Much of this self-restraint is developed through rigorous training. First, would-be
police officers must pass a meticulous screening. Their intelligence and emotional
maturity matter as much as their size. Afterwards they are instructed in policing
techniques. Along with this they are charged with being courteous, flexible, and tolerant
of social differences. They are also given to understand that promotions come more
quickly for those who pursue a higher education. Before long they realize that modern
policing is not about bang-bang, shoot-em-up confrontations. Consistent demands to be
firm, yet sensitive, together with on-going discussions about how to handle challenges,
result in individuals capable of making sound decisions, even under stress. Mostly on
patrol alone, or with a partner, they need to be able to supervise themselves, and they are.
All of the bad-mouthing to the contrary, it is remarkable how few incidents of police
abuse occur.
Other semi-professionals find themselves in similar circumstances. They too must self-supervise in high-tension situations where uncertainty is the norm. This is without doubt true for contemporary nurses. Where once nurses were a step above domestics, nowadays emptying bedpans is not one of their duties. On the other hand, administering complex medical tests, such as endoscopic examinations, is. Every day nurses are called upon to take blood pressure measurements or hook up cardiograph machines. In this, they must know what they are doing. Frequently called upon to allay the fears of a broad assortment of patients, they must maintain their concentration so that the information they obtain is correct. Panicking is absolutely not on the agenda. Nor is dithering about, especially in places like the operating room. Some nurses have even graduated into nurse practitioners, where for all-intents-and-purposes they function as junior physicians.

The demands on contemporary nurses are so intense that at my university prospective nursing students have among the best grade point averages of any of our students. Theirs is a no-nonsense curriculum, they must navigate almost as conscientiously as medical students. They are required to learn chemistry and biology in detail, then demonstrate their composure under stress while working on hospital wards. Sloughing off is not allowed. To do so at any point in the program results in dismissal. All of this, too be sure, is rigorously supervised by experienced nurses who often possess advanced degrees in their specialties. Yet in the end, the pupils are supposed to be capable of independent action. So valued is this that nurses resent close supervision by physicians. They insist upon an independent expertise and have lobbied state legislatures
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for the authority to prescribe medications. More and more this has been granted, as there
has been a growing realization they are capable of doing a good job.

So valuable has expertise and internal motivation become that even occupations
thought of as working class have succumbed to the blandishments of professionalization.
Thus, plumbing contractors have become more proficient in installing an extensive array
of complex equipment. They too must study their books if they wish to understand what
is expected of them. The same applies to exterminators. Where once they sprayed a
limited number of chemicals for a limited number of problems, they must now be capable
of diagnosing a larger number infestations, so as to administer the broad range of
correctives. They too read up about their business, in this case insects and their reaction
to various poisons. The goal once again is independent action. What is more, this trend
can be expected to increase as specializations proliferate and better-educated workers
pursue the right to supervise themselves.

Professionalized Selves

Consider how it once was. Not long ago the norm was for the factory worker to
be overseen by a foreman. Ordinary employees were thought to be inherently lazy and
therefore in need of close supervision. A person in authority would literally look over the
shoulder of the worker to determine if he/she was doing as instructed. At home the
average person was assumed to be equally dull. The normal business of life was believed
to be beyond the understanding of the ordinary person. He or she was consequently
embedded in an extended family or a religious community, where someone with superior
insights made the important decisions. This ensured that mistakes were avoided and the
community protected. Personal discretion and self-supervision were too dangerous to
permit. Because people were inherently selfish, and potentially violent, they had to be controlled for their own good.

How times have changed! Today people are not only thrown on their own devices; it is assumed that most of the time they will muddle through. What is not fully appreciated, however, is the extent of personal decision-making. Not only on the job, but also in their personal lives, more people exercise self-direction. They get to decide what to do and how to do it. This is so in determining with whom they will have relationships, how they organize their marriages, the techniques they use to raise their children, their political involvements, their religious affiliations, and their social lives. Where they will reside, how they entertain themselves, and whether they decide to undergo personal growth are likewise of their choosing. No one hands them a script or threatens them with ostracism if they do not conform in every particular.

Several decades ago, when the sociologist Melvin Kohn began investigating the values that parents favor in raising their children, he discovered that there was a striking gulf between upper middle class and working class parents. The former wanted their youngsters to be self-directed. They urged them to learn how and why things worked and to be considerate of others. The latter preferred conformity. They demanded that their offspring be obedient and neat and clean. The first group intended to inculcate flexibility and the knowledge to make decisions in uncertain circumstances, whereas the second was concerned with enforcing social order. Working class parents were more afraid of being disrespected by their children than that they would fail to learn the skills needed to exercise discretion.
Kohn went a bit further. In a series of surveys, many of which were international, he sought the roots of this divide. The answer turned out to be straightforward. Upper middle class parents were grooming their children for the sorts of work they themselves performed. Self-directed on their own jobs, they understood that the future success of their offspring depended on acquiring a similar orientation. They too needed to be professionalized if they were to obtain professional jobs. Since these occupations required expertise and internal motivation, these had to be established while they were young. Working class parents, in contrast, worked at jobs where discretion was in someone else’s hands. They were required to obey supervisory directives on pain of forfeiting their positions. While they did not enjoy hierarchical submergence, there was little they could do about it. Instead they carried their frustrations home. There they tolerated nothing similar. At home, they would be in charge; they would be the supervisors. This authority was not going to be relinquished to their offspring. Quite the opposite, the young were expected to obey. They would exhibit the kind of deference their parents were expected to exemplify on the job; even if this were coercively imposed. Working class children were also required to epitomize the symbols of social power. If their parents could not be their own bosses, then their brood would dress in a manner reminiscent of their supervisors.

These parents, in making their respective demands, reflected patterns originally picked up during their own childhoods. Upper middle class adults are generally raised by parents who stress values consistent with self-direction, whereas working class adults are surrounded by values consistent with conformity. Each thus passes along what was earlier internalized. Others, however, adopt practices derived from personal experience.
Since many professionals and middle managers begin life in the working class, it is in exercising authority that they learn the need for discretion. As supervisors, they alter their attitudes in the process of performing their jobs. Then they apply this approach to the task of childrearing. In other words, how they decide what was important for their children is derived from occupational lessons.

This is basically where Kohn stopped. His concern was with socialization, not other aspects of life. He therefore failed to appreciate the full extent of professionalization on the attitudes brought to these activities. People in the upper middle class grow accustomed to exercising discretion in more than one dimension. Self-directed at work, they anticipate self-direction in other venues. Thus, they expect to exercise control over their personal relationships, how they organize their marriages, the techniques used to raise their children, their political involvements, their religious affiliations, their social lives, where they reside, how they entertain themselves, and whether they will undergo personal growth. Confident in their ability to make expert decisions, they see no reason why they shouldn’t be able to choose which alternatives make them happy.

This is the essence of what it means to be a professionalized self. People who are internally motivated on the job desire something analogous at home. While they may not be conscious of what they are doing, they nevertheless pursue the kind of knowledge and emotional stability that allows them to make sensible decisions about whom to marry, the kinds of friends to choose, and so forth. Let us begin with the prospect of selecting a spouse. Where once families arranged marital alliances, today both men and women expect to decide this for themselves. In a world filled with millions of strangers, they
intend to find the right one for a permanent partnership. They recognize that this may be
difficult, but are confident that some day they will encounter a potential soul mate and
that the two will then proceed happily into the future. Many dimly realize that this is
romantic nonsense, but are loath to puncture an idealistic bubble. What they have yet to
apprehend is that choosing a spouse can be professionalized; that it is possible to become
expert in evaluating the suitability of potential partners.

Yet what needs to be understood about one’s personal life does not end here.
Once upon a time marriage was a foregone conclusion. Men and women were required
to enter matrimony if crucial needs were to be met. Today marriage is more voluntary.
Men do not need women to furnish household services; they can hire housekeepers for
this purpose. They can also eat out at restaurants. Similarly women do not need men to
bring home the bacon. They can go out and obtain good paying jobs on their own. Nor
must either gender submit to a lifelong commitment in order to engage in sex. Advances
in contraceptive technology have made it possible to achieve physical gratification
without worrying about unwanted pregnancies. Nevertheless both men and women
continue to crave intimate heterosexual relationships. They both desire a loving
association with someone they trust and with whom they can share their hopes and
dreams. This, however, entails a voluntary intimacy. The parties need to understand how
to be close to one another without causing injury. Since the two invariably differ in some
respects, they most possess the expertise to resolve their differences. They also require
the internal motivation to remain together while they iron these out. In other words, they
must become professionalized in establishing intimacy.
Expert discretion is likewise required for raising a family. More than an intention to inculcate self-direction in one’s youngsters is involved. It is necessary, for instance, to understand how children develop. Because they are capable of different tasks during different stages of their lives, these must be recognized if the demands made are to be appropriate. There is no sense, for example, in teaching a child about sex before he or she is prepared to understand it. By the same token, parents must be responsive to their youngsters. They have to be able to read their emotions and intervene in a manner that meets their needs. Unless they can separate their own requirements from those of their toddlers, they are apt to seek personal gratification through the lives of independent human beings.

On a less personal note are political decisions. Democratic institutions demand expert decision-making as much as do bourgeois marriages. If ordinary people are to contribute to their governance, they require citizenship skills. They must, among other things, care about the policies that govern their lives and be willing to participate in shaping them. Unless they possess the commitment and knowledge to act wisely, they are in danger of tyranny—or, more probably in a democratic society, demagoguery. Ambitious strangers are all too eager to dominate the personal lives of those unprepared to defend their freedoms. Civic responsibility does not come cheap. Those who would maintain control over their personal decisions must be alert to incursions and possess the courage to demand accountability of their leaders. They need to do this for themselves and those they care about.

Closely allied to a professionalized attitude toward politics is a readiness to participate in civic organizations. Ever since Alexis de Tocqueville toured the United
States to determine why it, and not France, had been able to create a stable democracy, it has been understood that Americans are joiners. Instead of waiting for a centralized government to cure all their ills, they band together to tackle difficult tasks. They form their own churches, run local school boards, organize chambers of commerce, establish industrial unions, sign up for bowling leagues, and choose the novels they read in book clubs. No one orders them to do these things; they do them because they have mutual objectives they are determined to achieve. In addition, as Robert Putnam has suggested, these public-spirited initiatives produce a bonus. They provide practice in just the sorts of skill necessary to sustain a democracy. Groups of strong-willed, self-directed, individuals learn how to coordinate their efforts, and, when necessary, make compromises. They recognize that multi-party negotiations, not non-negotiable-demands, generate the best results.

All of this devotion to personal discretion implies the flexibility to adjust to changing circumstances. Those who would achieve professionalized selves must be able to modify what they do, or believe, as the situation dictates. This means that they must be personally supple. Instead of being stuck in the ways they have always done things, they have to acquire new knowledge and act upon this as the need arises. Unfortunately, how individuals are raised can prevent this. When brought up in coercive environments, people become trapped in rigid social roles. Social roles are ordinarily conservative, that is, they are difficult to change, but under the wrong circumstances they become so ossified that elasticity is impossible. Those who have been bludgeoned into playing a particular part internalize fears and resentments that interfere with making adjustments. As a result, they recycle ineffective behaviors, despite copious instances of failure. In
short, they become neurotic. Once enmeshed in dysfunction, if they want better, they must be prepared for personal growth. They must learn how to relinquish unproductive templates so as to adopt more constructive ones. Unless they do, they are doomed to repeat unprofessional roles irrespective of their most cherished desires.

Yet personal growth also requires a professionalized attitude. Those who hope to let go of dysfunctional patterns must be expert on how change occurs and personally committed to engaging in it. They have to understand that growth occurs through a process called resocialization. Resocialization is comparable to grieving a significant loss. Dysfunctional roles are indeed losses. They are misplaced opportunities. As a result, personal change can be painful. It hurts to be sad and fearful. In order to get through it a person must be dedicated to overcoming what went wrong. This internal motivation, and not a medicalized treatment program, is essential for success. Unless someone perceives him/herself as a locus of control, he/she is destined to be a pawn of fate.

What makes it especially problematical to achieve a professionalized self is that there is no official mechanism for doing so. There are no medical or law schools dedicated to inculcating the necessary expertise. There are no police academies or nursing programs committed to instilling the requisite motivation. Colleges and universities often claim to prepare students for life, but this is a vainglorious boast. The information they transmit tends to be beside the point when their graduates decide whom to marry, how to raise a family, or even how to participate in democratic institutions. Worse still, higher education suffers from a deficiency common to most formal education. Schools, in general, tend to be emotionally desolate. They force their students
to read books and pass examinations, which are often deadly dull. As a result, they rarely provide an affective rite of passage that transforms a person’s self-image. Graduates do not exit their precincts thinking of themselves as professionalized selves. Having never been officially trained to do so, or having undergone a searing reappraisal of their identities, they await the reality shock of a real job or enduring relationships to perform this magic. It is these locales that reorganize their internal agendas. It is these that teach them facts of life that are fraught with consequence.

One of the most serious obstacles to achieving a professionalized self is that it is rarely a conscious goal. An awareness of this necessity may be developing, but it is not yet part of our collective psyche. Neither parents, professors, political leaders, nor religious mentors articulate it as such. Quite the reverse, the ideologies that guide most people tend to denigrate professionalism. It is generally dismissed as part and parcel of an inhumane commercialism. Sadly, many academicians assume that professionalization is equivalent to a bloodless efficiency that is at odds with personal and social, happiness. Yet they are wrong. A true professionalism embraces our humanity. If anything, it amplifies it.

A Professionalized Society

With professionalism so casually dismissed, it is almost unimaginable that we are headed toward a professionalized society. Yet this is exactly what is happening. Far from transforming into a huge extended family or collection of mutually supportive villagers, most of us are becoming more like doctors and lawyers, both at work and in our private lives. More amazing still is that in doing so we are enhancing our personal freedoms and improving our chances of achieving significant goals. As the social
division of labor continues to proliferate, whether we intend it or not, we are bent on cultivating the professionalized roles that enable us to perform extremely complex tasks. With more of us than ever becoming expert at what we do, and doing this without external prompting, what needs doing gets done more effectively. A majority of us are indeed becoming self-directed, self-supervising participants within the greater whole from which we derive our sustenance.

The secret of this evolution is that professionalized roles evolve to interlock with one another. They allow people to coordinate their efforts without external supervision because their separate motives encourage them to perform tasks developed so as to coordinate with one another. Put another way, their respective specializations are handed down from one generation to the next because on-going social negotiations continuously adjust them to fit together. Thus, physicians learn medical skills and professional ethics from a preceding generation of physicians such that these accord with the needs of their patients. Moreover, these skills and ethics are also modified via their interaction with own patients and with contemporary researchers. This enables improvements to be passed along to the next cohort of physicians. The same pertains to professionalized selves in that the discoveries of the parent generation are deeded to the younger generation, where they are further enhanced by discoveries made under emerging circumstances. Marriage, for instance, benefits both from rules of thumb handed down from historic experience and from recent findings about how intimacy operates.

Professionalized roles, because they are socially negotiated, can create social solidarity in a mass commercialized society. People do not require coercive hierarchies in order to develop coordination. Indeed, the larger the society the more coercive the
control that would otherwise be required to achieve cooperation. Fortunately, an expansion of professionalism achieves better results with more freedom. In allowing individuals discretion over activities where they possess a unique expertise, they get to make choices without external interference, while the larger social entity benefits from tasks executed more effectively. This is the paradox of social integration produced via decentralization. Certainly one method for eliciting cooperation is to appoint a supervisor empowered to command teamwork. Yet it is also possible to cooperate if separate tasks are perceived as requiring integration. In this case, they voluntarily do what the group requires because they independently recognize its value. Those trained to be role partners gain the further advantage of flexibility. Because they do not have to await instructions from above, they can apply their separate intelligences to a joint project. They literally talk things over to decide what will work best for each.

A professionalized, market-oriented society must, therefore, be decentralized. Middle class to the core, it is permeated by billions of power centers, each of which contributes unique pieces of information that no centralized authority could match. Not only is decentralized social solidarity possible, but it is more functional the larger and more complicated a society becomes. Because it is composed of finely attuned roles that are flexibly interrelated, it is inherently smarter and more responsive. Personal freedom is an extra; it is an unanticipated windfall derived from this interdependence. Where it was once thought that larger organizations necessitated a firmer control from above, it turns out that millions of individuals can be trusted to work together, assuming they have internalized the resources to do so. As long as they have been suitably professionalized, they can be liberated to supervise themselves.
This sort of professionalized decentralization occurs in a variety of domains. Certainly it functions well on an economic plane. The implosion of the Soviet Union provided an object lesson on the limitations of centralized planning. Its arthritic commissars routinely assumed insights they could not validate. Meanwhile, the American free market has been able to bounce back from near collapse to lead the way into the information age. Marxist carping aside, it is a model of what decentralized occupational professionalism can achieve. Nowhere else has the education of a self-motivated work force proceeded so expeditiously. Nowhere else have so many benefited from college based training. This form of preparation, despite its limitations, teaches both vocational skills and the cosmopolitanism of the liberal arts. Although there are justified complaints about the loss of lifelong employment as once paternalistic corporations become fixated on increasing their profits, there are also the benefits of flexibility in adjusting employment to the latest technological developments. What gets produced tends to be what gets sold, with the added fillip that most people participate in the ensuing prosperity.

A professionalized decentralization also produces benefits in the political domain. That’s what democracy is about. Nowadays most people recognize the utility of tolerance and diversity. They realize that others, whatever their ethnic, religious or racial backgrounds, deserve the right to self-determination. All are regarded as equal moral agents with as much right to contribute to government policies. What was not initially anticipated was that “empowerment” would be advantageous for the community at large. Nevertheless, in broadening political participation, we have received unforeseen inputs. Subcultures that were once dismissed as un-American have provided insights—not to
mention cuisines—to expand collective understandings. An artificial uniformity—formerly exemplified in state sponsored religions—has been discovered to be unnecessary for social solidarity. People can celebrate their distinctiveness and still collaborate on joint ventures.

On a personal level, professionalized decentralization has fostered a need for personal growth. Far from turning people into the standardized robots of science fiction, the expansion of techno-commercial societies has made more room for individualism. Nowadays people are even allowed to dye their hair green. They can also engage in what has been called self-actualization. With economic prosperity and political freedom has come the space to explore our innermost differences. Professionalized selves might at first blush seem to imply greater homogeneity, but the opposite is true. In order to develop the expertise and internalized motivation needed to navigate a complex social environment, it have been necessary for individuals to learn more about themselves. They have had to explore their idiosyncrasies and come to terms with their limitations.

To compound this paradox, in looking inward they have been able to sharpen their perceptions of others. Ironically, introspection has precipitated a better appreciation of personal differences. This in turn has facilitated advances in interpersonal relationships. Not only has reflexivity fostered tolerance, but is has paved the way for more stable marriages. This may sound naïve given the explosive increase in divorce, but a closer examination of the statistics reveals that the rise in marital instability has been reversed. People are beginning to understand that interpersonal intimacy must be cultivated; that, in order to flourish, it must be worked at. This development has, to be sure, been slow in coming, nevertheless if the trend can be sustained, professionalized decentralization may
pay off in more emotionally satisfying relationships; relationships grounded in voluntary choice, rather than economic or moral necessity.

A professionalized society will unquestionably require a further investment in interpersonal trust. As people become more competent in their areas of expertise, the way they interact will have to be regulated by moral standards appropriate to their emerging concerns. While internalized roles and point-specific negotiations will do much to harmonize their actions, broadly shared rules of the game remain necessary to prevent them from stepping on one another’s toes. Values regarding honesty, responsibility, and family stability must serve as guideposts to provide generalized attitudes that can be brought to bear on otherwise undefined situations. These allow people to predict one another’s actions even when they are not fully apprised of their respective roles. As a result, appropriate moral rules foster interpersonal confidence despite mutual anonymity. In addition, these rules facilitate negotiations between role players. By apprising them of what is fair or foul, they reduce individual fears of being cheated.

A professionalized society is no panacea, but it is a huge improvement over other options. Human beings, being human, are plagued by irreducible limitations, including a propensity to deceive and manipulate one another. They are also prone to errors; many of which are outlandish. As a result, upgrading their expertise and internal motivation can only go so far. It cannot produce miracles. Nevertheless improvements are improvements. The human condition cannot be perfected, but a more smoothly functioning version of our mass techno-commercial society can be achieved.
The Culture Wars

Oddly the most hotly contested proposals for improving our situation are diametrically opposed to professionalization. Sometimes it seems as if the culture wars into which we have blundered produce nothing save gridlock. Liberals and conservatives, each girded for battle, are determined to obliterate the other, but have so far only proved capable of thwarting each other’s efforts. Sad to say, they have also erected roadblocks toward professionalization. Rather than promoting the self-direction essential for advancing personal expertise and internalized motivation, each side, in its own way, fosters conformity. While few of the adversaries intentionally desire this, and almost none recognize the similarity in their strategies, they have been frozen into reactionary dreams by a shared dread of where society is moving. Despite proclamations of progress, both are determined to restore idealized versions of where they think we should already have arrived.

To begin with, both liberals and conservatives, or at least their more radical factions, have been traumatized by the middle class revolution. Unbeknownst to them, they have been deeply unsettled by its demands. Never before have so many people been responsible for making independent decisions. Because discretionary leadership has proliferated, more of us are in a position to make mistakes, some of which can be serious. This prospect has left some participants appalled by the potential responsibilities. They would rather return to more predictable times. Transfixed by presumed answers to their doubts, they clamor for a final solution. The problem, of course, is that liberals and conservatives have very different conceptions of what this may be. Each side is
absolutely convinced of the validity of its vision, whereas neither imagines that it is marching resolutely into an increasingly irrelevant past.

To be more specific, radical liberals are convinced of the efficacy of government based solutions. Given the power, they would centralize services further than they have been. Virtually any time a problem is identified—and they have made a cottage industry of identifying new problems—they recommend a federal program or additional federal regulations. Thus, should teenage pregnancy rise, they propose a federal agency to facilitate sex education, or should the homeless begin living in cardboard boxes, they suggest additional funding for public housing. Then too, if political correctness is flouted, they clamor for hate crime legislation. Only the full weight of the central government is thought sufficient to intimidate conservative Neanderthals into retreating from the public stage. Liberals also favor of stiffer regulations for business, for example, in hiring practices. Affirmative action is but one of the interventions of which they approve.

What is strange about radical liberalism is that it is antithetical to self-direction. So-called progressives don’t seem to trust ordinary people to make competent decisions. Convinced of the superiority of their own credentials, they are determined to save others from themselves. Thus, they wish to maintain control over social security, health care, and energy policies. But this, in essence, constitutes a professionalism-be-damned attitude. It is a call for a super-professionalism as supervised by philosopher kings. Secretly they assume this must place them place in charge. Individual expertise, save their own, is not encouraged; nor is the boldness to be internally motivated. The common people are expected to conform so that their idiosyncrasies do not interfere with the plans
of their protectors. This, somehow, is supposed to represent the apotheosis of informed modernity. In reality, it is an updated version of early modern absolutism. It is the reincarnation of the Sun King as animated by a select cadre of college-educated intellectuals.

Alas, radical conservatives are little better. They too demand conformity—with the caveat that this is to a different set of standards. Their centralized authority tends to be theocratic. Convinced that moral standards have been abrogated by modern secularism, they would reinstate a respect for tradition. In their idealized world everyone will be able to leave their front doors unlocked because all will defer to ancient regulations laid down by the omnipotent deity who created them. The most radical traditionalists insist on a reflexive fundamentalism. According to them, everything human beings need to know is available in the Bible. As the literal word of God, it can never be contravened and therefore should never be contradicted. The eternal father of us all, having provided a blueprint for salvation, requires no less than perfect obedience.

Yet this sort of compliance is the antithesis of self-direction. It does not ask people to be confident in their skills or to work at developing them. Nor does it celebrate free will, even though it claims people have the ability to make independent decisions. Individuals can decide, but they are supposed to do so in a predetermined direction. Very much like radical liberals, they assume that externally imposed regulations can cover every contingency. Personal discretion is relegated to a miniaturized space of mostly trivial issues, for example, what flavor of ice cream to order.

Clearly neither radical liberals nor radical conservatives appreciate the complexities of a mass techno-commercial society. Both exhibit the hubris to suppose
that they can provide all of the important answers. Neither allows for the plethora of surprises that technical innovations and social diversity throw up. Nor do they possess confidence in the individual ability of ordinary human beings to grow into competent decision-makers. If they are correct, then a professionalized society is not feasible. If they are correct, then our Gesellschaft world is destined to solidify into a modern version of Roman decadence. Ancient Rome, once the Pax Romana was under assault, sought safety by regulating ordinary life in order to preserve the empire’s previous glory. The effect, however, was exactly opposite. Instead of providing the resources to defend the borders, flexibility was banished from the scene. As a result, the economy collapsed, along with public order. Soon neither the will nor the tools were available to keep the Goths, and then the Huns, from knocking at the capital’s once proud city walls. An updated version of this rigidity is apt to have as grievous an impact. A modern failure to trust in decentralized decision-making will also throttle our ability to make essential adjustments. If so, instead of liberals or conservatives reviving fairness and intelligence, both will usher in a renewed dark age. A professionalized society implies a leap of faith, but the alternative is a narrow, defensive retreat into a counterfeit promise of safety and happiness.

This is not to say that all of the mechanisms that once held society together will disappear. Social roles may provide the adhesive necessary for mass cohesion; nevertheless the stronger social forces will continue to contribute essential elements to our future. Social hierarchies, for instance, are not going out of style any time soon. However dominant social role based forms of organization become, human beings will continue to rank themselves relative to one another. This means that there will always be
Professionalization

winners and losers. A proliferation of expert roles may soften the blow of coming in second, but will never make this feel good. Moreover, although the decentralization facilitated by professionalization provides crucial social flexibility, centralization is required in many circumstances. Whenever central coordination or uniformity is mandatory, there is no substitute for imperative synchronization. When large numbers of people have to follow the same plan in order for it to work, there must be a superior authority with the power to decide. This person, or small group of persons, must be invested with the legitimacy to chart a common course and enforce it. If not, multi-million person armies could not coordinate their attacks and multi-billion dollar corporations could not produce a coherent product line. In neither case can subordinate individuals be allowed to wander off the reservation with impunity.

In fact, social roles and social hierarchies inevitably intersect. Moreover, each must be accorded precedence where it best suits communal needs. Neither can be absolute, nor is it always be certain which is most appropriate. When the need for flexibility and responsiveness is critical, roles should prevail. Likewise when coordination and uniformity are paramount, hierarchy should take primacy. Which is which is an empirical matter. Experience and pragmatism must decide. This, of course, means that flexibility is needed to determine if flexibility is more important than synchronization. Once more uncertainty rears its ugly head, but that is the price we pay for complexity and mass organization.

So too is the unfairness of social class. That some people enjoy privileges others do not is unjust. No one’s moral worth is inherently greater than anyone else’s; hence no one innately deserves greater respect. Victory in tests of strength, or the manipulation of
symbolic victories, should not be confused with inherent virtue. There is a plane on which all human beings are equal. Surely the happiness of no individual is more valuable than that of any other. Nevertheless social class introduces a simulation of moral superiority. Those in the upper classes generally conclude that they deserve better, whereas those in the lower orders suspect that they have earned their misfortune. For better or worse, this too is part of our social nature and destined to be part of our future. The best that can be said of social class is that it is better than the alternatives. Despite a continuation of relative deprivation, by permitting social mobility, it at least allows for adjustments that produce an approximation of justice. Furthermore, in permitting an expansion of the middle classes, it facilitates the growth of professionalism. Specialized expertise and internal motivation are thereby sanctioned, with the effect that freedom, competence, and prosperity are promoted. This is not perfect, but it is not bad.
Chapter 5

The Economic Imperative

A Commercial World

Nowadays there seems to be a market for everything. It was not so many years ago that no one ever heard of Kiwi fruit. Now these prickly little globes can be purchased at most supermarkets. But this is not all. Today thousands of customers troop past scores of shelves groaning with products their grandparents could scarcely have imagined. Not just foods, but merchandise of every shape and description is on sale.

Once Ivory soap was the height of extravagant modernity. Prepackaged, and gleaming white, magazines and radio programs boasted that it was ninety-nine and forty-four one hundredths per cent pure. What was more, it floated. No longer would the housewife have to struggle with concocting the slimy, gritty substance she was formerly required to manufacture before commencing the rigors of laundry day. No longer would she have to save animal fats to be mixed with lye to create what was optimistically called soap. She could instead saunter down a grocery aisle to find what was needed. All she had to do was pick it up, pay for it, and transport it home. Nowadays, of course, she will find an aisle, perhaps almost the length of a football field, bordered on both sides by more brands of soap and detergent than she can keep straight. Whatever the cleaning task, there is a product dedicated to it.

Should today’s shopper wander a bit further, she will find herself on the cereal aisle. Before the Kellogg brothers invented corn flakes a mere century ago, there would have been nothing comparable for her to purchase anywhere. Afterwards, dozens of manufacturers hastened to invent, and package, a myriad of breakfast concoctions that
they assured the public were healthier and tastier than the original. As of now, the choice has grown into hundreds of products, with new ones coming onto the market nearly every month. Should the shopper exit the supermarket and head for the local Home Depot, she/he will enter a cavernous space with shelves so high that they can only be accessed by ladder. Looking down from these, almost every kind of home improvement supply will beckon the do-it-yourselfer or professional contractor. Lumber, screws, small appliances, potted plants, and artificial Christmas trees abound. Once more, all that is necessary is to locate what is desired, place it on a shopping dolly, walk it past the checkout computer so that one can run one’s credit card through a self-service contraption, and then (perhaps with some assistance from the staff) load it into one’s vehicle for the trip home.

Somewhere or other the determined customer will be able to identify an outlet that sells whatever product is required. Whether this retailer is found in the central city, a suburban strip mall, or a massive indoor shopping center, it will supply the conventional goods needed for everyday living, plus a profusion of exotic artifacts for which the shopper may have been longing. There is almost nothing that our market-oriented economy cannot provide. If what is desired is not part of a merchant’s current inventory, he/she will cheerfully order it. Moreover, if it is not available through brick and mortar stores, there is a good chance it can be found on the Internet, from whence it can be delivered by a parcel service. Bizarre pets, one-of-a-kind objects-d’art, foreign cheeses, Hawaiian–style pizzas, birthday teddy bears, singing telegrams, escort services, personal trainers, computer geeks, as well as ordinary groceries can all be had at the touch of a button. For the more adventurous it is possible to go out to restaurants that purvey any
kind of food one can imagine, to trundle into confectioner shops doing chocolates to order, to call up helicopter services that deliver one to the top of a mountain from which one can ski down, and to locate publishers that print vanity manuscripts in personalized bindings. Most of this, though unavailable a century ago, has become commonplace.

In fact, modern Americans have become utterly dependent upon this cornucopia of goods and services. The greater part of what we need to survive comes to us by way of trade. Few people grow their own food. Most purchase not only Kiwi fruits, but sweet onions, ugly tomatoes, Georgia peaches, pre-packaged chicken parts, black olive hummus, frozen pizzas, reasonably fresh veal steaks, shrimp egg rolls, sliced corned beef, sesame seed bagels, salmon cream cheese, Heath bar frozen yogurt, TV dinners, mayonnaise in wide mouth jars, New York style potato salad, and carbonated ginger ale. Some hardy souls still take pleasure in raising their own tomatoes and zucchinis, and a few others revel in catching their own trout, yet almost no one, except farmers, keeps a cow in the backyard for milk or a pig being fattened to provide a Thanksgiving ham. Fewer still build their own houses, manufacture flat screen televisions, pilot cruise ships through the Caribbean, or design personalized automobiles. Furthermore, not many do some things they could if they desired. They could, for instance, change their own oil, but most choose to pay someone else to do this. They could cook their own lasagna, but most find this too much trouble. Instead, all sorts of service providers come to the rescue. There are vendors that paint our houses, clean their interiors, sing us songs, teach us how to swing a golf club, file our taxes, collect our garbage, mow our lawns, program our computers, supervise our children, and clean our teeth.
The extent of these products and services might have embarrassed an ancient potentate, but we take them in stride. Ordinary working-stiffs find nothing strange in going out on a Saturday night to be fawned over by waiters, busboys, and sommeliers. They take it for granted that they can drink a French wine of superior quality to that which a medieval monarch could have quaffed. Nor do they bat an eye when on garbage day they wheel out a huge plastic trash cart filled to the gunnels with tattered packaging materials, unconsumed tidbits of food, and barely perused magazines. For them, there is nothing unusual about participating in a throwaway society. So affluent have they become that when something is broken, they do not attempt to repair it; they simply toss it out and purchase a replacement. When I was a boy I used to watch my mother as she spent hours patiently darning the holes in the family socks. Stitch by stitch she would weave the patches that allowed these foot coverings to continue in service. Today, most youngsters do not even understand what the word “darning” means. Stockings have become so inexpensive that they cannot conceive of taking the trouble to salvage them.

Those who curse capitalism do not realize how dependent they have become on the products made available by a comprehensive marketplace. Rather, they condemn materialism run riot and recommend a return to the simple life. Some would have us go into the backwoods to dwell in log cabins so that we can subsist in harmony with nature. What is more, they assure us that if we do not, we will soon poison the environment upon which we depend. Although these Cassandras are utterly sincere, they do not seem to comprehend that if we did embrace this simpler life, we would not be around to appreciate the ecosystems thereby preserved. Were we, for instance, to abandon the technology that provides us with food, clothing, and shelter, we would soon be starving
to death by the billions. Beyond this, were we to discard the convoluted division of labor that enables us to generate, and distribute, the plethora of goods they disparage, we would shortly be dressed in tatters—and, most likely, engaged in a Hobbesian war to procure the few shreds still available.

Trade, and the means of furnishing the objects of trade, has become the central feature of our contemporary economic existence. Marxists, to be sure, have insisted that economics is the driving force of human history. They tell us that almost everything we do, including how we think, is determined by the way we earn a living. In this, they completely disregard the social imperatives that shape our relationships. They entirely ignore the hierarchical, social role, and relationship patterns that make us human. Nevertheless there are economic imperatives. How we earn a living, and who controls the means of production, do have a large impact. This being so, it matters a great deal that ours has become a commercialized world. Having become dependent upon the marketplace for almost all of our material needs, as well as the many luxury services we find so appealing, how this is achieved is not irrelevant. The role of trade in determining the kinds of labor we perform is extremely influential in shaping our personal lives. It also sets the stage for where our future is headed. Clearly, were we less dependent upon commerce, we would not have to fret about keeping the wheels of trade in good repair. Were we less reliant upon competition and innovation, we would not need to work as hard at developing the expertise and internal motivation necessary for these to keep going.

A commercialized world is inherently both people and technology intensive. Worldwide trade, which is to say, massive trade at a distance, requires interpersonal skills
foreign to peasant farmers. The individuals with whom medieval serfs interacted were circumscribed, as were the sorts of errors to which they were prone. Similarly, the kind of coordination required when working behind a plow was of a different magnitude than that of a modern manufacturing plant. Getting thousands of items into place on an automobile assembly line is far more demanding that prodding a team of oxen to trudge forward. Being a peasant farmer is hard work, but it is not nearly as mentally taxing as scheduling the supply system of a corporate behemoth. The demands of working with people and data entail levels of knowledge no medieval serf could contemplate. However innovative they were, the details of crop rotation were simply not on a par with the cultural heritage of a diverse workforce. Occupations dealing with both strangers and complex information necessitate a mental and emotional flexibility that subsistence farming does not. Human beings can be so unpredictable, and technology so balky, that those prepared only to cope with the vicissitudes of traditional agricultural implements would be hard pressed to keep up.

In a commercialized world, professionalism becomes de rigueur. With anonymous persons inhabiting every nook in the workplace, and with discretion required of producers and customers alike, an ability to make multifaceted decisions is paramount. Mass societies demand supple responsiveness. Those who only know how to interact with others exactly like themselves are tempted to force everyone into a Procrustean bed. Because they cannot understand personal differences, or react appropriately to them, they would chop off heads and feet so as to produce a false uniformity. As may be imagined, this is not the best way to influence people. Treating everyone the same is tantamount to disrespecting their individuality and is almost guaranteed to be offensive. By the same
token, technologically sophisticated societies demand finely tuned judgments. Customers confronted with a wealth of choices must be able to determine which will meet their needs. They must be able to distinguish between a genuine Rolex and street-level knockoff. Likewise, producers confronted with competing business plans must be able to decide which will be most profitable. Then when things go wrong, as they invariably do, they must know where to turn for relief. Those solely dependent upon customary rules of thumb get tangled up in their own lack of sophistication.

There is also the small matter of organizational politics. The larger and more commercialized a society, the bigger the units that must be coordinated. This ensures that there will be battalions of ambitious individuals competing for the privilege of making significant decisions. Each of these will be eager to create, and manipulate, the coalitions that exercise power. But this too takes expertise. Successful participants need to understand each other’s motivations and appreciate the effects of symbols. Moreover, much as on a military battlefield, the skills required to emerge intact from corporate struggles are subject to the fog of war. Once the competition begins, the contestants will find it difficult to discern what is happening. Promises are made and broken, alliances shift, and novel tactics are invented. In order to win, an individual must possess the equanimity to remain afloat in a sea of uncertainty and the ability to adjust to unexpected developments. To put the matter simply, those who would be successful in organizational politics must be professionalized in these transactions. Managerial skills, not merely technical ones, are imperative in a complex commercial environment.
The Division of Labor

So complex has our techno-commercial world become that the resultant division of labor has been sub-divided into specializations so fine as almost to defy comprehension. The sorts of jobs have multiplied to such an extent that it is difficult to keep track. Moreover, many of these roles have become so demanding, that a larger proportion have become professionalized. The economic imperative, which is to say, the manner in which we work, can only be appreciated by recognizing the impact of these professionalized tasks. Standard economic analyses tend to emphasize the parts played by wealth, ownership, or technology. No doubt the advent of an unprecedented affluence, widespread greed, and breathtaking scientific breakthroughs have shaped contemporary world-views, but these leave out important social imperatives. The professionalized roles sculpted to meet market demands have an independent impact on how we cope. They too determine how we think, with whom we associate, and what will make our lives more satisfying.

In becoming professionalized, our roles have transformed both us and the products that we produce. As economic tasks have gone from working with things to manipulating people and data, the way people look at themselves and their work has been modified. Work can no longer be equated with transforming physical objects, nor labor identified with muscle power. The mental and emotional aspects of production have assumed too prominent a place. Nevertheless, our less substantial tasks can be ephemeral, almost as if they were disembodied. To cite a modest example of how we handle this quandry, the emerging Information Age often tempts us to treat information as if it were a thing. We frequently assume that data has a value independent of those
who utilize it. In fact, information does not speak for itself. It must be gathered, arranged, and interpreted by individuals skilled at working with symbols. Facts floating about in electronic circuits are, of themselves, as useful as letters on a page in an illiterate society. Someone must be available to decipher what appears on the screen, then apply it to real-world issues. Were no one capable of this, the information would be as insubstantial as the proverbial sound of a tree falling in an uninhabited forest.

The reader is now urged to take a deep breath, for what follows can be mind-boggling. To understand how universal professionalized occupational roles have become we need to peruse figures put out by U.S. Department of Labor and its Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Mandated to keep track of what is happening in the workplace, their specialists found it necessary to categorize the tasks performed by most Americans. They quickly discovered that no simple classification would do. Nevertheless they developed a compendium of overarching categories. These include: 1) management, 2) business and financial operations, 3) computers and mathematics, 4) architecture and engineering, 5) life, physical and social sciences, 6) community and social services, 7) legal activities, 8) education, training and library sciences, 9) arts, design, entertainment, sports and media, 10) healthcare practitioners and technicians, 11) healthcare support, 12) protective services, 13) food preparation and service, 14) building, grounds cleaning, and maintenance, 15) personal care and service, 16) sales, 17) office and administrative support, 18) farming, fishing and forestry, 19) construction and extraction, 20) installation, maintenance and repair, 21) production, and finally 22) transportation and material moving.
What is immediately clear from the above is how many of these categories refer to professional, management or service occupations. It is not until we get half way through the BLS list that traditional thing-oriented jobs appear. Occupations concerned with money, design, science, education, and health take the pride of place. Each of these, of course, concentrates on people and data. Most require extensive preparation that once mastered entails effort to manage. Virtually all rely on individual discretion. In order to perform these tasks, those assigned them must be capable of self-direction. To be competent, they need to understand, and care about, what they are doing. The complexities in finance, to mention one, are legion, while the responsibilities entailed in supervising money are noteworthy. Bankers and brokers who regard work as a matter of following orders are bound to be poor custodians of their client’s interests.

At the top of the BLS list are occupations that pertain to management. These specialize in higher-level supervision. In fact, almost all of the remaining categories include titles pertaining to management. Even direct line manufacturing includes the jobs of foremen. Over all, as corporations and government agencies grew, the number of people needed to coordinate activities multiplied. Organizations required not just owner/managers, but chief executives and middle managers. The sorts of activities that begged for direction varied from advertising to marketing, from public relations to human resources, from purchasing to real estate. Their leaders had to know how to work with people if they were to get the most out of them, but they also needed to be proficient in the technical aspects of their businesses. Supervisory tasks, in general, demand self-direction and expertise. As a result, they have become more professionalized by emphasizing credentials such as the MBA.
Closely aligned to management are employments in business and financial operations. These include business agents, buyers, claims adjusters, insurances appraisers, recruiters, benefits specialists, accountants, bankers, auditors, budget analysts, underwriters, and tax examiners. Obviously, these are not confined to clerks sitting on spindly stools wielding quill pens. Designated to make important decisions about what is spent, how this is recorded, and what is profitable, they are regarded as part of the administrative team. At present, experts in computer management are rapidly supplementing fiscal operatives. With computers assuming greater control over day-to-day transactions, programmers, database administrators, statisticians, and systems analysts have achieved prominence. Since it is often only they who understand how electronic organizers operate, they too are impelled to professionalize.

Next in the BLS compendium are architectural and engineering occupations. The list of these is impressive. It includes architects, landscape architects, cartographers, surveyors, aerospace engineers, agricultural engineers, biomedical engineers, chemical engineers, civil engineers, computer hardware engineers, electrical engineers, electronic engineers, environmental engineers, health safety engineers, industrial engineers, marine and naval engineers, materials engineers, mining and geological engineers, nuclear engineers, and petroleum engineers. Plainly what they do requires thought and accountability. So do more directly people oriented jobs such as those in the life, physical, social science, and social service occupations. As commercialization as pushed the technological bubble forward, the knowledge base underlying these grew more critical. Research and development became the tip of the modernization spear. The result has been that scientists of all sorts, including agronomists, biologists, biochemists,
microbiologists, zoologists, epidemiologists, astronomers, geographers, physicists, chemists, hydrologists, economists, psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists are today employed by commercial, academic, and governmental organizations. The embodiment of self-direction, they must be autonomous if they are to figure out what to ask, even before seeking solutions.

More pragmatic in orientation than basic scientists are those dedicated to social service. Substance abuse counselors, vocational counselors, marriage and family counselors, mental health counselors, rehabilitation counselors, and social workers of various stripes, including those oriented toward family, mental health, and school caseloads, deal directly with individuals in trouble. The answers they provide must, therefore, be tailored to the dilemmas of the moment. This means that they must be able to figure things out as they go.

De Tocqueville long ago suggested that stable commercialized relationships are contingent upon a legitimate legal system. He was correct in this observation in that the larger the marketplace the greater the need for dependable means of settling disputes between strangers. Besides attorneys; judges, hearings officers, arbitrators, mediators, paralegals, court reporters, and law clerks are all essential for engaging in criminal, corporate, or civil law. Indeed, the legal system specializes in emotional control. It is where people go when their own discipline breaks down. As such, its practitioners have to be unsurpassed at thinking on their feet. Then too, so must educators. When they appear before students, they must be familiar with what they aim to convey. Moreover, like lawyers, or, for that matter, marital counselors, they are typically unable to consult a colleague before they answer a question. They need, in short, to know their material and
to possess the confidence to deliver it. So voracious has the quest for knowledge become that, as of 2001, the BLS estimated there were over seven and a half million teachers and related occupations in the United States. These individuals teach business, computers science, mathematics, architecture, engineering, agricultural sciences, forestry, meteorology, chemistry, environmental sciences, physics, anthropology, philosophy, economics, social science, nursing, criminal justice, law, social work, English, foreign languages, and history. While many would be considered semi-professionals by sociologists, with each passing year they too become more professionalized.

Next down the line are jobs in the arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media. Not long ago, these would have been denied professional recognition. Their work may have been admired, but their genius was reckoned the kissing cousin of madness. Times have changed and now artists and entertainers also receive extensive training in the refinements of their undertakings. Painters, sculptors, illustrators, art directors, multi-media animators, commercial and industrial artists, fashion designers, floral designers, graphic designers, interior designers, merchandise displayers, and set designers must all possess an independent aesthetic judgment. The same applies to actors, producers, directors, dancers, choreographers, musicians, composers, and musical directors. Media people too come close to being entertainers, especially on-the-air personalities. Many of these, however, have more elevated ambitions. Whether they are reporters, correspondents, editors, writers, authors, or photographers, they claim the honorific of journalist. Styling themselves members of the “fourth estate,” they assert the privilege of soliciting, interpreting, and conveying the news; which, of course, also entails self-direction.
Nowadays outstripping educational occupations in membership are health related occupations. Today everything from the mumps to heart disease, from indigestion to polio, seems capable of a cure. Chiropractors, dentists, dieticians, nutritionists, optometrists, pharmacists, anesthesiologists, family and general practitioner, internists, obstetricians and gynecologists, pediatricians, psychiatrists, surgeons, physician assistants, registered nurses, audiologists, occupational therapists, radiation therapists, recreational therapists, respiratory therapists, speech-language pathologists, veterinarians, medical and clinical laboratory technologists, medical and clinical laboratory technicians, dental hygienists, cardiovascular technologists and technicians, nuclear medicine technologists, radiological technologists and technicians, emergency medical technicians and paramedics, dietetic technicians, pharmacy technicians, psychiatric technicians, respiratory therapy technicians, surgical technologists, veterinary technologists and technicians, licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses, medical records and health information technicians, dispensing opticians, occupational health specialists, and athletic trainers have entered the fray. So too have home health care aides, nursing aides, hospital orderlies, occupational therapy assistants, physical therapy assistants, massage therapists, dental assistants, pharmacy aides, and veterinary assistants. What is notable is that even many of these lower status occupations have been professionalizing. The levels of knowledge and training required of them have escalated. No longer merely jobs, they too have become careers.

As earlier remarked, this same phenomenon has asserted itself within the protective service occupations. Police officers, detectives, sheriffs, transit and railroad police, fire fighters, correctional officers, fish and game wardens, animal control workers,
private detectives, and even security guards have been impelled to professionalize. They are now expected to get better educations than their predecessors and to exercise self-control when on the job. Even low-level white-collar workers have been professionalizing. Account collectors, billing clerks, bank tellers, customer service representatives, eligibility interviewers, file clerks, loan interviewers, library assistants, human resource assistants, receptionists, police, fire, and ambulance dispatchers, meter readers, postal carriers, shipping and receiving clerks, stock clerks, executive secretaries, administrative assistants, legal secretaries, computer operators, insurance claims clerks, mail clerks, proofreaders, and statistical assistants are nowadays reckoned problem-solving positions. Far from being mindless robots tremulously fulfilling every request of their superiors, they make decisions involving a great deal of money and sometimes life and death. Often college educated, they have been upgrading their expertise in the expectation of greater responsibilities.

So far, most of these jobs are at least tangentially white-collar. Yet to be examined are the traditionally blue-collar occupations. Nevertheless, because these too have metastasized into thousands of sub-specialties, they have likewise been infected by the professionalization mania. Although largely still manual in nature, their practitioners no longer merely work with things. Now they too deal with data and people. The most central blue-collar occupations are those that entail production. By century’s end there were over twelve million of them, including supervisors and foremen. Nonetheless this represents a mere ten percent of all employment. What is more astonishing is the multitude of distinctions in what they do. Aircraft assemblers, coil winders, electronic equipment assemblers, structural metal fabricators, fiberglass laminators, team
assemblers (e.g., as on automobile assembly lines), timing device assemblers, calibrators, bakers, meat cutters, food roasting operators, food batch makers, numerical tool programmers, extruding machine setters, drilling machine operators, lathe tenders, machinists, metal pourers, tool and dye makers, welders, cutters, job printers, dry-cleaning operators, textile workers, sewing machine operators, dressmakers, knitting machine operators, and upholsterers are all enumerated by the BLS. Amazingly, so are furniture makers, woodworkers, nuclear power workers, waste treatment operators, chemical plant employees, boiler operators, jewelry occupations, dental technicians, etchers and engravers, and tire builders. Evidently, skill and conscientiousness are not confined to the traditional professions. Many of today’s production jobs take years to learn and pride to perform. Machinists, for instance, in order to achieve tolerances measured by micrometers, must possess a good eye, a superior mechanical aptitude, and a disciplined attention span.

The transportation and material moving occupations also encompass a hodgepodge of the simple and complicated, of the conformist and responsible. They embrace airline pilots, air traffic controllers, ambulance drivers, bus drivers, long distance truck drivers, light delivery drivers, taxi drivers, locomotive engineers, railroad conductors, sailors, marine oilers, parking lot attendants, service station attendants, conveyor operators and tenders, crane and tower operators, excavating and loading machine operators, industrial truck and tractor operators, hand laborers and freight and stock movers, hand packagers, and refuse collectors. Needless to say the distance between an airline pilot and a refuse collector is considerable. Yet even long haul truckers have increased their level of responsibility and remuneration. Given that they are accountable
for the safe operation of vehicles that have snowballed in sophistication, they cannot be “cowboys.”*

Lastly, construction workers can no longer be stereotyped as mere ditch diggers or hod carriers. Carpenters, masons, electricians, and plumbers are very nearly semi-professionals. The tools they wield, and the plans they are required to follow, are intricate and, therefore, obscure to the uninitiated. Road builders and heavy construction workers also employ machinery that cannot be mastered solely by sitting in a seat and turning a wheel. As for repair occupations, whether these are in telecommunications, avionics, automobile repair, air conditioning, or factory machinery, the very nature of this work enables their providers to control uncertainties. Other operations often cannot proceed without their intercession. But this too becomes a source of power. Because they can figure out what others cannot, they are able to regulate important activities. Consider plumbers. When a basement is flooded, the job of draining it is imperative. In most cases, a homeowner has no recourse but to rely on a plumber’s professional intervention. And, despite well-publicized lapses, for the most part they can. Most plumbers know what they are doing and do it without supervision.

Taken together, these developments should be an eye-opener. They indicate a quantum leap in the accountability of contemporary workers. Often left on their own to accomplish tasks upon which others depend, the very fact that our society lumbers along largely free of catastrophes testifies to the fact that this faith is not misplaced. Most people execute their specialties satisfactorily. Nor should we expect this to change. If history is a reliable guide, the trend will continue. The division of labor will grow more

* My apologies to cowboys who have also been professionalizing and are certainly self-directed.
complex and those charged with effecting its separate elements will grow in expertise and dependability. They will, in short, become both more specialized and more professionalized. Moreover, with this will come alterations in the institutions in which they are lodged. The fact of their increasing professionalism will inevitably modify the manner in which their tasks are coordinated within the organizations that pay their salaries. Indeed, this process is well under way, with modern corporations changing their modes of operation to meet the challenge.

**Forms of Control**

Philosopher kings are long gone. They never really existed. Nonetheless, something like them was once prevalent. Economic tasks, especially when they entail the production or distribution of technologically advanced goods, demand precise coordination. A single individual beavering away in his garage can rarely construct a piece of machinery as complicated an automobile. Efficiency in the production of such vehicles virtually demands a division of labor that is synchronized within in a factory. This, in turn, requires that someone be in change. Such an individual was historically the business proprietor. He was responsible for determining the over-all goals of the enterprise, as well as for maintaining discipline within it. With more at stake than the other participants, he/she could be counted upon to press for optimal harmonization.

Obviously, with profits on the line, proprietors craved efficient production. This meant that he/she had an interest in becoming expert in the dealings at hand, as well as seeing them through. Others might slack off, but not him.

Traditionally there have been a limited number of methods used for maintaining control over economic enterprises. As commercial activities have become more
complex, and the number of individuals required to participate in them increased, the
techniques for keeping those involved in synchronization required modification. In
hunter-gatherer societies face-to-face hierarchies were sufficient. With the advent of
agriculture this changed. Here property rights mutated into kingships, where a version of
oriental despotism often prevailed. Rulers possessed not just the land, but also those who
labored on it. Coordination was therefore achieved imperatively, with orders brutally
imposed. The tasks assigned peasant farmers were generally simple enough so that
discretion was not required. All that was needed was that traditional duties be performed
with sufficient enthusiasm to please the masters.

By the time of the great classical civilizations, most notably the Greek and
Roman, a variation on this format had evolved. Perhaps best characterized as the
Patronage Model, it was based upon familial modes of control. Although a massive
advance in commercialization distinguished the classical period, modern capitalism was a
long way off. More goods were traded over longer distances, but the interpersonal trust
needed to regulate market transactions remained grounded in long-established patterns.
People depended upon their relatives, including members of their extended families.
They knew who belonged to which lineage and expected those tied by blood to share
common interests. While this was often a vain hope, especially with regard to political
leadership, in day-to-day life it was the norm. The Romans, for instance, did business in
organizations modeled after the archetypical family. This kin group was ruled by a pater
familius. In a sense, he owned the family. His wife, and children, and their children,
were all his to command. So too were his slaves. They were also conceived of as part of
the family and thus his to order about. The other side of this coin was that the father was
expected to be paternalistic. His duty was to protect and provide for those in his care. This implied that his directives were not selfish; that they were promulgated in the interests of those attached to the clan.

What the Romans did as their commercial ventures expanded was to enlarge this notion of the family. They perfected what came to be patron/client relationships. A rich merchant was thus conceived of as a father figure for those who worked for him. He was their leader, their mentor, and the source of personalized authority. Meanwhile, those who occupied lower statuses assumed the role of supplicant children. It was their duty to carry out the instructions of their master, whereas it was his to make certain that their needs were provided for. A client, in his turn, assumed the role of patron to a lower level client, with parallel duties and obligations structuring their relationship. This created chains of patronage in which the parties were related to each other as if they belonged to a single lineage. Coordination was achieved by building upon a facsimile of the forces that keep nuclear families together. At the base of these chains were battalions of slaves working in proto-industrial conditions. They might, for example, be producing linen in organized groups, subject to imperative control not unlike that of agricultural laborers. In this, they would be treated like small children at the beck and call of their parents.

By the time of the Middle Ages, the high water mark of Roman commercialism was a distant memory. Society had become more fragmented and economic enterprises more localized. Both trade and industry were on a smaller scale and hence the modes of achieving coordination more parochial. What developed was another version of family-based control. This one may be dubbed the Guild Model. It was adapted to coordinating limited transactions over short distances. Within this setting, the typical manufacturer
was a “master” who worked inside his own household. On the first floor of his abode was a sales area that fronted the street. Here goods were made available for retail transactions. Behind this, at the back of his establishment, was floor space dedicated to production. Here members of his own family, that is, his wife and children, participated in fabricating merchandise under his direction. Also present were journeymen workers. Although skilled at their trade, they were not sufficiently accomplished to set up their own businesses. Beside them were likely to be apprentices. These younger persons, not yet proficient in their occupation, were bound to the master as if they were his children. In exchange for teaching them his craft, they were required to do his bidding.

The master himself was aligned with other quasi-fathers in an umbrella organization called a guild. Together they set standards and prices and defended each other’s prerogatives from external threats. The guilds also determined the rules under which the separate family-like constituents operated. They also decided the conditions under which the journeymen and apprentices labored. More importantly, they imposed the requirements for moving from journeyman to master. A person who wished to set up a shop of his own had to convince the members of the guild that he possessed the requisite skills by producing a master work (i.e., a masterpiece) that met their benchmark. Given this imprimatur, the new master received the support of the guild in asserting his own quasi-parental authority.

This guild model survived into early modern times. Small-scale merchants and manufactures were the norm until the Industrial Revolution upset the balance. As improvements in technology and mechanical sources of energy took hold, the volume of trade rose exponentially. More goods and services entered the marketplace, and with
them arrived larger economic agglomerations. This was the first era to see factories of the modern sort. Gone were home-based, family style manufactories to be replaced by larger steam or water powered structures. Within these multitudes of strangers labored side by side over iron machines. No longer related by blood, or toiling within the precincts of their own abodes, they could not behave as if they were family. The owner of the factory, that is, the capitalist, might technically be the boss—he might even affect the benevolent patronage of earlier times—but he was not close enough to his workers to feel like their father. However much he appealed to the emotional authority of a parent, he could not recreate its impact. There were simple too many involved—and their jobs were too diverse.

What began to develop at this point was the Bureaucratic Model. It specialized in imposing spans of control over wide swathes of strangers. Some bureaucracy had existed during Roman times, especially within the imperial administration, from whence it was bequeathed to the medieval church. While European civilization was fragmented into a myriad of feudal rivalries, the Roman Catholic Church was able to maintain a semblance of centralized organization. The Pope could, at least from time to time, exercise control over his bishops, who in turn utilized a defined hierarchy to officially promulgate regulations intended to maintain order in the lower clergy. The military too, as armies grew larger, sought bureaucratic solutions. It was one thing to depend upon hundreds of armored knights to free lance their way across a battlefield; it was quite another to manage lines of thousands of musketeers so that their fire was trained on the appropriate target. This required a centralized leadership that could count on obedience up and down
a chain of command composed primarily of strangers. Bureaucracy furnished this
certitude.

One of the first requirements of a bureaucratic structure is an organizational goal. If large numbers of individuals are to cooperate on a shared objective, they must, more or less, be aware of the endpoint. Unless they individually agree upon a shared purpose, they are likely to pull in opposite directions. This central set of goals must therefore be capable of imposition from above. While, on the one hand, those who enter the organization should understand, and concur in, its primary aims, e.g., that working for Ford entails manufacturing automobiles, those at the top should be capable of altering the common direction, e.g., by shifting the emphasis from building large to compact vehicles. But more of how this is achieved shortly. For the moment let it suffice that this is not a family-based mode of control.

As significant as a common objective is a functional division of labor. Bureaucracies are composed of numerous individuals assigned different, yet interlocking tasks. These organizations are, in short, composed of role structures. In medieval times, there was not much of a distinction between the master, journeymen, and apprentices. Each performed similar operations. Within a modern factory, the opposite is true. The man who puts the tires on a nearly completed automobile has a very different job from the one who operates a drill press, who in turn has a different assignment from the one who creates the blueprints for a new model. Adam Smith explained the advantages of this over two centuries ago. As the father of modern economic thought, he utilized the example of a pin factory to make his point. In former times, an isolated blacksmith might set out to make pins. If so, he would have to prepare the metal, draw it out into wires, cut
these into pin size lengths, then sharpen a point on one side and create a head on the other. At the end of the day, this would leave him with perhaps a couple of dozen pins. In the mechanical factory, however, things were otherwise. No single person was in charge of the entire operation. One would be delegated to prepare the metal, a second to draw it out into wire, and so forth. Each became a specialist in a limited task. As a result, they would not have to shift their attention from one chore to another. They could instead become skilled in a particular facet of the whole. At the conclusion of the day, this concentrated expertise resulted not in dozens, or even hundreds, but thousands of pins. The efficiency, and profits, was many times greater than before.

In the Bureaucratic Model this economical division of labor is assured by designating particular individuals to fulfill particular functions. Max Weber called these “defined offices.” Nowadays they are referred to as “jobs.” People are hired to perform a designated task, for which they are presumably qualified. If strength is required, a physically powerful person will be employed; if skill with numbers is at issue, someone with a degree in accounting is preferred. Once appointed, the individual is informed of what is expected. Frequently this will take the form of a job description. A bookkeeper is told which books to keep, where to get the data, to whom to deliver the accounts, and even the format the accounts should take. By the same token, he will be instructed that it is not his task to turn bolts on the assembly line. Were he to do so, he would be functioning outside his job description.

Not only is the bureaucratic worker pigeonholed, but he is placed in a carefully fashioned hierarchy of authority. The newly hired assembly line employee is not expected to engage in tests of strength to determine who will be his boss or subordinate.
These statuses are built into the office for which he was engaged. More than this, if his job entails the exercise of authority, he is informed of the limits of this authority. As a foreman he may have the power to move an underling from installing tires to tightening bolts, but he is not allowed to order her to buy his lunch. Nor will he be allowed to purloin a worker from a different section. The sorts of command he is authorized to give are precisely specified. Looked at from the other end of the supervisory relationship, the underling is given to understand that he is expected to respond to some directives, but not others. If a boss becomes too peremptory, the boss is in trouble. These restrictions tend to clarify who is in charge of what; hence they make control more precise. People are inclined to obey because they know who and what to obey. They are also less prone to disobey because power is less likely to be abused. Protected from arbitrary coercion, they become less defensive and more cooperative. This, in turn, means that disruptive conflicts are reduced.

Efficiency is the aim of another aspect of the Bureaucratic Model. Employees are not only told what their jobs are, or who is in charge of whom, but also how they will perform their jobs. Bureaucracies are notorious for specifying the rules and procedures applicable within their precincts. Creative improvisation has never been their long suit. More prevalent is what is ruefully referred to as “red tape.” Bureaucratic organizations specialize in providing detailed instructions that must be followed to the letter. The reasons for this rigidity are manifold. The most notable is that the organization presumes to be the keeper of the most efficient standards. Rather than allow employees to experiment with idiosyncratic techniques, it insists on standardizing the effective ones. This has the additional advantage of imposing uniformity. In a world full of strangers,
both within the organization and among those with whom it interacts, its workforce can better anticipate what to expect. Is members can predict the responses of others also following the rules and act accordingly. Once more this is thought to promote efficiency. In fact, one of its consequences is often an unresponsive rigidity. Stereotyped reactions may on average be best, but when adjustments are disallowed, can be wildly irrational.

Lastly bureaucracies are dependent upon comprehensive files and records. Medieval guilds could operate within the bounds of human memory. A master who had few customers could keep track of them. He knew who was promised what and who owed whom how much. Ford Motors is not so fortunate. Were it not to keep careful records of its stock, inventories, or sales, it would soon go broke. Suppliers would cease delivering goods that had not been ordered, employees would refuse to work when not paid, and customers go elsewhere when double billed. Using ledgers, or nowadays computers, to calculate the details of these transactions may be tedious, but it is indispensable. Only permanent documentation of who is doing what enables everyone to be certain of what needs to be done. Only this can coordinate the efforts of thousands of individuals, most of whom have no other way of determining where they stand vis-à-vis one another.

This then is the Bureaucratic Model that has come to dominate the corporate scene. It is today’s norm because only it has proved capable to organizing the armies of workers necessary in an industrialized economy. Yet it has acknowledged downsides. Perhaps the least attractive is its inherent inflexibility. Weber castigated bureaucracies as *iron cages*. Although he could see no alternative, he disparaged their excessive control. In his view, they were so effective at managing those under their sway that they provided
little latitude. Bureaucratic employees had to do what they were ordered. Treated almost like cogs in a machine, they might not be coerced in the manner of medieval serfs, but were, in fact, more effectively manipulated. They were literally induced into enslaving themselves. Dependable rewards and all-encompassing directives persuaded them to stay in line. Although they might complain about the barrenness of their situations, they nonetheless plodded along in sullen conformity. Don’t make waves, don’t challenge the system or the chain of command and you will keep getting your paycheck. Back when I lived in Rochester, this was the mantra of Kodak employees. If not personally fulfilled, their bellies were stuffed and their families had roofs over their heads.

This is where the Professional Model comes to the rescue. It is an alternative, albeit incomplete, to the bureaucratic model. Much to the surprise of the cognoscenti, bureaucracies have not established a monopoly. They have spread into every crevasse of the economic scene, yet they have not gone unchallenged. Just as Marx’s predication that impoverishment would be the fate of the proletariat left out the role of the middle class, so projections of an inescapable iron cage have been overstated. They failed to account for the growth of professionalism. As previously discussed, in the professional model individuals acquire the expertise and internal motivation to supervise their own activities. They become sufficiently competent in contributing to joint activities to be allowed discretion. As such, they do not need to be bound by as many bureaucratic restrictions. In their case, the necessary controls do not vanish; their locus is merely moved from outside to inside. Couched in these terms, this development may not sound significant, yet it makes the difference between mindless compliance and freedom.
Oddly, this transformation results from the same sort of development as the one that produced bureaucracy. As the dominance of corporations has grown, the world has not become more simplified. The need for coordination is if anything greater in an environment in which billions of products are produced and exchanged every day. The trouble is that with more complexity has come the need for greater flexibility and intensified local knowledge. Bureaucratic techniques remain the gold standard for imposing uniform actions over masses of strangers, but they fail when adjusting to unique circumstances. Complexity is about uniqueness. It is about unpredictable events that need to be mastered by those with the understanding and concern to make the correct choices; namely the professionals. If bureaucracy solved the problem of mass production by brigades of strangers, professionalism addresses that of sustaining the technological and social needs of an affluent society. It has been called to the forefront by the very successes of bureaucracy.

The Old Economy versus the New

Douglas McGregor, in exploring the human dimensions of the modern enterprise, concluded that the type of management appropriate for our great-grandfathers is out of place in the contemporary economy. According to McGregor, in the past there was a consensus regarding what he called Theory X. Managers were in agreement that ordinary workers were intrinsically lazy. When they came to work, their primary concern was with doing as little as they could. Disinclined to take initiatives, they depended upon guidance from above. Their bosses were forced to remedy this lack of responsibility through close supervision. If quotas were to be met, managers had to monitor the output of those under them. If mistakes were to be avoided, they had to impose sanctions on
sloppiness or a dereliction of duty. Only a strong-arm, hands-on approach could counter the natural tendency of people to circumvent onerous tasks.

To this, McGregor countered with Theory Y. This approach to management was the product of psychological progress. As science was applied to the study of human behavior, it became plain that most people were not inherently lazy. Nor were they biologically wired to shirk hard work. To the contrary, they took pleasure in accomplishing difficult tasks. This provided an internal satisfaction that business enterprises could exploit. Instead of coercing employees, they could provide opportunities for self-actualization. Workers could be allowed to explore new ideas so that they could take pride in becoming more than they had been. In this case, the duty of management was not to enforce conformity, but to take advantage of the human propensity innovate and be productive. Innately creative and generative, people enjoyed being efficient; that is, if allowed to do so on their own. The object was, therefore, to nurture workers, not treat them like prisoners on probation.

The epitome of a Theory X mentality was reached in the philosophy of Frederick Taylor. As the prophet of Scientific Management, he systematized the notion that managers strictly control employees. In the name of rationality, he urged employers to take a hands-on approach. Executives were implored to be the voice of reason within their organizations and insist on the optimum means of turning out products. It was up to them to ensure that bureaucracy was efficient by taking its practices seriously. To begin with, they had to determine the most efficient procedures. The techniques employees used had to be effective. For Taylor, this meant time and motion studies. Efficiency experts were hired to take a stopwatch to particular tasks to establish the best way of
performing them. The next step was to hire the best employees. Their qualifications too had to be scientifically established by employing the latest methodological advances. In this case, psychological testing was adopted to measure manual dexterity or numerical proficiency. Finally, managers would bring the optimum method together with the optimum employee and then compel the employee to follow the specified procedure. The result would be enhanced profits.

Taylorism turned out to be less scientific than its founder imagined, but it dovetailed nicely with the underlying assumptions of bureaucracy. In a world in which machinery was taking over from individual craftsmen, standardization seemed to be the wave of the future. Interchangeable tools owned by capitalists and operated under their direction had only recently generated unimagined surpluses. So too would interchangeable workers. Progress was clearly in store for those who consciously sought the best ways to manufacture goods, then imposed these on refractory laborers. In the end, it was bosses who would pursue optimization. Only they had the intellectual assets; only they possessed the profit motive to force improvements. Were lower level employees allowed to make decisions, they would surely opt for the familiar and the inefficient.

Unfortunately, by the second half of the twentieth century the promise of scientific management had evaporated. While the economy continued to expand, optimization proved elusive. There did not seem to be one best way to perform any given task; nor did coercing employees to follow optimal procedures produce industrial harmony. Into this breach rode Herbert Simon. After surveying what Taylor had wrought, he concluded that it was beset with internal contradictions. In short, what
Taylor said must be done was impossible to do. First, Taylor had contended that managers were to select the best of all possible alternatives. This sounded straightforward, but Simon argued that it is almost never true that we know all the alternatives. A handful are readily available for examination, but how can a person be sure that better ones will not emerge tomorrow. The answer is that we do not know—and never can. This would assume an omniscience that is denied humankind. Second, even if all the alternatives were known, it would be impossible to predict all of their consequences. This too would imply an omniscience in that it entails a complete understanding the future. Surely, in order to know which, of any two options, is best, it is necessary to follow causal chains into the indefinite future. But even if we can be satisfied that one will yield better results next year, can we be sure it will be best the second year? Obviously so many variables are involved certainty is impossible. Third, as if this weren’t enough, deciding which was best implied that we have settled preferences. But what if our tastes change? What if what we like tomorrow is not what we prefer today? If this occurs, then what seems best now will not then.

For Simon optimization is an illusion. It is predicated on assumptions that cannot be fulfilled. The best that can be achieved in the real world is “satisficing.” Those who decide can use only the information available to them, with the understanding that this may be imperfect. They must therefore use their judgment in deciding what is satisfactory. The best they can do is interpret what is before them and make guesstimates of what will happen down the line. Theirs are thus the tribulations of those who must exercise discretion. If they are honest, they will recognize that mistakes are always possible, but, if they are reasonably mature, they will also understand that they need to be
flexible enough to fix what is broken. Rather than place their trust in a fictional best, they must perceive themselves as embedded in a process that requires an ongoing monitoring of where things stand or how they might be improved.

Simon’s view, as opposed to Taylor’s, is much more in tune with the needs of a professionalized organization. His managers and employees are not omniscient philosopher kings, but ordinary mortals who apply their expertise and internal yearnings to incredibly complex decisions. Like McGregor’s Theory Y employees, they want to do their best, but this presupposes an orientation to personal growth. They need to keep learning and maturing in order to produce efficiency. Never perfect, they must intend to get better. Given the freedom to explore their opportunities, they ultimately produce more than pseudo-optimal bosses who presume to enforce stereotyped policies on reluctant subordinates.

When one examines the place of professionalized roles within a bureaucratic setting what comes into focus is an uneasy interaction. Two of the central aspects of bureaucracy are modified by the presence of professionalism. Both models agree on the need for organizational goals, a precisely defined functional division of labor, and files and records. Where they diverge is on the shape of the hierarchy of authority and the structure of rules and procedures. With regard to authority, there is an obvious shift in the center of momentum. In the traditional bureaucracy, power is concentrated at the top of the organization. Indeed, because centralized control is its raison d’etre, it is assumed that superior authority must be associated with superior status. Professionalism, in contrast, thrives on decentralization. Those lower down the hierarchy may actually be delegated greater latitude than those above them. Because professionals are presumed to
know what they are doing, in supervising their own activities, they appropriate the former
decision-making prerogatives of their bosses.

This sort of displacement of authority can be seen among the traditional
professionals. Physicians retain considerable autonomy even when employed by large
corporations. HMOs are frequently scorned for taking medical decisions out of the hands
of doctors and placing them in those of administrators, but this is misleading. The
overwhelming majority of medical decisions are still made by an attending physician.
Even when supervision is required, consulting physicians make the ultimate judgment.
Since these are medical opinions, they, not non-medical managers, are qualified to make
them. As a consequence, life and death matters remain at their discretion, as does the
expenditure of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

A similar, if not as profound, displacement occurs among semi-professionals.
Police officers are required to consult supervisory opinions more often than physicians or
attorneys, but when they are on the street, they must make snap decisions that entail life
and death. Despite improvements in modern communications and transportation, the
officers with the greatest experience cannot always be on the scene. Sometimes a
judgment about whether to use a weapon must be instantaneous. Even questions about
which words to use with an agitated perpetrator are at the discretion of the first person to
arrive on the scene. Intended or not, this becomes a de facto assignment of authority to
those with less official power.

With respect to rules and procedures a parallel displacement occurs. In the
traditional bureaucracy, managers, who supposedly possess the expertise and motivation
to install the best guidelines, set the policies. They write the rules and then enforce them.
In a professionalized organization, decisions about which procedures to follow are left to the professional. Taylorism assumed that the number of policies needed were finite and manageable. It also supposed that rules selected from above would be optimum. Yet within professionalized settings the tasks performed are so complex, and variable, that the appropriate interventions are too diverse to enumerate. Furthermore, with the professional more expert than the supervisor, standardized procedures are generally less effective than decisions selected on the spot. In essence, the Professional Model internalizes the rules and procedures in the practitioner. Instead of relying on a pre-established playbook, the professional is allowed to program him/herself at the point of impact. Having assimilated extensive knowledge and reorganized his/her interior goals, he/she is understood to be the person best equipped to determine the proper procedure. This permits the professional to eschew deference to a generalized policy and substitute one more responsive to the moment. Discretion thus takes the place of conventionalized rules and procedures.

Among physicians, this is easy to recognize. The body is so complex, and potential treatments so numerous, that no one imagines a standardized intervention schedule would be appropriate. Were this possible, someone would by now have reduced the appropriate protocols to a computer program run by low-cost clerks. Among police officers, this is less discernable—but equally relevant. Police officers are, in fact, drilled in the appropriate procedures. They are instructed on the finer points of the law and tutored on the most effective means of controlling felons. Nevertheless, the real world is less compliant than the classroom. Real arrests tend to throw up unanticipated wrinkles. Those charged with practice, as opposed to theory, must frequently decide on how a rule
should be applied. Will a judge later conclude that evidence must be excluded because there was no probable cause to engage in a search? Does a family dispute require a trip to the precinct or can the differences be resolved in the living room? There may not be an absolute method for determining which of these is best. Among marital counselors, a need for internalized rules and procedures is also undeniable. Even more than police officers, they require the flexibility to adjust to their clients. What is the cause of a marital conflict? How will the partners respond to a particular intervention? More importantly, if what occurs between them is not what was predicted, what rejoinder can salvage the situation? Absent quick thinking by the mediator, the outcome may be unfortunate.

In each of these cases, professionalism provides for the appropriate decentralization. It is not that control is missing; rather it has migrated to where it is most needed. Were intelligence and suitable motivation confined to the upper reaches of large organizations, many of lower-level interventions would not be needed. But, as technocommercial enterprises proliferate, they become the rule. If so, then occupational professionalization can only increase.

**Bureaucrats versus Professionals**

Thus far, it may sound as if there is a natural progression from the Patronage Model, to the Guild Model, to the Bureaucratic Model, to the Professional Model. Yet this is deceptive. True enough, the first was replaced by the second, which replaced the third, which seems to be in the process of being displaced by the fourth, but this sequence has not been without conflict. Guild masters did not welcome capitalistic organization. Indeed, they actively sought to prevent it. Similarly traditional managers rarely welcome
professionalization. They do not wish to see their prerogatives eroded by specialized upstarts. As a consequence, modern organizations are beset by disputes about who should be in charge. Administrators insist that they should be in control, whereas professionals demand that they be allowed greater discretion. At times, the decibel level can be deafening. At others, the rationalizations become Jesuitical. The question remains, however, who will win? Which of these contestants will prevail in the quest for power?

One of the tools that managers use to assert their priority is accountability. They claim that if efficiency is to be maintained, lower level employees must be monitored to make sure that they are achieving the organizational goals. These subordinates are asked to furnish reports of their activities so that those responsible can evaluate their productivity. The argument is that only those with a broad overview of the entire operation can ensure proper functioning. Only they possess the insights and dedication to correct errors and demand efficiency. Their underlings many resent the periodic reviews to which they are required to submit, or the projections of future activities according to which they will be judged, but this holds them to observable standards. Mere intuition, or seat-of-the-pants performances, can be misguided. People may believe that they are doing a fine job, but a lack of perspective prevents them from making accurate judgments. Clearly, they cannot know how well they are doing relative to others. Nor can they be sure of how their contributions fit into the larger picture. A panoramic viewpoint remains the prerogative of those assigned to oversee the entire undertaking.

The bureaucratic contention is thus that only those at the top of the official chain of command can be trusted to coordinate what must be coordinated. Advocates of higher
management also imply that only they are inherently accountable; that only they are committed to the success of the larger organization. To this proponents of professionalism respond with derision. They too are convinced of their dedication to rationality and efficiency. They too tout their special role in ensuring appropriate performances. How, they ask, can supervisors who do not understand their work evaluate their efforts? How can they know what meets the needs of the larger organization? The partisans of professionalism insist that only those who share their expertise are qualified to determine competence. If individual achievements are to be reviewed, they demand participation in these reviews. For instance, physicians promote committees of other physicians to appraise their handiwork. They likewise demand the right to sanction members of their fraternity. Should a doctor be guilty of serial malpractice, they claim the right to revoke his/her license. Anything less is considered an invasion of their prerogatives.

With such divergent opinions, bitter skirmishes are inevitable. Each side accuses the other of ignorance and/or bad faith, and expects good sense to prevail only when it achieves victory. In the heat of the moment, the tide of battle is usually unclear. Often, however, administrators seem to have the upper hand. As those who officially exercise superior authority, they claim the right to be the ultimate arbitrator. When there is a quarrel over a particular issue, they assert an entitlement to enforce a peaceful settlement. In these clashes, managers have several advantages. To begin with, management is their business. They are emotionally committed to regulating the activities of others. As professional control agents, they are accustomed to resistance and possess the incentives to be persistent in their demands. They also enjoy a preponderance of organizational
sanctions. In this, they can reward their friends and fire their enemies. In addition, they are likely to be better organized than the opposition. Skilled in the politics of organizational power, they can manipulate coalitions of both peers and underlings to enforce their dictates.

To this professionals frequently respond with disorganization and diffuse anguish. Typically articulate, they coherently state the reasons for their displeasure, but because they are focused on their individual specialties, they often lack the staying power to deflect administrative initiatives. Rather than consistently fight a particular evaluative instrument, they throw up their hands in despair. Uncomfortable with the emotional wear and tear of a protracted struggle, they resign themselves to the inevitability of bureaucratic control. Why keep attacking city hall when there is so more important work to be done? Why be diverted into immature arguments about who is more powerful when one’s occupational sphere is more satisfying? Within a university setting one sees this in periodic curricula reorganizations. One day a college president, or an administrative vice president, decides that freshman require a revamped set of core courses. The next thing the faculty knows is that a select committee of their peers has approved a reorganization inspired by those who appointed them. Eventually this innovation is rubberstamped by the academic senate even though a majority of professors believe the changes vapid. Off in their separate departments, they grumble about their lack of input, but, in time, most decide it is better to go along to get along. Why waste precious energy opposing another administrative boondoggle?

Nevertheless, appearances are deceptive. Whatever the individual triumphs of the bureaucrats, their conflict with the professionals is weighted against them. Politically
inept though they may be, college professors ultimately control what takes place in their classrooms. They even interpret course outlines decreed from above. The deans may resent this independence, but it is an inevitable consequence of the faculty’s unique expertise. Since only they are truly proficient in their subjects, only they can determine what needs to be taught. As a result, they tend select the classroom texts and evaluate student performances. They even evaluate the performances of their peers. The same is true for other professionals and semi-professionals. Doctors, lawyers, and engineers each tend to have the final say about their own disciplines. When questions about medicine, or law, or the tensile strength of metals arise, there is generally no recourse. Even nurses and police officers have benefited from an increasing concentration of knowledge in their hands. Though more subject to chains of command than traditional professions, their independence while on the job provides them with de facto authority.

These trends can be expected to intensify. As the BLS statistics reveal, a larger proportion of occupations than ever depend on decentralized expertise and personal motivation. They are becoming further professionalized, but not because their superiors fervently mandate this. To the contrary, their superiors have encouraged it because it is essential for the work that needs doing. In today’s economy those tasks that can be automated eventually are. The residue is usually too complex to be performed by a machine—even a machine controlled by a computer. It is these residual duties that devolve to human jurisdiction. These tasks mandate discretion because of their very nature. As a result, they need to be performed by individuals capable of handling discretion. This is why managers encourage employees to seek advanced training. They lead the parade toward professionalization, not because they take pleasure in trying to
herd autonomous subordinates, but because as leaders they are impelled to march at the front of the line. Were they to do otherwise, their impotence would be revealed and their authority further erode.

One of the ironies inherent in this situation is that bureaucrats are themselves professionalizing. Because managers also need to be expert in their duties, these too are codified and transmitted via advanced education. The MBA has become the norm for middle managers, not because they are fond of scholarship, but because it has proved beneficial to leadership positions. They have learned that they must be conscious of what works and flexible enough to adopt it, whatever their personal proclivities. This suggests that with time, more organizational superiors will adopt management strategies that take account of professional needs. Indeed, this is already occurring. Scientific management has been passé for decades. Its rigidities were exposed as far back as the 1920s when a human relations model took hold. Even then executives were encouraged to accommodate to the needs of subordinates. Eventually what is apt to occur is an institutionalization of what the techno-commercial marketplace requires.

Finally, there is the small matter of job switching. With permanent employment within single, family-like, organizations fading rapidly from memory, more workers exhibit an allegiance to their occupation than to a particular bureaucracy. They therefore identify more with their profession than their bosses’ interests. The outcome of this trend is a loss of authority for corporate bigwigs. No longer viewed in paternalistic terms, they are not accorded the deference due a protective parent. It consequently makes sense for those at the periphery of such institutions to think in terms of the standards they will need to apply should they one day work elsewhere. This means a greater commitment to
professional standards than parochial organizational ones. The result, as might be expected, is to strengthen the hand of the professionals vis-à-vis their bureaucratic superiors.
Chapter 6

The Democratic Imperative

Capitalism and Democracy

Even in the midst of the twenty-first century the Georgia Sea Islands remain remote. It is not merely that they are off the Atlantic coast; it is rather the salt marshes that separate them from the mainland are nearly impassable. The only way to get to them is, therefore, over what amount to two-lane causeways. It was for this reason, as opposed solely for their natural beauty, that they were chosen to host a meeting of the big-eight heads of state. Experience with earlier gatherings had demonstrated that if these discussions were held at more accessible venues, they would be deluged in protest. The only sure method of keeping violent protestors at bay was to make certain they were miles away from the main event. Otherwise they would break windows, chant obscenities, and pelt the participants with debris.

One of the primary targets of this abuse was George W. Bush. Especially following the Iraq war, dissenters felt a moral obligation to vent their hostility toward a man regarded as threat to world peace. Yet those who believed his polices were misguided did not confine themselves to accusing him of mistakes. They went out of their way to hurl the most insulting epithets imaginable. In their view, Bush was a mass murderer, a fascist, a Nazi, an aggressor, a dictator, and a butcher. He was, as they saw it, a greater menace to humanity than Saddam Hussein and consequently deserved to be impeached. Some protestors went so far as to call for his assassination. To this end, they waved hangman’s nooses and painted portraits of Bush with a pistol held to his head.
When cautioned that this was over the top, they maintained that they were only alerting others to a grave danger. Wasn’t this their responsibility as citizens of a democracy?

Incongruous as it may seem, this sort of rhetoric corroborates a thesis opposite the one propounded by the dissenters. Rather than democracy being in peril, the protestors’ freedom to engage in rhetorical excess confirmed their nation’s continued stability. As even they, in their more lucid moments, might acknowledge, Bush had no designs on overthrowing the constitution. He was not a fascist, Nazi, or potential dictator. The situation was, in fact, similar to one that often accompanies divorce. Newly estranged mothers are frequently confused when thrust into the role of custodial parent. Now raising their children without the assistance of a spouse, they find themselves disrespected by the very youngsters they are struggling to protect. Their ex-husbands, in contrast, appear once every couple of weekends to entertain the kids by taking them to the movies or out to a baseball game. This converts them into heroes and the mothers into carping vixens. Dad, in this case, is the one with the smiling face, while mother is the one with the scowl, demanding they be home on time. Meanwhile during the week, she enforces mealtimes, insists on homework, and turns off the television set at bedtime. She is, in sum, the villain. Relegated to the troublesome aspects of parenting, she receives not thanks, but rather accusations of malice. She may even be told that she is hated by the very children she is trying to safeguard.

No wonder that divorced women seethe at the injustice of their situation. How, they marvel, can their sacrifices go so unnoticed? Why aren’t they given credit for their efforts? Be this as it may, the allegations they endure ought to be worn as a badge of honor. They reveal, not cruelty, but a devotion to duty. The paradox of the obloquy they
suffer is that it would not arise were they as mean-hearted as claimed. Indeed, the anger they suffer is a sign that they are trusted. Whereas the fathers are treated with kid gloves lest a whiff of disapproval drive them off never to return, these mothers have demonstrated that they will remain reliably present in good times and bad. It is safe to get angry at them precisely because they won’t bolt even when reviled. In other words, the overt hostility they experience is evidence, not of maltreatment, but its opposite. The very passion with which it is expressed displays the strength of the ties between these mothers and their offspring.

The same may be said of the zeal with which American politicians are accused of tyranny. Were they as power hungry as alleged, hundreds of torture chambers would long since have sprouted as a warning to the insolent. Nor is the nation as totalitarian as it is portrayed. The United States is not a rogue state on the verge reducing its citizens, or neighbors, to quivering vassalage. Quite the reverse, it is the most stable, large-scale democracy in the history of the world. Never before has so populous a country been ruled by as a democratic constitution so continuously or so conscientiously. Never before has so great a nation endured for as long without having been hijacked by a ruthless despot. The country is not, of course, the participatory democracy for which some clamor. Those entitled to its vote do not gather together in an immense marketplace to debate the issues of the day, much as the ancient Athenians once did. At over three hundred million strong, this would be physically impossible. Instead Americans partake of a representative democracy. They periodically troop to the polls to select the individuals who will speak for them in the nation’s deliberative bodies. They also know that, should they make a mistake, they can throw out the rascals during the next electoral
cycle. And if they do, they can be certain that the losers will step down to allow their successors to take their place.

This may sound unexceptional; nonetheless it is not the historical norm. In the customary course of events, ambitious leaders, such as Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez and Robert Mugabe, have sought to monopolize power for themselves. They have engaged in coups, civil wars, and backstairs plots for the sake of personal hegemony. This is not to say that democratic politicians are choirboys; only that they are constrained by democratic conventions to abstain from a variety of excesses. About a century ago Robert Michels hypothesized that an Iron Law of Oligarchy guarantees that only a few persons will direct large organizations. He noted that whatever the appearances, small cliques tend to gain control. They decide what is done and make certain that they, or their legatees, remain in charge. According to Michel, efforts at achieving such supremacy are not repealed by democracy. They are merely held at bay by social patterns that restrict the participants’ rapacity. However great the individual appetites of the players, the rules of the game prevent them from implementing their most treasured aspirations.

Some critics of the American scene assert that the natural inclination to oligarchic rule is made worse by a fundamental contradiction between the nation’s economic system and its political institutions. They fret over greedy capitalists who, they are convinced, are forever conspiring to impose a dictatorship grounded in their relative affluence. Given the normal human desire to dominate, they would, allowed the opportunity, use their wealth to distort the body politic and destroy democracy. Determined to become Michels-style sovereigns, they would not be above purchasing the cooperation of the less
wealthy in order to manipulate the system to their own benefit. Pundits of the left, therefore, recommend that the schemes of these tycoons be forestalled by jettisoning the capitalist system before it is too late. They believe that the nation should instead be guided by unselfish impulses. Only an emphasis on cooperating in communal enterprises, they say, can protect everyone’s civil liberties. This, they further insist, depends on a total reorganization of the economy such that material incentives are completely extirpated. Doing so would ensure that communal leaders pursue policies intended to promote shared interests. Only then would the structure be immune from corruption. To this end, they advocate a version of socialism in which everyone is dedicated to helping everyone else. They call it “social justice.”

Once more, appearances can be deceptive. Capitalism, far from being a threat to democracy, was the cause of its emergence. Indeed, capitalism and democracy are joined at the hip. Not by chance did modern democracies come into being in the very nations that led the way into a market-based economy. Just as ancient Athens pioneered democracy among the Greeks because it was commercially affluent, so England and the United States have done the same in the recent era. Business, it develops, is not inimical to freedom. If anything, its success is dependent upon liberty. The kinds of deals in which merchants engage, and the sorts of risks in which industrialists indulge, are contingent upon independence. Successful capitalism is naturally decentralized. It cannot create the surpluses we have come to expect unless battalions of autonomous individuals are allowed to make unhampered decisions about what is profitable. Unless they can honestly evaluate the situations before them and pursue the best options, little can be achieved. Centralized commands, whether they emerge from an absolute monarch
or an ideological commissar, tend to be ill informed and rigid. In constraining people to do what a would-be philosopher king decides, they rob them of the motivation, and intelligence, to apply themselves.

Moreover, as capitalism expands, the need for liberty expands. Techno-commercial societies are dependent not only on merchants and industrialists, but managers and technicians that keep their wheels turning. These professionalized experts all require the space to make independent decisions. In fact, were their intellects and personal impulses stymied by a centralized command structure, they would degenerate into incompetent ciphers. This was the fate of the Soviet Union; it was also the bane of Maoist China. Despite the promises of their leaders to bury the West, they were never fully able to exploit the talents of their peoples as long as they attempted to rationalize everything from the center. Fortunately for democracy, well-educated workers tend value their freedom. Internally motivated to do their best, they press for the conditions that permit them the latitude they need. This preference is what has provided the impetus for liberty in mercantile societies.

If the reader has not already guessed it, the conditions that allow freedom to flourish are best provided by democracy. Nation states that delegate political control to broad segments of their populations thereby supply the space for innovation and personal happiness. Democracy is about sharing power and preventing an arbitrary concentration of authority. It is a social structure that allows those on the bottom to exercise a veto over those at the top. In a democracy, ordinary voters do not directly settle the issues that concern the larger society, but they do get to oust those who might decide against their wishes. If they feel over-taxed, they can, for instance, elect representatives who promise
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to roll back the rates. This threat tends to modify the actions of officials who realize that they may be out of a job if they offend their constituents. As a result, rather than collect every ounce of power they can, they recognize that they must allow the voters room for maneuver. In this, whether they intend it or not, they provide professionalized citizens the discretion needed for the efficient operation of a techno-commercial civilization.

Despite the warnings of the pessimists, this logic has resulted in the extension of democratic institutions to virtually all industrialized nations. The aristocracies of old have been swept out of Western Europe and a desire for liberty now threatens to displace the pseudo-aristocracies of Eastern Europe. Even the banana republics of the western hemisphere promise to be dislodged in favor of genuine republics. In comparison, what has not transpired is an authentic democratic socialism. Socialism is supposed to be dedicated to defending the welfare of the little people, but, in practice, has crushed them under a totalitarian boot. Long ago, Lord Acton counseled that power corrupts and that absolute power corrupts absolutely. This adage is well known even to Marxists. All the same, few collectivists have noticed that a system, which concentrates economic decisions in one place, essentially focuses power there too. Similarly, if property is removed from private control and transferred to the government; the result is to imbue a small number of individuals with enormous authority. The subsequent tendency is for them to become intoxicated with their responsibilities and assume that they know best. Even if they are modest enough to recognize their limitations, a desire to protect their prerogatives is liable to disguise their weaknesses. Regardless of their original intentions, they sweep aside those who question their decisions and like Castro, Chavez, and Mugabe decide to rule for life. Democratic socialism is, therefore, an illusion because
socialist institutions undermine the freedoms they purport to protect. The proof of this pudding is in the rigidity of a multitude of left wing regimes. Thus, a nation with as strong a democratic tradition as Great Britain was wracked with strife after its government decided to promote fairness by nationalizing major industries. Labor leaders such as Clement Atlee, in quest of what Thomas Sowell has labeled “cosmic justice,” sacrificed both business efficiency and political autonomy on the altar of Marxist theory.

If any of this is accurate, then as capitalist economies grow the need to strengthen democratic institutions should also. If so, both the rule of law and broad political participation have to be safeguarded. Fortunately, they probably will. Human nature, however, being what it is hierarchical pressures should remain. Nonetheless, there will also be pressures to keep them in check. Besides, a more professionalized population is likely to possess the characteristics necessary to make democracy work. More dedicated to decentralization than its predecessors and better equipped to handle the complex personal responsibilities, popular institutions should become more, not less, stable.

Internalized Norms

The Weimar Republic was a noble experiment. With the Kaiser packed off into a dishonorable Dutch exile, it was time for Germany to put a genuine democracy together. The nation’s leading lights, including an intellectual with credentials as impeccable as Max Weber, gathered together to create a constitution guided by the examples of the United States and Great Britain. On paper, the resultant document was a paragon of democratic principles. It theoretically guaranteed liberties that would make the ensuing republic the envy of the world. In this, scholars of most every stripe agree. But events, turned out otherwise. The Weimar government quickly devolved into a shambles. For
starters, its politicians were unable to control what shortly became a roaring inflation. Within years the currency was converted into a medium feebler than the Confederate dollar at its worst. Wheel barrels full of paper bills were required to purchase a loaf of bread and postage stamps were ultimately denominated in the trillions of marks.

Worse than this economic travesty was the disorder on the streets. Private armies, largely composed of decommissioned soldiers, roamed the cities attempting to beat their rivals into submission. In short order, Russian inspired communists and members of a newly convened party, i.e., the National Socialists (better known as the Nazis), were threatening each other with coups and counter-coups. Ordinary Germans might be horrified by the violence, but they too longed for a restoration of the traditional orderliness. What they craved most was a strong leader, perhaps one cut from the same cloth as Otto von Bismarck. All too soon their wish was granted in the person of someone the world would know as the “fuehrer.” A strange looking man with a Charlie Chaplin mustache, Adolf Hitler might not be physically imposing, but, as a public speaker, he was mesmerizing. Standing on the stump, in strident tones that rose to a rapturous crescendo, he promised to make the nation whole again. The German folk would be restored to the place of honor that their innate superiority entitled them. What was more, should the electorate favor them at the polls, his Nazis would consign the Weimar democracy to the ash heap of history. Hitler explicitly vowed to dismantle what he considered a corrupt political system. Democracy was for the weak and dishonest. It encouraged avaricious politicians to debate irrelevant matters until they deadlocked. Obviously nothing could emerge from such doings but chaos. Hitler would have none of
this. He would substitute his will, which was the embodiment of the people’s will, for
the empty verbiage of his opponents.

What was most remarkable about this development was that German voters were
swayed by his assurances. They soon elevated the Nazis to the political forefront, from
whence Hitler was appointed chancellor. What followed is well known. Hitler rapidly
converted what had been a democracy into a draconian dictatorship. Within months he
was standing before huge crowds of cheering citizens who glowed with pride at the
bondage into which they were being thrust. Flags waved, and voices grew hoarse, in
approval of the fuehrer’s no-nonsense policies. From a distance, i.e., from across the
Atlantic, this seemed perverse. Most Americans were bewildered by such unseemly
enthusiasm. They could not understand how human beings could voluntarily denounce
their own freedom. What a people steeped in liberty did not perceive was that the
Germans never shared the social norms they took for granted. In America, democracy
had evolved over the course of hundreds of years. Ordinary people, in the process of
growing up, internalized the perceptions, and standards, which made it possible—
generally without realizing it. Democracy, for them, seemed normal. It was the way
things were and always had been. For the Germans, this was not the case. Their history
prepared them for a monarchy. They were accustomed to being ruled by a strong-willed
aristocrat; hence they did not question his legitimacy. Without the Kaiser to guide them,
they felt like orphans. Where was the father figure who loved them and would protect
them from life’s vicissitudes? Given this mindset, Hitler seemed like the answer to a
prayer.
It is not always recognized that democracy requires more than a blueprint. It also entails a way of life. A formal constitution, however well framed, cannot by itself ensure democratic practices. The attitudes necessary for liberty to survive must, at some point, be present among the citizens. Unless a large proportion of them believe in this form of government, and are prepared to defend it, its structures are vulnerable to attack. Potential demagogues are then able to undermine it before its adherents can mobilize an effective resistance. This was the experience not only in Germany, but also in Russia, where the Soviet Union also boasted a progressive constitution. Here it was the machinations of a well-organized communist party that substituted its decisions for those of the people. Other examples of this process can be found in Algeria, Cambodia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America. In all of these, democratic customs were absent; hence when minority takeovers threatened, they succumbed.

Also largely unrecognized is that democratic institutions take time to develop. It is not enough for people to claim an attachment to liberty; they must acquire a cognitive and emotional adherence to it. This means they must both believe in democracy and be personally offended when its norms are violated. Consider the French Revolution. Its advocates were deliriously in favor of liberty, equality, and fraternity, and yet when the guillotine rolled out, they allowed the device to take a bloody toll. Unhappily, it took a man on horseback to restore order. In a nation with a long history of absolute rule, Napoleon could arrogantly crown himself emperor, whereas across the pond George Washington would refuse to become king. Washington, along with his fellow citizens, shared a revulsion of taxation without representation. Years of relative freedom left them with bitter feelings toward arbitrary power. The French had no such history.
Accustomed to centralized rule, to this day they are susceptible to Gaullist-style rebellions. They, as opposed to Americans, continue to look, not to themselves, but toward a paternalistic state to protect them from life’s uncertainties. A similar lack of internalized democratic standards has hampered the development of an Iraqi democracy. This deficiency has similarly hindered the advent of democratic institutions in Russia and the Ukraine.

What is missing from the psyches of these nations can be gathered from observing what is present among Americans. One of the simplest of these essentials is honoring the results of the electoral process. When the reigning party loses, it must step aside so the other can take over—that is, until the next election. To democrats this seems like common sense, but it is not so regarded in places where this has not been the standard practice. Thus, when Algeria’s secular regime was threatened by an Islamist victory, it called for a do-over. Its leaders invalidated the polls and arrogated rule to themselves. Russia’s Vladimir Putin did something comparable when he decided to appoint local officials rather than allow them to be selected by popular vote. He simply did not trust the people to make the correct choices. All this contrasts markedly with what occurs in the United States when a presidential election is hotly contested. Rather than resort to a violent coup, Americans turn to long-established institutions. They recount the votes; they appeal to judicial review; they grumble and pool their dollars to reverse the decision the next time around. But that is all. They would have been horrified had anyone seriously suggested replacing George W. Bush, or Bill Clinton, at gunpoint. The most ardent Democrats and Republicans would have joined forces to disarm any such putsch—even if it aimed at installing their candidate.
Equally essential for democracy is a commitment to compromise. Americans often bemoan the fact that their political leaders lack principles. Instead of standing up for a belief to which they have expressed undying loyalty, they temporize, then wind up accepting a half a loaf. Where, their constituents wonder, is the backbone? Where is the dedication to fight for what is right? Ideologues will have none of this. Thus, during the 1960s it was common for radicals to make what they called “non-negotiable demands.” They declared an intention to stand by the barricades until justice was done. Yet huff and puff as they might, these extremists never took control of the nation’s institutions. The Weathermen managed to blow up a building or two, but they never came close to electing as many representatives as Hitler.

Almost no Americans consider sending stiff-necked ideologues to Washington. The mere accusation that someone is an extremist sends shivers down their spines. It is more of a red flag than the notion that someone is unprincipled. Indeed, Americans agitate for bipartisanship. At bottom pragmatists, they want their leaders to make deals so things can happen. They understand, perhaps at an unconscious level, that non-negotiable demands result in zero sum games in which one side wins everything. But if this occurs, the other side loses everything, in which case it will nurse a grievance that can inspire a violent counterattack. Were this to take place, a stable democracy would be impossible. Agitation would be the norm, as would daily uncertainty. Moreover, this would be bad for business. Commerce would be beset with doubts; hence it would contract. The consequence would be further shortages that inspired more violence. No, this is not what Americans want. They are, therefore, prepared to share scarce resources.
As long as their rivals also defend democratic processes, they are deemed worthy of compromise.

Another of the internalized commitments that makes democracy possible is a belief in universal standards. The rules of the game, whatever they are, are supposed to apply to everyone. Favoritism and back door deals are frowned upon as inimical to fairness. This was why voters were so upset when Barack Obama tolerated a Louisiana Purchase and a Cornhusker Kickback in order to facilitate health care reform. To the contrary, a democratic mindset assumes that everyone has equal rights. Some people may be more talented than others, possess greater wealth, or have better political connections, but no one is entitled to more liberty or happiness. Unlike medieval Europeans who assumed that aristocrats deserved greater deference than peasants, when Americans go to court they expect the same laws to apply to them as the richest entrepreneur. Likewise, when they enter a classroom, they look forward to be graded by the same standards as pupils who may share a common ethnicity with the teacher. For them, democracy is more than one person, one vote; it also entails civil equality. People are supposed to be endowed with identically inalienable rights. Anything less would deny them the self-rule to which they feel entitled.

Finally there is the matter of tolerance. To be free is assumed to imply the right to be different. Equality does not mean fitting into the same mold, but having equal rights despite one’s uniqueness. In a society that has been growing larger and more diverse, anything less would Balkanize the population into competing factions. Rather than allowing this to occur, rather than building barricades, the players must be able to recognize each other’s intrinsic humanity so that they can negotiate in good faith. How
indeed could they arrive at mutually acceptable compromises were they unable to recognize each other’s interests? They must, in fact, be able to communicate openly and respectfully. To do this, however, they have to take the time to get to know and trust one another. They must, in short, be prepared to live and let live—that is, within the bounds of joint moral standards.

Putting this all together suggests that for democracy to succeed the participants require a civic professionalism. They need to be experts in the processes of arriving at communal decisions and internally motivated to desire such outcomes. Unless they are actively engaged in upholding their shared communal responsibilities, they will ultimately relinquish their rights to authoritarians who relish dominance. Democracy is not a gift from the Gods; it is an historic asset that must be nourished and defended. It is a collaborative social achievement that protects its members only if they vigorously contribute to its maintenance. This makes it likely that efforts to promote democracy will continue to spread. As more citizens become further professionalized in other aspects of their lives, they should also be more strongly motivated to partake in egalitarian political institutions.

The Rule of Law

One of the lesser myths of modernity is a faith in “the rule of law.” Thought to be a bulwark of democracy, many people believe that a strong legal code of itself keeps despots at bay. The idea is this: once upon a time, long ago, monarchs ruled by fiat. A king ordered that his subjects obey and they did on pain of lethal punishment. Whatever this paramount figure desired was his to command with a few truculent words. Among the images that spring to mind is a fearsomely bearded Ivan the Terrible, Czar of all the
Russias, scowling at his boyars and threatening to bash in their sculls with his staff. So too does Lewis Carroll’s Queen of Hearts arbitrarily demanding that heads be cut off for the crime of painting the roses red. This then is the problem with absolute power—it can be capricious. A potentate can on a whim command any cruel outcome that takes his fancy. Rather than think through what is best for the community, he impulsively orders what meets his fleeting needs. Such an arrangement may suit his requirements, but is scarcely a prescription for social justice.

Many are convinced that the best way to guard against this sort of danger is to follow Sir Thomas More’s advice. He believed that the laws were like a forest of sturdy trees capable of withstanding devastating regal gales. They were public regulations that when properly maintained served to master a society’s human overlord. He too could be compelled to follow these standards, irrespective of his transitory urges. As long as the people backed them, because they had been legally promulgated, they provided a palisade the most potent monarch could not breech. This, however, obligated them to stand together and avoid chopping down inconvenient edicts. The people had to be committed to the majesty of the law and to regard it as almost sacrosanct. Indeed, it was this collective attitude that gave the laws their clout.

Another advantage of the rule of law is that it supposedly provides guidelines to which everyone has equal access. People can know what is expected of them once the rules are written down. Instead of relying on the subjectivity of a ruler who might misremember what is required, or even manipulate his dictates to suit himself, anyone can assess officially stated standards. This way, they know in advance what is likely to draw a sanction. They can also identify how to defend themselves if others accuse them
of an infraction. Public standards—which is what the laws are—allow for equality by making it clear which behaviors are required and which proscribed. No one can claim special privileges when everyone can see what all are supposed to do. Nowadays this is reinforced by demanding equality before the law. Not only are the same statutes expected to apply to everyone, but they are supposed to be applied evenhandedly. The identical procedures for enforcing the laws are to be employed regardless of the accused’s station. Sovereign and pauper alike are entitled to an identical day in court.

So attractive has the rule of law become that laws have proliferated at an accelerating rate. Every time a legislature meets, it churns out a fresh batch of statutes that are expected have the same, or greater, weight than previous statutes. On the local, state, and federal levels, no self-respecting official counts him/herself successful without affixing his/her name to a host of regulations. The upshot is that whenever there is a grievance, it is assumed that an additional piece of legislation can remedy the matter. Perhaps there was an oversight in the existing law; perhaps there is confusion as to its meaning. Either way, revising the law books to account for this difficulty is thought to improve the situation. It is believed to provide the required objectivity and to compel people to behave as they ought.

What is left out of this equation is that for laws to operate, they must rely on extra-legal supports. Rules, however clearly promulgated, do not apply themselves. No matter how emphatically stated, no matter how glorified, unless they are respected, are dead letters. Dumping a law library in the middle of the Amazonian jungle would have no effect except to provide nourishment for the bugs. Laws are laws because of norms dictating that they be obeyed. When people do not possess internalized allegiances to
formal statutes, they are no more potent that a gust of wind. Years ago Chester Barnard advised business leaders that they obtained much of their power from the consent of their subordinates. Unless these inferiors did as they were directed of their own accord, the boss had little control over anything other than his vocal chords. It was, therefore, imperative that would-be leaders not order people to do what they were disinclined to do. The same applies to the laws. Citizens who are not schooled in honoring the law per se will not be impressed with particular laws, however cogent. Even when a legal system is part of their tradition, it has normative limitations. American officials discovered this during Prohibition. Despite following all the niceties of amending the Constitution, they could not get people to renounce alcohol. The need to drink turned out to be more normative than a decree to abstain.

As importantly, for laws to be obeyed, they must be interpreted. The meanings of the words on a piece of paper are not absolute. Different people perusing the same texts draw different conclusions. Thus when the Congress passed legislation to provide funding for those suffering from disabilities, the question arose as to what constituted a “disability.” The legislators had initially conceived of the beneficiaries as wheelchair bound “cripples,” but it soon became clear that the mentally ill demanded the same consideration. Then too, many believed the mentally ill to include substance abusers. Ultimately the federal government sent out checks to the liquor stores alcoholics recorded as their legal residences. This, of course, was not what the sponsors of the original bill intended. It was merely that they had no control over administrative interpretations of the statute. The same sort of difficulty plagues legislation intended to eliminate discrimination. What, after all, constitutes “discrimination?” Can there, for instance, be
such a thing as reverse discrimination? Do policies designed to benefit African-Americans infringe on the rights of Caucasians? Nor is it possible to eliminate this problem by increasing the specificity of the laws. Since the new codicils are also subject to interpretation, this only multiplies the issues over which there may be disagreements.

Moreover, this need to interpret the laws is not limited to administrative agencies. It is obviously one of the major reasons why we have courts and why courts depend upon precedents. The ambiguities bundled into legal statutes can be so great that unless those delegated to apply them can look to the decisions of others, they might not know where to begin. Clearly this applies to judges, but also lawyers and juries. They too require guidance from normative practice. The same also pertains to policing agencies. Like their more prestigious brethren, police officers must be sufficiently professional to judge how particular laws should be enforced. They too must possess the knowledge and personal temperaments to make decisions in harmony with the demands of justice. What is usually needed beyond the letter of the law are informal social norms. Moral rules and folkways shape how laws are understood. Although the former are created, not by legislative fiat, but on-going social negotiations, they frequently take precedence over written formulations. Thus, those who interpret the laws are expected to be morally grounded. Although ethical commitments per se are not legally enforced, they are presupposed.

In other words, democracy can be protected by the rule of law only so far. Because laws are dependent upon informal structures, their application can be arbitrary. Worse than this, an officious attitude toward the law creates its own capriciousness. Several years ago Philip Howard, a lawyer by trade, wrote a perceptive little book
entitled *The Death of Common Sense*. Subtitled, *How Law Is Suffocating America*, its thesis was that too literal a dependence upon rules and regulations results in absurd rigidities. Common bricks get labeled as a dangerous pollutant and Nuns are required to put elevators in the buildings they operate despite the fact that they are not allowed to use them. Instead of adapting the rules to situations that could not have been foreseen when they were promulgated, pedants insist upon interpretations that make no sense. One of the silliest of these declared a zero tolerance of the key chains carried to school by six year-olds. For some reason these were described as weapons. Howard concludes that what is needed is the latitude to be flexible. Legislators and citizens alike have to recognize that there is no substitute for good judgment and that apparently objective laws inevitably require an exercise of prudent discretion. But to be discrete, individuals must be capable of discerning what is best. More than this, others must trust their assessments. A Gesellschaft society assumes that people can rely on the common sense of strangers. Another way to put this is that the rule of law compels us depend on the professionalism of others in interpreting the regulations to which we are mutually subject. Those who apply the laws must possess the expertise and internal motivation to make sensible decisions, for unless they do, formal statutes will be as dumb as Charles Dickens once declared them to be. Ketchup will mutate into a vegetable and felons will be allowed to prowl the streets because a police officer misspoke when he read their rights.

In many ways the conventional attitude toward the rule of law parallels that toward traditional bureaucracy. It celebrates rules and procedures that are propagated from above to be obeyed below. Even something as amorphous as hate is expected to yield to statutes declaring it a crime. Nevertheless true tolerance depends upon the
evolution of an informal acceptance of differences. It cannot be conjured up by promises to punish its absence. While it is true that bigots can evade informal sanctions, they can also escape legal penalties. Informal rules take time to develop and internalize; yet they are the surest defense against troublesome behaviors. This limits the control of reformers, but it is the way the world works.

Nor can it be said that a more professionalized citizenry guarantees appropriate decisions. Because we human beings are hierarchical animals, power struggles will always dot the landscape. People will continue to compete for status and in so doing interpret the rules to their own advantage. However professionalized they become, their judgments will occasionally be distorted by selfish impulses. As previously noted, perfection is not the lot of humankind. Still and all, democracy depends upon encouraging a more professionalized attitude toward the law. People must understand what is at stake and be motivated to control their impulses. Unfortunately, civic professionalism is not yet a prominent part of the public agenda. If the tide is indeed turning in this direction, it is turning slowly. Agitation for additional legislation remains the norm. Nevertheless, it can be predicted that civic professionalism will gain greater currency. More people are bound to recognize that legislated red tape is as oppressive as the corporate variety. And when they do, they will lose faith in the promises of politicians who seek power based on programs that cannot work. A need for intelligent flexibility should therefore become as deliberate an aim as the necessity to obey traffic lights.
**Political Participation**

When Alexis de Tocqueville toured the infant United States, he was struck by the tendency of its citizens to join civic associations. Rather than await action from Washington, D.C., they took matters into their own hands by collaborating on local initiatives. Unlike in France where a paternalistic spirit prevailed, Americans exhibited a can-do attitude that included a willingness to cooperate with their neighbors. Tocqueville interpreted this disposition as crucial to sustaining democratic institutions. He reasoned that in learning to negotiate with strangers on a community level, citizens developed skills they could transfer to the larger scene. Instead of quietly deferring to prominent figures, they acquired practice in speaking up and making their needs known to others who could help them achieve their goals. They also learned to take yes for an answer even though this entailed forgoing what they initially desired. Then too, they discovered that practical success was contingent upon doing what was possible. Idealism was all well and good, but politics was the art of the doable. It concerned concrete actions with concrete outcomes. Dreams might be a good starting point, but were no substitute for horse-trading with other human beings who also had goals they wished to attain.

Robert Putnam later generalized Tocqueville’s thesis about American associations upon observing a comparable phenomenon in Italy. After studying the latter’s democratic reforms, he discovered that the provinces with a history of self-government were more effective in organizing decentralized rule than those with autocratic traditions. Their citizens were more willing to exercise initiative and were, therefore, more effective at bargaining with one another. Rather than await directives from Rome, they got down to the business of setting up their own schools and courts. Putnam realized that this was
analogous to the effect of America’s civic associations and concluded that keeping local alliances healthy was crucial to keeping democracy vigorous. The trouble back in the United States was that there seemed to be a decline in civil organization. Instead of joining in bowling leagues, as they once had, an upsurge in individualism had resulted in more people “bowling alone.” Membership in groups as widespread as the PTA and churches was apparently waning, with the eventual outcome that fewer individuals acquired the skills needed to participate in governmental activities.

Soon researchers were scouring local records to determine if these anxieties were justified. What scientists such as Everett Ladd found was that Americans were still joiners; it was merely that they were joining different sorts of organizations. As their circumstances changed, so had their needs. Thus, it was true that Parents-Teachers Associations were losing members. Nevertheless Parent’s Associations were gaining them. The switch was attributable to the fact that better educated parents resented being manipulated by teachers often more concerned about their own interests than those of the children. By the same token, whereas bowling leagues were contracting, tennis leagues were expanding. In Atlanta, for instance, one of these boasted over fifty thousand members who regularly competed in tournaments arranged on the basis of ability. Tennis, it seemed, was more congenial to middle class sensibilities than bowling; hence as the middle class grew, so had a devotion to a revised avocation—one more consistent with independent decision making.

In area after area, Americans continue to belong to associations in which they acquire both alliance building and negotiation skills. These, however, match contemporary rather than historical concerns. For one thing, as more of people become
homeowners, more belong to homeowner associations. Gathering together in the living rooms of their neighbors, they debate issues ranging from cleaning up common spaces to regulating home improvements. By and large, they want to make certain that others take care of their property was well as they do. Often concerned with changes that affect property values, they fret about zoning patterns that might modify the character of their communities. In these cases, they actively dialogue with county supervisors to assert their rights as stakeholders. This may entail appearing at public hearings or campaigning for one candidate rather than another. Either way, they exercise considerable influence. Politicians listen because they understand that their careers depend upon it. As for the homeowners, in interacting with one another and with local officials, they acquire a great deal of political sophistication. Some, in fact, move on to run for office. As a consequence, ordinary people, not just lawyers, sit on local school boards and get elected county commissioners.

Business owners are also strongly motivated to participate in the system. They too collaborate in associations dedicated to promoting their interests, albeit from different motives. Joining together to form everything from chambers of commerce to better business bureaus, they lobby for regulations favorable to their needs. They too worry about zoning and agonize over traffic patterns and tax rates. Their goal, however, is for customers to reach their businesses and profits to remain in their pockets. When they encourage their representatives to sponsor incentives for businesses to move into the area, it is not because they relish the competition, but because vigorous commerce improves everyone’s bottom line. This is not to say that business leaders are exclusively concerned with commercial success. They too exhibit a community spirit. When they agitate in
favor of school improvements this is partially because they seek employees with the relevant skills, but also because they too are parents and grandparents. They too want their families to live and work in a pleasant environment.

Needless to say, one of the most significant sorts of organization to which Americans belong are professional associations. Doctors and lawyers, but also college professors, architects, social workers, nurses, police officers, engineers, and teachers enlist in societies dedicating to promoting their occupational interests. They receive newsletters keeping them abreast of the latest developments in their fields, trundle off to annual conventions at exotic locations, and do their duty on local committees devoted to solving selected problems. These associations are a source of professional socialization in that they promote professional expertise. They are also a counterweight against pressures impinging on their affiliates. Utilizing the weight of numbers, they support professional authority in opposition to bureaucracy or government. Influential precisely because they represent collective expertise, they possess the prestige, and organizational competence to make their will felt.

Besides these associations, there exist a multitude of others. Some are small in scale—such as book clubs or trivial pursuit circles. These provide little more than an excuse for their members to socialize. Others, such as those committed to particular sports, allow for mingling, but also sustain the infrastructure upon which their activities depend. Golf associations provide an illustration of this. More serious in their endeavors are a variety of special interest groups. Among the more energetic are environmentalist organizations. Ranging from the Sierra Club to Greenpeace, these allow public-spirited individuals to lobby for ecosystem protections. Whether the idea is to save the whales or
to force coal companies to undo the damage done by strip mines, money is donated and
time expended to educate and shame others into doing what is believed right. The same
can be said about the ACLU, the Moral Majority, or NOW. While others might think
them misguided, their members voluntarily engage in these pursuits because they want to,
not because they have to. They genuinely intend to cooperate in improving civil rights,
public morality, or gender equity. Nor should we forget the innumerable self-help groups
that have sprouted like mushrooms. They bring people together for purposes as diverse
as providing emotional ventilation for divorcees to investment advice for would-be real
estate tycoons. Either way, they too pool knowledge for joint purposes.

Of special interest is the status of religious associations. Nowadays they are
controversial because their activities are often thought inimical to democracy. Some
skeptics characterize them as the opposite of professional; that is, as sponsoring narrow
superstition rather than enlightened expertise. In particular, while the mainline churches
are applauded for encouraging liberal programs, more conservative denominations are
castigated for imposing a theocratic despotism. They are thought to covet a
fundamentalist conformity in which everyone is obliged to become a stereotyped
Christian. Those who favor a separation of church and state, therefore, insist that
conservative religious organizations stay out of politics. They believe that freedom is
contingent upon fostering a secular orientation. To claim that overtly religious groups
constitute a mainstay of democracy strikes them as an oxymoron.

Yet if we look back upon history, religiously committed citizens have been in the
forefront of social movements that buttressed democratic institutions. The abolitionists
who agitated for an end to slavery were among these. Typically associated with
Protestant denominations, the circuit around which speakers such as Fredrick Douglass sought to generate excitement was anchored in church pulpits. A similar sort of association was evident within temperance groups. They too depended upon a devout constituency to spread the message about demon rum. In retrospect, the precursors to Prohibition may seem like anti-democratic zealots, but in their own context they promoted values intended to buttress egalitarian institutions. When they preached against drunkenness, it was to replace it with a God-fearing sobriety. Convinced that alcohol dependence converted men into improvident wastrels, they sought to change them into responsible family men who provided for their wives and children and refrained from beating them. Not only would this benefit the vulnerable, but it would transform the drinkers into model citizens.

One of the mistakes that critics of a resurgent religiosity make is to assume that contemporary religion is fundamentalist in temperament. They believe that most of the people attracted to church participation are in search of authoritarian guidance. What is presumably desired is instruction on what to believe. The reality is somewhat different. Contemporary Americans have not taken to a belief in the inerrancy of biblical text. Theirs is more an evangelical outlook. As the sociologist Alan Wolfe has demonstrated, their primary allegiance is to groups dedicated to spreading the good news of Christian redemption. Unlike the stern deity of their Puritan forefathers, they have faith in a loving God committed to their personal well being. Most passionately believe in a spiritual Being who loves them individually. Thus when they go to church, or gather together for bible study, the emphasis is on emotional sustenance. Not textual exegesis, but witness to the need for community and forgiveness of sins is the focus of their discussions.
The point is that contemporary religion is rarely about intellectual matters. Those who seek it are not questing after an increase in personal professionalism through a deepening of their understanding of denominational doctrine. When it comes to the cosmological expertise once furnished by biblical narratives, they, like their less devout peers, turn to science. Yes, some have doubts about evolution, but in most cases they recognize that empirical knowledge supplies more dependable problem-solving information than scripture. Thus pastoral counseling today owes more to psychotherapy than to Christ’s parables. Even ministers seek out training in psychology preparatory to advising their congregants. What religion has actually come to specialize in is imparting the courage to face life’s uncertainties. Much to the surprise of many, a community of co-religionists has proven a wonderful bulwark against the inevitable doubts of a Gesellschaft existence. It addresses the requirements of individuals who are forced by modernity to be occupationally and personally daring. It aids them in making decisions they know may be wrong. Under these circumstances, those required to be internally motivated often find themselves feeling emotionally isolated. The upshot is that in order to be self-directed, they welcome external support for their autonomy. This is what contemporary religious participation offers. It is not about enhancing the expertise dimension of professionalism so much as reinforcing its motivational dimensions.

As a consequence, religious affiliations are not anti-democratic. They are not about obedience as opposed to self-direction. Present-day Americans are individualists even as they pledge their loyalty to a particular faith. Indeed, one of the more salient facts about modern church-going is that switching denominations has become normal. No longer stigmatized as disloyalty, moving to a new area or marrying a spouse of a
different faith many occasion praying at an unfamiliar house of worship. As a corollary of this, Americans have become more universalistic in their religious outlook. Where once they were convinced that only members of their sect were destined for heaven, most today believe that being a good person pleases God—whatever one’s official faith. Americans, including Catholics and Jews, have likewise adopted the originally Protestant conception of a personal deity. They too turn to a “presence” that does not have to be mediated by an ecclesiastical hierarchy. Having become professionalized, they consider themselves sufficiently competent to communicate with the Lord on their own. Thus when they substitute one denomination for another, they bring their personal convictions with them—where, indeed, they tend to be tolerated. American religion as ceased being about exclusivity. To the contrary, it is about reasonableness and inclusion. It is also sentimental, as opposed to doctrinal. What could be more democratic than this?

Americans may be better educated than their ancestors, but they continue to believe in God. Perhaps less churched than previously, their religious commitments are not disappearing so much as becoming more egalitarian.

The Media

When the American democracy was first being fashioned, communication was difficult. The roads, where they existed, were poor. Neither railroads, nor steamships, had yet been invented; hence transportation depended upon the horse and carriage or sailing ship. Weeks were often required to travel the distances that separated the original states. Nevertheless, if the disparate parts of the nation were to cooperate in establishing, and maintaining, their independence, they needed a means of staying in contact. This was often furnished by the written word, or, more particularly, the printed word. Almost
simultaneous with the advent of the Revolution came a proliferation of newspapers. At first devoted to local and practical information, within short order they specialized in disseminating political messages. What people down the coast were doing, as well as recent legislative proposals, became the cynosure of community chatter. These matters were considered so critical to creating a popular democracy that the post office subsidized the distribution of newspapers.

At the beginning, many of these journals were avowedly partisan. Financed by political factions, they made no bones about party allegiance. Nor did they mince words in trashing their opponents. By today’s standards much of what was printed was scurrilous. Those on the other side of the political spectrum might openly be castigated to their stupidity or lack of moral integrity. Thus Thomas Jefferson was raked over the coals for the Sally Hemmings affair, while Alexander Hamilton was scolded for his infidelities. We tend to remember the erudition of what were eventually collected as the Federalist Papers, but these were scarcely the essence of daily fare. Even so, these slanted newspapers initiated a national discourse. They allowed voters to consider the issues they would be asked to judge at the polls and, as a consequence, helped them become reasonably well informed. In this, they permitted the infant democracy to be relatively competent by sustaining the rudiments of broad citizenship

In due course, as the nation expanded, the press became less sophisticated. The reasons for this were various. First, as technology improved, the cost of the daily paper declined. For pennies apiece, even ordinary workmen could afford them. Second, as education spread, literacy became the norm. This meant that readership was more widespread, albeit less cultured. Profits were now dependent upon volume, which
encouraged a search for excitement as opposed to scholarship. New kinds of articles emerged, especially those devoted to crime and mayhem. In the process, reporting became a specialized occupation, although not a prestigious one. Despite what might be imagined, most reporters were not well educated and many had a taste for strong spirits. By the twentieth century the reputation of journalists as hard drinking, foul-mouthed gypsies was well earned. Rarely thought of as professionals, they were subject to direction by editors, such as Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, who had political axes to grind and circulations to pump up.

Only in recent decades has journalism become thought of as a profession. With the advent of the electronic media, and in the wake of Watergate, individual journalists became celebrities. Some columnists, such as Walter Lippmann had long been influential, but the growing political power of the press began to attract more ambitious, and more cultivated, types. Schools of journalism sprang into prominence and those educated in subjects such as the law transferred to writing for national publications. Where before would-be journalists learned their trade on the job, the elite media began to demand a more in-depth grounding. This infusion of intelligence and integrity would presumably produce a better-informed public. It would also guarantee that despite their personal idiosyncrasies, individual reporters would be fair and balanced. Independently perceptive, they could communicate their insights so as to generalize their hard-earned expertise.

Given this emergent professional ideology what occurred is ironic. By the end of the century partisanship reemerged with a vengeance. With roughly ninety percent of elite journalists admitting to liberal leanings, this crept into their copy. Although most
stoutly maintained that they kept their biases in check, these, in fact, became standard. Not merely editorials or columns, but front-page articles betrayed a transparent partiality. Outlets such as The New York Times, once fabled for their objectivity, degenerated into predictable flacks. Despite continuing to trumpet their neutrality, comparisons between them and emergent vehicles such as Fox News revealed their prejudices. Thanks, in part, to a culture war between liberals and conservatives, the battle lines were drawn and an escalation of vitriol ensued. The players insisted that they remained the watchdogs of the system, but, as became increasingly apparent, the stories selected and the manner in which these were presented revealed prior commitments. Indeed, with the advent of Barack Obama, they developed what Bernard Goldberg characterized as “a slobbering love affair” with his left wing causes.

The depth of what occurred was earlier exposed by two incidents that took place during the 2004 presidential campaign. Almost bookends, the first arose shortly after the Democratic Convention. During the proceedings John Kerry presented himself as a military hero who was prepared to take charge of the Iraqi war. As a silver medal winner from Viet Nam, he presumably demonstrated the personal courage and know-how to be commander-in-chief. To this assertion came a speedy reply. A group of veterans who had served with Kerry in Southeast Asia put out a series of television advertisements that questioned his integrity. Months earlier they called a press conference to make their doubts known, but even though there were over two hundred of them, many of whom were also medal winners, the major media assiduously avoided reporting their views. Eventually to be known at the “swift boat vets,” weeks went by with their ads likewise ignored. It was not until they cut into Kerry’s poll numbers that the elite press took
notice, but then only in the negative. Instead of investigating the charges, they dug into the group’s financing, which was quickly proclaimed to prove they had been “discredited.”

To this must be contrasted what happened at CBS a month before the election. In this case, the venerable anchor Dan Rather presented a story that alleged George W. Bush had been derelict in his National Guard service. Letters, that were represented as coming from an unimpeachable source, proved that he had violated orders, been given preferential treatment, and been disapprovingly evaluated by a superior officer. Although Bush had already led the nation as commander in chief, these were put forward as casting doubt on his competence and patriotism. Within quick order, however, Internet observers demonstrated that the letters were fraudulent. Even so, Rather continued to defend them. It also became apparent that other outlets, such as The New York Times, had been preparing to endorse the same story. They were dissuaded from doing so only by CBS’s troubles. Other information similarly emerged that suggested coordination between the media and the Kerry campaign. While Rather was ultimately forced to back down, the disparity between the eager support extended to a Democrat, as opposed to the antagonism directed at Republicans, was striking. All but the most committed partisans had to conclude that even-handed professionalism had been trumped by political expediency.

What then of journalistic professionalism as a pillar of democratic institutions? Paradoxically, for a period at the end of the twentieth century, the growth of capitalism undermined the media neutrality upon which public information depended. As newspapers grew larger, and electronic media replaced the presses, a virtual monopoly
took shape. With fewer conduits serving larger audiences, the messages were more homogenized. A plethora of opposing periodicals that challenged each other’s assertions once controlled the excessive partisanship of their editors, but this balance vanished as reporters steeped in an insular culture adamantly denied that they possessed a point of view. When accused of a liberal bent, they expressed outrage. How could anyone question their professionalism? Didn’t the doubters understand that they were dedicated to protecting the public interest? This argument extended to what prospective journalists heard while still at J-school. The irony was that places presumably dedicated to purveying a disinterested expertise had enveloped them in an unbalanced partisanship. In fact, the professors at these institutions were also steeped in the prevailing liberal consensus. They too did not perceive their biases because these were so pervasive. Nor did they want to be disabused of them. A self-selection that impelled individuals with a desire to reform society to choose journalism (as opposed to business) for their career ensured that collectivist inclinations dominated the media and its teachers.

While this concentration of opinion was decidedly anti-democratic, it does not seem destined to remain permanent. The same trend that institutionalized the liberal supremacy appears on the verge of dismantling it. Emerging technologies are providing the means for dispersing what had become an oligarchy. The advent of cable networks made it profitable to develop news channels aimed at smaller audiences. These, in particular Fox News, soon appealed to more viewers than the established networks. So too did talk radio. Conservatives quickly discovered that they could hear like-minded commentators on voice only vehicles. Finally there is the Internet. No one anticipated the blogosphere, but a proliferation of computers and servers enabled private persons to
become their own journalists. Requiring neither extensive financing, nor corporate permission, they set up shop based solely on their interests and motivation. The result has been the reemergence of overt partisanship. Contradictory opinions once again are the norm and with them the liberal hegemony lurched toward extinction. In this, public pressures, not elite paternalism, proved decisive.

What has apparently occurred, and promises to continue, is that a more professionalized electorate has recreated the marketplace of ideas upon which its expertise depends. Instead of passively succumbing to an ideological cartel, it seeks out opposing opinions. Those occupationally disposed to making sound judgments would not rest content with swallowing the undigested views of minority oligarchs. All of this bodes well for the future of democracy. While it is impossible to predict the shape of future events, these will be influenced by large numbers of emotionally independent, relatively well informed citizens. The forces pressing toward centralized dominance are unrelenting, nevertheless so are those militating toward further professionalism.

**Diversity**

Americans are regularly harangued about their alleged parochialism. Sophisticated observers never tire of scolding them about their jingoistic venality. Rather than appreciate the virtues of other nationalities, Americans are reproached for preferring to speak only English. Rather than learn from more noble traditions, they are excoriated for exporting their own vulgar culture. In the light of this narrowness, what could be more advantageous than adopting multiculturalism? Were Americans to recognize that others have insights they lack, they might deign to celebrate the diversity on their doorstep. With immigrants daily streaming across the borders, they would embrace the
distinctive contributions these offer. Instead of attempting to force émigrés into a dreary conformity, they would support them in remaining separate. The old idea of a melting pot in which assorted ethnic groups melded together into a single American identity could then be permanently retired in favor of a salad bowl ethos. The goal would ultimately be for everyone to live courteously side-by-side, residing in their own neighborhoods and speaking their respective languages. This way interracial spice and interpersonal sympathy would replace egotism and misplaced pride.

Indeed, by the late 1960s conventional wisdom held that pluralism was preferable to assimilation. Not only was it okay for Italian-Americans to live in Little Italy’s and African-American students to reside in all black college dormitories, but this was favored over compelling them to integrate into the larger culture. Suddenly culturally diverse ethnic fairs became the rage. When the weekend arrived families embarked on expeditions to be served moussaka by Greeks, plantains by Jamaicans, and curried dishes by Indians. This worked so well that the next question was: Why not introduce bilingual education so that groups could preserve their native tongues? Wasn’t this the real spirit of democracy? Surely a nation as great as the United States did not need to demonstrate its superiority of imposing arbitrary standards on defenseless immigrants. Moreover, wasn’t it clear that everyone benefited from “diversity?” Allowing people to remain distinctive not only protected them from oppression; it exposed the larger culture to perspectives from which it could draw strength. If nothing else, this was obviously one of the best safeguards of democratic institutions.

Surely this sort of diversity made economic, political, and social sense. A market-based economy could not help but benefit from an infusion of novel ideas, hard workers,
and eager customers. Hadn’t history demonstrated that European immigrants added to prosperity rather than detracted from it? An injection of Mexicans, South Americans, and Africans would doubtless do the same. They too would prove themselves assets as they strove to be successful in a commercial environment that rewarded effort and innovation. For similar reasons, disparate communities would elevate the political process. Politicians forced to curry the favor of unfamiliar constituents would soon learn that serving their needs broadened their horizons. This would sensitize them to human needs and prevent them from promoting one group over another. Most of all, diversity would open the souls of ordinary citizens. Merely interacting with people different from themselves would educate them about the nature of humanity. It would, in short, make them better human beings.

Pluralism was, therefore, the shape of the future. It was what any clear-thinking and compassionate person would desire. Besides it could not be stopped. Assimilation was a myth. Experience revealed that the melting pot did not melt. Most people preferred the company of others similar to themselves; hence this ought to be admitted and encouraged. Furthermore, everyone deserved to have pride in his/her heritage. Celebrating diversity would actually further the self-esteem from which the nation benefited. The only accommodation required was to ensure that resources were evenly distributed and this could be accomplished through affirmative action. The government would establish goals such that jobs, educational opportunities, and residential arrangements were equally distributed. These would not be “quotas,” which were, of course, unfair, but “targets” that respected individual merit. People would be persuaded, not forced, to be fair. This, at least, was the rhetoric. The reality was otherwise. It
entailed administratively imposed preferences. Targets that were coercively imposed turned out to be quotas, irrespective of what they were called. If, in the unusual circumstance that the talents and inclinations of various groups exactly matched their proportion in the community, merit might be respected. But if they didn’t, as quite frequently they did not, the only way to reach a previously established goal was to place people into positions for which they were less qualified. In this case, individual life chances depended not on expertise and effort, but on an association with a particular community. What mattered more than one’s abilities or motives were one’s relatives.

Affirmative action, for all its good intentions, was a thinly disguised species of corporate pluralism. Although it might preach tolerance and equality, it treated people differently depending upon their race, ethnicity, or national origin. Far from being democratic, it Balkanized the body politic. Groups were encouraged to compete with one another for their share of the spoils rather than to cooperate in pursuit of equally enforced standards based on individual merit. This so affronted the democratic ethos that even the recipients of quota systems expressed displeasure. Worse still, those who were inserted into positions they did not earn tended to be disrespected. Perennially suspected of incompetence, they had to work twice as hard to be given credit for their achievements. Although they might sport fancy titles and good salaries, they were denied what they really wanted, namely the dignity that comes from genuine success.

The good news is that in a professionalizing society expertise and self-direction militate against affirmative action. The grievance machinery of politically ambitious officials is countered by the natural human desire to be successful. Hierarchical animals, whose relative success depends on their skills and decision-making abilities, tend to seek
these even when pushed to do less. The same applies to who gets hired. Organizations that wish to be successful have an incentive to select competent workers. If forced to accommodate politically imposed ciphers, they shunt them to sites from whence they can do the least harm. This means that members of different communities will be stimulated to do their best, while employers will be motivated to select the superior employees. All in all, professionalism will surge forward because it is both more efficient and more satisfying. In other words, tolerance and diversity will increase because they are profitable.

The same is true on a personal level. Diversity becomes the norm not because people are convinced that it is moral, but because their personal experience demonstrates the humanity of sundry others. As people interact with role partners who differ from themselves, they cannot help but notice that some are better than others. When they choose coworkers, friends, or spouses, if they want to be happy, they need to make accurate distinctions. They have to become expert in distinguishing who is who, in spite of cultural differences. To do less, that is, to be persuaded solely by surface characteristics, would condemn them to unsatisfactory relationships. In fact, Americans are much more professional in their judgments of these matters than they are given credit for. Despite their critics, they are among the least parochial of peoples. Yes, they insist on speaking English, but no, they don’t automatically reject people because their cultures are strange. More than in almost any other society in the history of the world, they are exposed to diversity in their daily lives. Paradoxically, part of the reason Americans are monolingual is that there is such a plethora of languages to which an immigrant society exposes them. They could not possibly be fluent in all. What they do instead is to
acquire a thumbnail knowledge of a host of ethnic and racial groups. Americans do not expect homogeneity, nor do they demand it. To the contrary, they live amidst heterogeneity and are comfortable with it.

Nor do Americans reject assimilation. Indeed, it, rather than pluralism, will be the shape of our future. People may take pride in their ancestors, but that does not imply they wish to retain a separate status. For most immigrants and minority groups, living in the United States stimulates a desire to become American. They may at first wish to remain hyphenated, yet in the long run even this distinction tends to atrophy. This, it must be stressed, is a good thing, for if they were to follow the recommendations of the pluralists, democracy would be in peril. Sadly, many of the settlers who come to these shores lack a democratic tradition. Were they, therefore, to cling to their old ways, it would not be long before autocratic inclinations swamped egalitarian ones. This has not happened because new Americans have usually embraced the political attitudes of their adopted homeland. If not, then their children almost surely do. Quite voluntarily, their allegiance shifts to the customs in which they are immersed. The mistake made by anti-assimilations is in supposing that the melting pot is like a microwave oven. When immigrants do not immediately become Americanized, they assume they never will. What they fail to reckon with is that assimilation is a multi-generational process. For most groups, the longer they are in the United States, the more integrated they become. The appropriate analogy is thus one of a stew pot, where the longer things cook the more the ingredients tend to meld together. Indeed, this blending process also alters the host culture to make it more cosmopolitan.
The proof of what is occurring is found on the domestic scene. Not only is there assimilation, but there is more amalgamation. Americans not only tolerate those different from themselves, they marry them. Generally speaking, the longer groups have resided in the country, the larger the percentage engaged in exogamy. Even groups as habitually clannish as Jews find a majority of their children creating families with non-Jews. This is true across ethnic distinctions; it is true across racial lines. Asians, in particular, but nowadays even African-Americans, are finding love in what once would have been unlikely places. Thanks to the nation’s egalitarian, democratic spirit, people are allowed to mingle and thereby discover each other’s virtues. Personally professionalized, they possess the courage to explore differences and the knowledge to pierce barriers. By the same token, their personal cosmopolitanism strengthens democracy. In creating alliances across what used to be impenetrable boundaries, it makes oppression less likely.

Put another way, the more sympathetic people are with one another, the less plausible is a desire to exclude particular individuals. Diversity becomes a way of life, not a philosophical aspiration. This too, as it happens, is a corollary of the Middle Class Revolution. Those who earn a living by being professionalized experts care more about what others can do than about their pedigrees. Since a desire for competence makes it foolish to formulate fictitious distinctions, they are less parochial and less racist. Likewise, the individualism bred of professionalism encourages perceiving others as individuals and, therefore, as possessing the rights due competent adults. Despite all of the talk of lingering prejudices, these are declining. Furthermore, they should continue to diminish. This will occur more slowly than might be preferred, but the logic of professionalization is certain to drive egalitarianism forward.
Chapter 7

Love and Marriage

Sex

Once, married couples slept in single beds. Once, when they shared the same bed, at least one of them was required to keep a foot on floor at all times. This, at least, was the media standard. Beginning first with the movies, then extending to television, the prospect of censorship encouraged producers to present modesty as the norm. No one got naked. No one became vulgar. There was absolutely no frontal nudity. For the most part, the heroes were married, or if not, they were decorously widowed. In the words of John Ford’s matchmaker in The Quiet Man, “the proprieties [were to be] observed at all times.” Everyone knew the rules about sex, and consequently set a good example, whatever the temptations to do otherwise. Some opportunistic moviemakers violated these conventions, but responsible artists knew enough not to glorify sin.

How different times have become. Sleaze is now customary. In the cinema, on television, in music videos, in magazines, during halftime at the super bowl, and on the concert stage a horde of sordid performances compete for public attention. Even in local neighborhoods teeny-boppers parade through malls flaunting belly button rings to gawking adolescent boys. Most are convinced that the more skin they expose, the better. Some talk show hosts also believe that the more risqué the double entendres, the greater the sophistication. Who today would blush at intimations of sexual activity? Who is so gauche as to admit being prudish? Ours has become a sexually liberated world in which virtually everyone is allowed—nay encouraged—to do whatever feels good. Why not have multiple sexual partners? Why not curse out people—especially if they deserve it?
To do less would be inauthentic. It would deny one’s innermost nature. Besides, sex is fun. Don’t the glamorous people, the ones everyone admires, prove its worth on screen and off? By her own testimony, wasn’t Madonna in the business of liberating an uptight puritan society by having simulated sex with a coke bottle? In any event, her exhibitionism did not hurt her career. If anything, it made her more exotic.

Nowadays we are assured that sex is both normal and natural. There is clearly no point in hiding our biological heritage. Why not show off one’s body—especially if it is attractive? The only reason to be ashamed is that one is trapped in priggish Victorianism. Nor is there a disgrace in having multiple bed partners. In the old days this was scorned as promiscuity, but that was long before effective birth control and the Freudian revolution. As psychology has demonstrated, sex is what makes the world go around. Sex is what gives life meaning. It is pleasurable. It is healthy. It smoothes the relationships between human beings. Make love, not war, that’s the ticket! Rather than cower behind a barrier of hidebound conventionality, people should take pride in a vigorous sexuality. They should flaunt their conquests and agitate for free love. After all, what good is mere money if it does not lead to happiness? The best way to be ecstatic is unquestionably to rejoice in multiple orgasms.

This, in any case, is one of the faces of contemporary sexuality. It is a world of gyrating hard bodies and beach bunny hotties. It is the domain of girls gone wild and boys hitting on whichever wench smiles their way. But there is another attitude toward sex abroad in the land. It is the one more closely associated with feminism. This perspective laments the survival of sex slaves. Here women are depicted as the vulnerable victims of male lasciviousness. They are sweet innocents continuously put
upon by potential rapists who desire nothing other than their sexual favors. Men may make sugary promises, yet their real intention is to get what they can without succumbing to matrimony. If, however, they must marry, they will turn their spouses into obedient Stepford wives. The actual nature of marriage is legalized exploitation. It is about males using physical intimidation to be waited upon hand and foot, whether at the dining room table or in the bedroom. In this view, sex is not about pleasure, but subordination. It is literally a form of slavery to which the only answer is liberation. Liberation, in this instance, does not mean the ability to have sex with whomever one desires, but the capacity to refrain from heterosexual encounters altogether. This is the sexuality of the dildo and female companion.

Then too there is the sexuality of the classroom. This is not the sexuality of the lecture hall in which the physiology of organs is discussed in clinical detail. It is not about discoursing on contemporary advances in biology to illuminate the different ways in which men and women respond to sexual stimulation. Rather it is the politically correct classroom in which very young students are indoctrinated into the mysteries of AIDS and birth control. In former years, secondary school hygiene classes described a sanitized version of sex. They used diagrams to explain how eggs were fertilized by sperm cells and then urged students to be prudent. More recently, the emphasis has transformed into encouraging safe sex and social tolerance. Beginning in kindergarten, near toddlers are exposed to stories about STDs. Presumably the earlier they learn about HIV, the less likely they will be to condemn homosexuals as adults. They are also expected to receive instruction in the use of condoms. These are not merely discussed; they are brought into the junior high school classroom. Teachers impersonally
demonstrate how to place a rubber on a cucumber, while cautioning their students that it is the penis which is the actual object of this exercise.

Contemporary sex education is also supposed to be gender education in that it promotes tolerance of sexual variation. If Mary has two mommies, then two mommies are quite as good as a mommy and a daddy. Or if Tommy has two daddies, that also works. Social censure of diversity is depicted as a specter from an uninformed past. Students must learn that it is totally out of place in an enlightened society. How people choose to use their bodies should be a matter of individual preference, not moral condemnation. So insistent has this message become that many students chuckle at what they privately call “homosexual chic.” The attitude seems to be that being gay is more politically correct than being straight.

Sex, in short, has become fashionable. In the name of honesty and open-mindedness it is thrust in people’s faces. Partisans of various theories of sex insist on presenting their views as progressive and informed. As they tell it, they each know the truth and are merely attempting to disseminate it. This knowledge, whatever its character, will liberate us; whether this means more or less sex, either of the gay or straight variety. Nevertheless much of what is represented as neutral information is distorted by a need to be persuasive. Neither the idea that everyone is having sex and glorying in it, nor that the average woman must regularly be on guard against predatory rapists, is exactly right. Fortunately, although the truth about sexuality is hard to come by, our understanding of what people actually do is better than ever. Even though both men and women hide these activities and offer false testimonials, social scientists have managed to get closer to the facts. In doing so, they have exposed a host of surprises.
Quite unexpectedly, most people turn out to be less deviant than the propagandists have led us to believe. Because so much of what is blandly presented as true derives from biased sources, the reality is less bizarre.

Let us begin with a simple instance. When Alfred Kinsey, over a half century ago, lifted the veil on homosexuality, it created a sensation. Until his closely researched book on male sexuality, most Americans assumed that same sex relationships were rare. These were roundly denounced as immoral and unnatural; hence were confined to perverts. It was not then recognized that these liaisons were invisible because they had been driven underground. Gays haunted inner city train stations and seedy out of the way bars; they did not walk hand-in-hand down Main Street. Kinsey’s data made it plain that the orientation was fairly common. He estimated that ten percent of the male population exhibited it. This subsequently became the benchmark for later discussions. Only with the passage of time did it become known that Kinsey was himself gay and that his sampling techniques were skewed. Part of the reason he found so many gays was that he was looking for them. He was also attempting to make their lifestyle appear normal. If so many people were immersed in anal sex, it could not possibly be a disease. Eventually even the American Psychiatric Association agreed and deleted homosexuality from its list of paraphilias. More recently, investigators have concluded that perhaps three percent of men are habitually homosexual. While these scientists are not seeking to return gays to a leper status, this number substantially reduces the presumed prevalence of same sex behaviors. For better or worse, it flies in the face of the assertions of pro-gay activists who seek to curry public acceptance by inflating their population statistics.
Another misconception fostered by sexual partisanship is the volume of sexual activity. Those for whom promiscuity is the Holy Grail have promulgated the notion that everyone is copulating with everyone else and enjoying it enormously. Many of these impressions were originally gained from surveys that indicated frantic partner swapping. What was not at first realized was that the people who completed questionnaires published in popular magazines tended to be exhibitionists. Not surprisingly, they were eager to brag about their exploits. A majority of others were more circumspect. They kept their dealings between themselves and their partners. Thus, the first indicators suggested that infidelity was mainstream. Apparently more than three out of four men and about half of all women admitted to cheating on their spouses. Nor did they seem to be humiliated by this. Fortunately, better sampling techniques have altered the picture. It develops that about twenty-five percent of men and fifteen percent of women have strayed, and of these, most have done so infrequently; often only once. Instead of average people accepting unfaithfulness as a standard part of their relationships, most take their vows seriously and expect their partners to do so as well. Betrayal, including sexual betrayal, is not, as had been imagined, undertaken lightly. Nor do normal people consort with hundreds of sexual partners during their lifetimes. The basketball great Wilt Chamberlain boasted of having made over twenty thousand conquests, while Warren Beatty claimed over ten thousand, but this is far outside the normal range. Including premarital, extramarital, and post divorce sex, most men can count their partners in the mid teens, while for most women it is under ten. The notion that everyone jumps into bed with a stranger at the end of every trip to a local bar is pure fantasy. People are more careful; especially women, most of whom, understand the consequences of indiscriminate
sex. In fact, although most people have sex prior to marriage, this is frequently with someone expected to become a spouse.

Nor is rape the norm. To hear radical feminists tell it, almost every woman has been raped or had a near encounter with rape. If the official statistics are not in agreement with this assessment, they conclude this is because most women are too embarrassed to report the incident. Rather than destroy their reputations in a society that blames them for their defilement, they lick their wounds in private. Despite the fact that this has become the conventional wisdom, there is reason to doubt its validity. Much of what is today considered rape is often regret over consensual sex that turns out badly. There is also evidence that some rape has been over-reported. Several years ago, at the height of the feminist movement, college campuses rang with “take back the night” demonstrations. Hundreds of women stepped forward to denounce university administrators who refused to protect them from an epidemic of sexual attacks. Apparently college men could not take “No” for an answer and misinterpreted sexy clothing as an invitation to coitus. The result was the instillation of better lighting and call boxes on campuses nationwide. Only in retrospect was it realized that stranger rape was rare at these institutions. On most, it was years between incidents. Often what at first seemed to be rape were instances of women using the accusation to cover embarrassing episodes. Most men, it seems, are not congenital rapists. They are not driven into uncontrollable paroxysms of lust on Super Bowl Sunday. This is a libel foisted on society by reformers more intent on achieving political victories than communicating the truth.
To judge by the public discourse, one might suppose that sexuality, or the need to defend against unwanted sexuality, is rampant. One might conclude that sexual release is all that most people—not just adolescent boys—think about. If so, it would make sense to assume that controlling sexuality is one of the most significant items on our social agenda. Depending upon one’s point of view, this would indicate either a future in which the libido is liberated or one where it is reigned in. Both scenarios are, however, deceptive. Unbridled talk about sexuality is, in many ways, a smoke screen for dealing with heterosexual intimacy. What has really changed is the context in which men and women form long-term relationships. Where in the past marriage was expected and frequently required, this has been challenged by middle class professionalization. People no longer need to get married in order to have their basic needs met. Men do not require women to cook for them; nor do women need men to bring home the bacon. The overwhelming success of the techno-commercial marketplace has allowed both genders to support themselves. If they wish to establish enduring liaisons, this is a voluntary matter. It is because they want to, not because they have to.

This said; genuine intimacy is difficult. People who live together, and share the same bed, are prone to misunderstandings. Merely vowing to love and respect another human being “until death do us part,” does not ensure sympathetic cooperation. Individuals who start out infatuated with one another can grow cold and even hostile. Moreover, because they live in such close proximity, they can do each other great physical and emotional harm. They learn each other’s weak points and can exploit them for personal advantage. Thus, a husband might ridicule his wife’s weight, precisely because she is self-conscious about it, whereas she can deride his sexual prowess,
because he has his doubts. They figuratively tear at each other’s souls, without anyone else being present to alleviate their excesses. Sometimes such skirmishes escalate to physical abuse. Men and women lose control and fists fly. In this case the authorities need to intervene. More often, irreconcilable differences conclude in the termination of the relationship. Voluntary intimacy implies voluntary divorce. People who don’t need to stay together may choose not to. They can decide to look elsewhere for the affection they once thought they had found.

The reason why an obsession with sex has become a smokescreen for intimacy gone wrong is that sex is habitually confused with love. Individuals in the throes of physical passion assume that the attraction they feel will be deep and lasting. Lust can, in sum, be all-consuming. It can fill the head—and loins—and motivate a desire for never-ending closeness. The difficulty with this is that coital bonding is not the same as emotional bonding. Neither unlimited intercourse with unlimited partners, nor nonstop bedroom gymnastics with a single collaborator, can substitute for mutual caring. Yet because long term caring is so problematic, it is easy to conclude that lust—which unlike love can be instantaneous—is the secret to voluntary attachments. This, in turn, can promote the glorification of promiscuity as being every bit as valid as marital fidelity and heterosexual hostility as more sensible than the inevitable disillusionment of interpersonal intimacy. Rather than take the time to learn about love, or to become the sort of person capable of it, pseudo-sophisticated sex enthusiasts renounce it either as no different than good coitus or as a fantasy that is best spurned. Instead of allowing themselves to get hurt, they endorse sexual fictions that keep them occupied in unproductive directions.
What is missing from these ideological calisthenics is an appreciation of the intricacies of interpersonal intimacy. Love is not automatic. As has in recent years become better understood, it requires work. Yet love remains a mystery. In the past, it was thought to just happen. Lightening stuck from an empty sky to sear two soul mates together for life. They did not have to think things through because their emotions made more valid decisions than their conscious minds. This belief may have been sufficient when necessity produced permanency irrespective of the long-term attitudes of the partners; it is sadly deficient in a society where prosperity facilitates easy separations. Under these circumstances accurate information is essential. Members of today’s middle class society need to be expert in the nature of intimate relationships. If they are to make sensible decisions, they need to know how love is sustained. Professionalized individuals who are otherwise aware of why they do as they do cannot settle for less. Accustomed to making choices with their eyes open, they cannot be comfortable with closing them when selecting a lifelong partner. Nor should they accept ignorance during the day-to-day encounters that constitute the substance of these connections. If they intend to succeed, they will want to understand what is going on as they struggle to reconcile the ordinary frictions of daily life.

Nor can they depend on external pressures to keep them together. Whatever their extended families may believe, or their neighbors expect, unless they decide to remain a couple, they probably will not. Professionalism, it must be understood, entails not only expertise in decision-making, but the internal motivation to engage in particular behaviors. Individuals who control their own destinies do what they do because they desire it, not because they are coerced into it. This applies more so to personal
relationships than occupational duties. If intimate alliances must be worked at in order to succeed, the partners themselves must be committed to doing so, for unless they make the effort, it will not be made. They won’t take the time to find the right person, work on becoming someone who can love, or resolve the disagreements that divide the staunchest lovers. The desire to form a personal attachment may be natural, but the stimulus to overcome interpersonal tensions is not. The latter takes individual maturity and self-direction.

**Family Matters**

Sexually transfixed activists, whether of the promiscuous or male-bashing variety, tend to be anti-family. They contemplate a future in which individuals make their own way, unencumbered by entangling alliances. Families based on heterosexual bonding are anathema to them because these are conflated with interpersonal slavery. Thus, sexual addicts believe that allegiance to a single human being is tantamount to incarceration. It is reckoned the equivalent of voluntarily building a barrier between oneself and innumerable opportunities for physical gratification. Why, they ask, would anyone willingly spurn an attractive partner for the sake of a piece of paper? The male bashers, in contrast, view marriage as a priapic plot. They believe that men long ago discovered that they benefited by forcing women to raise their children and manage their households. “Barefoot, pregnant, and in the kitchen” became their motto, but it also became the bane of womankind. Instead of men assuming an equal obligation for family duties, they foisted these on the “weaker” sex. This was so patently unfair that it could only be enforced through a society-wide conspiracy. So inequitable is it that modern women have a responsibility to renounce it and embrace their own liberation.
The free love crowd usually solves the problem of the family in one of two ways. The first is simply not to worry about it. If women are careless enough to get pregnant during an evening of passion, it is their concern. The babies are theirs to be taken care of as best they can. The rest of us should simply get on with our own business. Option number two is more conscientious. Academic advocates of free love, such as Bertrand Russell, promote a welfare state. In their view, modern prosperity is such that the government both can, and should, provide the resources to raise children. This is more dependable, not to mention more equitable, than requiring fathers to support their offspring. Generous entitlements, in the form of monthly stipends, will ensure food on every table and a roof over every head. The end product will be an equality of opportunity that parental meddling cannot match.

The radical feminist crowd so hates the arrogance of male irresponsibility, that they too envision male-free households. Men, they repeatedly aver, are not worth the trouble. If they will not do their duty, who needs them? Who needs their boisterous selfishness? Who needs to put up with their violence or sexual imperialism? Let them go their own way, relegated to the role of sperm donors. Women are perfectly capable of handling their own affairs. In the feminist universe, if men won’t help raise their children, why participate in the charade of trying to make them? If they won’t contribute the dollars needed to provide comfort for their own flesh and blood, that’s all right too. Women can earn enough on their own for themselves and their children without their intrusive presence. They are smart enough and strong enough. Single parent households, that is, families dominated by mothers, are every bit as adequate as two parent households. Indeed, they are probably better because they are more loving.
The anti-family circle has been nothing if not innovative. It offers an assortment of arrangements that allegedly take the place of the traditional nuclear family. Not only are these proffered as viable alternatives; they are lauded as superior to the two parent, heterosexual model. Sometimes bracketed together under the rubric of the “multi-cultural” family, the implication is that other cultures have pioneered their employment and found them satisfactory. Westerners may believe a husband and wife are necessary to raise children, but women working independently, or in cooperation with other women, have proved as effective. Experience has also demonstrated that it is possible to have “open marriages.” Why should individuals artificially pledge each other their troth when they can as easily provide the freedom to experiment? Why indeed can’t they indulge in partner swapping or pleasure-centered orgies? As long as the parties voluntarily consent to these arrangements, they can enhance their relationships by making them less oppressive. Why, in fact, should couples marry at all? Why can’t they just shackle up? This way if things go wrong, they can part amicably. They can also test each other out before they assent to a permanent alliance. In this case, a kind of trial, or perhaps experimental, marriage would strengthen the real thing should they later decide on one.

Then too, what is wrong with divorce or serial monogamy? Surely, if a particular alliance does not work out, it is better to admit failure and move on. A pretense of marriage, hypocritically perpetuated for the sake of the children, is bound to injure them as well as their parents. Mature individuals should, if anything, be encouraged to pursue personal growth, whether inside or outside a particular relationship. Wouldn’t this be more professional than rigidly adhering to an institution created for a bygone era?
Wouldn’t it also be more intelligent and personally satisfying? Then too, why not accommodate both homosexual and heterosexual unions? Love should be welcomed irrespective of its gender or duration. Although this may be disconcerting to people raised to honor historical patterns, recent innovations are more rational and civilized.

Not that long ago it would have been considered unnecessary to defend the traditional family. Even Frank Sinatra, not himself a paragon of heterosexual fidelity, sung about love and marriage going together like a horse and carriage. Marriage, he opined, was an institution one could not disparage. Yet disparaged it has been and, therefore, a defense is needed. More particularly, the once standard nuclear family must be examined to determine if it is appropriate within a middle class, techno-commercial society. Perhaps in a Gesellschaft world personal autonomy should extend beyond the marketplace into the domestic sphere. If people are going to be impersonal in their civil relationships, maybe something equivalent should prevail in their private relationships. Might not this independence, in fact, promote freedom more effectively than a lifelong commitment? Wouldn’t it aid children in teaching them self-reliance?

The answer is an emphatic “No!” Marriage may be as old-fashioned as alleged, but, in another sense, it is more modern than ever. Critics who suggest impersonal alternatives seem not to recognize that the institution has been revised to meet evolving contingencies. Recent events reveal that a family composed of a man and a woman and their children provides advantages in a world dominated by interactions between strangers. Christopher Lasch famously portrayed it as a haven in a heartless world. It might also be portrayed as an indispensable nursery in a world where children need to become self-directed. Couples committed to one another because they love each other
provide adults the safety and emotional support no other relationship can. Similarly two
parents, committed to their children, instill the security and expertise no other institution
can equal. If anything, the emotional attachments available within a loving family are
more important in a society that places a premium on the courage to make independent
decisions. The nuclear family may not have originated in a professionalized world, but is
critical to perpetuating it.

In previous generations this was not apparent. Their conventional wisdom was
grounded in aphorisms derived from years gone by. Yet society has undergone a learning
curve since then. The information required to determine which kind of relationship is
today best for marital partners and their offspring is not innate. This sort of expertise had
to be created, often by trial and error. Where once romantic myths seemed like solid
facts, as society has transformed, their flaws were revealed. People who live longer, and
have the resources to move on to other liaisons, learned that love is not guaranteed to last
forever. Not unnaturally, a host of innovators rushed forward with a flood of
suggestions. They were all too happy to tell people how to correct what they were doing
wrong. Many of these proposals were subsequently found wanting, but this could not be
known a priori. No one could have been predicted, for example, that trial marriages
would not result in more perfect unions. That increased communication between two
partners would cement their relationship was a reasonable conjecture. Only time
disclosed that couples dedicated to the notion of commitment would have a better track
record than those who didn’t. As might have been predicted, but wasn’t, those who
believed in living together first were more willing to separate when things went wrong.
Thanks to their belief in experimentation, they were less inclined to put effort into
repairing disagreements. Nor could it be foreseen that temporary cohabitation was for some a means of leaning about relationships before entering one intended to be permanent. They perceived it merely as an updated version of going steady and hence when it ended were not overly distressed.

The same sort of learning curve has occurred with divorce. Initially a lack of experience with effortless break ups suggested that it would be easy to move from a bad relationship to a better one. The parties would rationally decide that they were not meant for each other and as rationally select a new partner for whom they were better suited. Divorce would be amicable, as would be the subsequent relationship between the ex-spouses. This too, however, turned out to be an illusion. The nature of emotional attachments is such that they are not easily ruptured. Even when they go wrong, the pain, and the anger, of separating can be intense. Nor is there any insurance that the partners will have learned from their mistake. Not only is it possible to repeat old errors in a new relationship; there is a substantial likelihood they will.

Nevertheless, the worst outcomes of divorce afflict the children. Originally it was supposed that they would be resilient enough to weather the storm. Despite their natural misgivings about losing a parent, they would quickly accept this revised circumstance. Indeed, they would benefit from the example of parents who were wise enough to pursue their own happiness. This would provide them with permission to pursue their own happiness and with the understanding that they too could survive stressful errors. It took several decades to recognize that this was wishful thinking. Divorce did not strengthen children; to the contrary, it left many with insecurities they could not begin to address until they were adults. Precisely because they were children, they did not understand
why their parents separated. Nor could they understand their part in the process. This bequeathed them uncertainties about their personal adequacy and doubts about the reliability of members of the opposite sex. The consequence was that children of divorce were themselves prone to divorce; that they had greater mental health issues, especially regarding depression and anxiety; and that they were less likely to get a good education or achieve occupational success. Staying together for the sake of the children turned out not to be such a ridiculous idea after all.

Nor was single parenthood a walk in the park. For starters it was worse on children than divorce. The absence of a father was apparently more than a mere oversight. Offspring who grew up without a daddy noticed the difference. Certainly the loss of one was not an advantage. Fathers, the evidence suggested, were not superfluous drones. They added a dimension to families that mothers had difficulty replacing. Men tend to make demands of the young that women do not. Because they are more instrumentally oriented, that is, because they are more concerned with achievement; they provide a structure that emotionally supportive mothers often overlook. They also contribute to family finances to such an extent that their absence correlates with poverty. Moreover, women on their own tend to have so many demands impinging on them that they cannot simultaneously be super-successful breadwinners and adequate disciplinarians. Some things tend to fall through the cracks, such that their children get shortchanged. As a result, like the children of divorce, but more so, they drop out of school, get in trouble with the law, and enter fragile relationships. It is definitely not the case that they receive more love because they don’t have to put up with the distractions of male crudity. That today about forty percent of children are born out of wedlock turns
out to be a social disaster. It presages a world in which the children of the poor are destined to remain poor, while the children of the irresponsible will likely become so.

At the height of the free love agitation during the 1920s the anthropologist Margaret Mead suggested that western children were prone to rebellion because they were corrupted by parental possessiveness. Recently returned from observing Samoan family customs, she concluded that their young, in being raised by extended families, were less oppressed. They did not have to fight for their freedom and were even allowed to engage in casual sexual liaisons without fear of reproach. It, therefore, made sense for Americans to be less possessive. Later on, other innovators suggested that open marriages provided this latitude. If marital partners did not have to depend upon one another for sexual gratification, they could be less demanding of each other and their offspring. Everyone would thereby be given permission to be themselves and, therefore, be more loving. The dynamic was presumably this; since they had less reason to feel resentful, they could be more accepting of differences. But here too experience demonstrated otherwise. Open marriages and swinging couples do not make for solid commitments or for interpersonal security. Human beings want to feel loved and a multitude of sexual peccadilloes do not furnish this assurance. To the contrary, they arouse jealousies and apprehensions. Casually sleeping around does not so much offer freedom as a threat to interpersonal attachments. In reality, couples that agree not to interfere with each other’s affairs are more apt to wind up in divorce court.

The question then arises as to how it is possible to construct a loving family within a Gesellschaft society. In a world where individuals are more on their own than ever, how do they develop the expertise and individual motivation to make, and maintain,
long-term commitments? The place to begin is with the couple. What do they need to do to create a sturdy relationship? How do they get intimacy to work such that they can pass along its benefits to their offspring? Although marriage as an institution is more about the needs of children than their parents, if the latter cannot make their alliance succeed, the entire arrangement is apt to fall to the ground. What thus needs to be understood is how emotional attachments are established and perpetuated.

The Perils of Attachment

Once arranged marriages were the standard. Parents made agreements with other parents, and their children followed along. Often with the aid of a matchmaker, they established what amounted to an alliance between their families. Later, as society grew denser, young adults made their own decisions about whom to marry. But with more choices, came greater confusions. Throngs of strangers made it difficult to differentiate the good prospects from the poor ones. A common response to this dilemma was to marry the girl next door. Men and women were attracted to those with whom they had the greatest probability of interacting, and this was often those close at hand. But then society grew even larger. Work was now farther away from home and might even be in another city. This meant that those one got to know were more widely dispersed. At this point, the choice of potential partners expanded to include millions of eligibles. But who among these would make the best companion? How could one tell? Would celestial lightening appear to guide the decision or were young people condemned to wander unloved in the wilderness?

Many contemporaries have taken to consulting the media for hints about how to proceed. They watch programs in which physically attractive people seem to achieve
happiness because they are so sexually appealing they draw attention to themselves. From this viewers conclude that if only they looked like that, they too would be loved. This makes appearances seem paramount. Regrettably, because most of people are unaware of what sort of other would meet their needs, these immature onlookers tend to confound plastic sex symbols with genuine humanity. Not yet in touch with their innermost selves, they do not realize how shallow these public icons are. The young especially seem to believe that being a media star automatically brings fulfillment.

What romantics fail to recognize is that the first step in establishing a stable attachment is knowing oneself. Before one can perceive which others would make satisfying partners, one needs to understand what one finds satisfying. This starts with obtaining an appreciation of one’s likes and dislikes? True maturity reveals that what works for the crowd may not work for oneself. Besides this, what are one’s strengths and weaknesses? Are there some things one can do, but others one cannot? Lastly what are one’s deepest values and fondest dreams? And which of these objectives are important enough to pursue? Research shows that unless couples complement each other in this dimension, conflict is likely. In the old days, when marriages were arranged, children could be linked together until they grew to know one another. It was possible for them to develop into adults in one another’s company because, however this occurred, they were expected to adjust to their respective foibles. Nowadays, with relationships more voluntary, potential mates have to be more mature before they choose a partner. They need to develop an adult sense of self so that they can judge the fittingness of another adult. Put another way, before selecting an appropriate candidate for a long-term attachment, they must become experts about themselves. They must be professionalized
regarding the sort of person they are. This too is an expertise, albeit not one obtained by going to school.

But this is just half of what is required. The motivational aspect of a personal professionalism must also be considered. Sadly, not everyone who wants love is capable of it. It may be a cliché, yet it remains true that those who receive love when they are young are generally better able to give it later on. One of life’s more agonizing tragedies that those in the greatest need of affection are the least likely to find it. Having been deprived of tenderness when they were small, they become so desperately needy that they drive off potential partners. Those who might offer them warmth are literally frightened by demands they know they cannot meet and which they suspect will not be met by a complimentary emotional generosity. What needs to happen, but frequently does not, is that a needy partner first fills the empty place in his/her own heart. Before entering a productive partnership, he/she must learn to love him/herself. A person’s internal motivation cannot be appropriate unless he or she engages in this kind of personal growth. Despite the myths of yesteryear, love does not save people. Unless they first grow into loving human beings, they are unlikely to attract the sorts of person who might help them become what they desire. Love can make a person feel stronger, but it cannot replace the internal work only a person can do for him/herself. This business of personal growth is so important to becoming a professionalized self, and so extensive in its implications, that it will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter. In the meantime, it is enough to recognize that loving relationships are personal as well as interpersonal.

In any event, once a possible partner has been selected, the work of forming an attachment has just begun. To begin with, regardless of myths about the electricity of
love at first sight, who a particular stranger is will not be visible on his/her face. It takes time to get to know what makes another person tick. In today’s world, searching this out is usually achieved through a dating process. A man and a woman go out, often to a restaurant, during which time they engage in conversation. They tell each other about what they have done and hope to do. They also introduce each other to the other people in their lives and to their respective responsibilities. Although strangers may at first appear to be isolated individuals, few are. After a while, if all goes well with this biography swapping, the two begin to admit their individual weaknesses and divulge the blemishes that make them human. Under the best of circumstances, this is accomplished in a balanced manner. Neither will be asked to go out on a limb without this being reciprocated by the other. In doing so, they establish the interpersonal trust that is the sine qua non of a satisfactory relationship. Such confidence is the absolute minimum required to feel comfortable in each other’s presence.

At this point, it is important to reiterate how crucial trust is to love. Intimacy is dangerous. Whether heterosexual or homosexual, propinquity is conducive to betrayal. As unromantic as this may sound, once people get close to one another, they have the opportunity to disappoint each other. They become privy to embarrassing secrets and are physically present when the other’s defenses are down. As a result, a central feature of courtship is testing the trustworthiness of a potential partner. What he or she says matters, but how he or she acts, especially under pressure, matters more. Careful observations are essential, but trust is so critical that circumstances must be arranged such that the other is forced to reveal his/her true colors. Very few men or women admit to being potential traitors. This propensity must be elicited in deeds rather than words.
Thus, one might share a secret, go out to an expensive restaurant, or arrange for the other to hang out with a friend’s children to determine how he/she responds. Nevertheless, telling a potential partner that his/her behavior is under scrutiny is a surefire formula for a goodbye. It suggests a lack of trust that is itself an indicator of disloyalty. This aspect of the courtship is, therefore, conducted sub rosa. Each partner monitors the other and sets up challenges for the other to meet, but without admitting as much out loud. While this may not be completely candid, to do less would set a person up for disappointment. Trust must be earned; and earned in action, not through empty promises. Testing trust is thus a critical interpersonal skill. It is a vital forerunner to judging the character of strangers in a Gesellschaft environment.

Only after the parties are confident in each other’s presence do they enter the next stage of attachment formation. This part is often mistaken for love itself. It is the part where the couple seems float on air. We call it “infatuation.” Assuming that each of the partners likes what is being learned and that the other appears to be trustworthy, one, or hopefully both, will experience an emotional release. They will be flooded by warm feelings that engulf the other in an incomparable glow. Now this former stranger appears perfect. He or she will be so idealized that the lover feels extraordinarily lucky to have found someone this fantastic. How, it will be wondered, did fate bring so angelic a being into one’s life? How is it possible for a fit to be this flawless? There must obviously be a heaven that brings soul mates together. Freud, of course, wrote about our tendency to overestimate a loved object’s value, but this is only one aspect of love’s radiance. Those in the grip of infatuation feel warm all over. They too glow when in the presence of the object of their affection. Even thinking about this other creates a pleasant dizziness. No
wonder the joy of first romance is eagerly sought long after its initial blush is a memory. Couples talk about reawakening their love when they really want to recapture the tender certitude of this period. They fail to realize that the feeling is an aspect of establishing an intimate attachment; hence once achieved cannot be re-experienced.

Infatuation is the stage of courtship that instills an emotional bond. It is the part of the process that reorganizes the way that people think and feel about one another. Their passion, in essence, rewrites their brains so that they incorporate each other into their respective life spaces. Sex may be important in attracting people to one another, and useful in helping them provide each other pleasure, but it is no substitute for an emotional attachment. Love is real, if elusive. It changes the way people see and respond to each other. From the outside it may seem irrational, and, in the sense that it is not intellectually determined, it is. But this does not make it unprofessional. This aspect of love is not about achieving a cognitive expertise; it is about altering one’s motivational priorities. The very fact that it is so emotional is what makes it effective. However intelligent a person, if he or she wishes to obtain love, at some point it is necessary to let go and allow one’s instincts to take their course. In the end, he or she will be a different person, but this is a difference that can make a difference.

Actually infatuation feels so good most people welcome it. They may experience trepidation at losing control, but this is amply compensated by its joys. Nevertheless, the feeling does not last. No one can live on love in the romantic sense, because it ultimately subsides. One day the glow is replaced by disillusionment. This perfect other suddenly does something jarring. Indeed, this is often something trivial. He picks at his teeth with a finger or she takes too long to dress for a date, and there is a flicker of irritation.
What’s wrong? Why did he/she do this? Why did a person who had hitherto been faultless engage in an inappropriate act? How could he or she betray one’s love? Had this violation occurred at the beginning of the relationship, it might have been the pretext for a hasty exit. But now that the infatuation stage has intervened, it is an occasion for a lover’s quarrel. The partners stick around to fight out their differences. Having established a bond neither wishes to relinquish, each attempts to instill sanity in the other. If only this other realized how important it is, how silly it is to behave this way, the proper adjustments would surely be made.

What arrives next is the negotiation stage of courtship. In fact, this label is misleading. It makes it sound as if the bargaining processes that are about to commence will shortly be over. In truth, interpersonal negotiations are a central feature of successful relationships. No matter how well matched a couple, there are inevitably areas in which they clash. No two people always possess the same opinions or objectives. Because they are individuals, they will have dissimilar reactions and aspirations that don’t jibe. This requires both to make adjustments. As a consequence, they need to be sensitive to one another and flexible enough to fine-tune their behaviors. Indeed, competent negotiation skills are as crucial to a successful partnership as is a commitment to work things out. Without an ability to make satisfactory bargains, grievances are bound to accumulate. Sooner or later the complaints become so voluminous that a dissolution of the relationship seems preferable. In essence, what the parties are doing is creating interlocking social roles. They are negotiating a personal division of labor with which both, over the long haul, are comfortable.
A personalized professionalism, when it comes to intimate relationships, must therefore include negotiation skills. Partners who are dependent upon their own abilities to keep their relationship intact have to be able to work out disagreements. They must possess both the expertise to establish areas of accord and the motivation to work these out despite the discomfort of doing so. Voluntary marriages depend on nothing less; hence contemporary couples require insights and emotional maturity that their grandparents did not. Furthermore, if our techno-commercial society continues to develop along the directions it has, these skills will be of greater value. If marriage is to remain viable, a larger number of people will consciously require an understanding of, and a capacity for, intimate bargaining. More reliant than ever upon themselves, their aptitude for decision-making has to incorporate an interpersonal axis. For many, this suggests a fragility to matrimony. More probably, our need for stable marriages will eventuate in a better understanding of its dimensions. The personal hopes of couples, and the requirements of their children, should alter social customs so as to make companionate arrangements more practical. In short, professionalized individuals are bound to learn how to be more proficient in their private commitments.

Gender Differences

One of the more enervating speed bumps of the twentieth century has been the feminist movement. As prosperity sent more women out into the marketplace, men and women alike often found themselves in trembling disarray, unsure of how they were supposed to interact. Did discerning men open doors for women? Did considerate women allow men to order for them in restaurants? More crucially were men required to become sensitive enough to cry in public and women to be so assertive that they spurned
motherhood in favor of an opportunity to run a corporation. Some self-proclaimed authorities assured their readers that men must cease being competitive, whereas women must expand their cooperative style into the public domain. The old division of labor between the genders had to be decisively eradicated such that androgyny reigned. Since the differences between men and women were artificial, they must be expunged; ultimately to be exchanged for shared behavioral styles. Whereas it was only an illegitimate male usurpation of power that enabled them to impose socialization practices that created the appearance of variation, once these were changed, so would the apparent disparities. They would fade into nothingness. It was, therefore, incumbent upon right thinking human beings to join forces in supporting a social revolution. Justice demanded no less and the arrow of history would tolerate nothing less.

For a while all of this sounded so logical that to imply it was wrong brought forth a chorus of derision. To be against feminism was to be against women. It was to be sexist, misogynistic, and malicious. Only male chauvinists, who wished to continue their oppressive ways, could be so callous. Only they would insist that there was a biological basis for the customary division of labor. Sigmund Freud even had the temerity to state that anatomy was destiny. He thus earned the opprobrium to which modern psychology continues to consign him. So confident was this denunciation that it seemed it would last forever, or, at least, a thousand years. As it turned out, it only narrowly outlasted the Third Reich. Today few women endorse the initial claims of the mid-century feminists. They no longer assert a desire “to have it all.” They even blush at the suggestion that they have been intimidated into passivity by masculine threats of rape. Male bashing might be all right for the radicals, but they are simply not that radical. They are happy to
be women. Many even enjoy being mothers. Oh yes, they believe in equal pay for equal work, but this does not imply a desire to humiliate men. All they want is fairness and respect.

Feminism too it seems has undergone a learning curve. People, and that includes both men and women, have discovered that the more extreme assertions of the gender activists were never true. Some have even discovered that these purported democrats were closet Marxists. Their plaintive cries of oppression really masked socialist aspirations. Just as did any good “social democrat,” these radicals longed for a world in which selfishness disappeared and total egalitarianism was the order of the day. Those who carefully read their proclamations soon noticed that these were laced with criticisms of capitalism. Not for them a market based society in which people competed for precedence. Their preference was for cooperation. This was the lesson ostensibly derived from their femininity. Moreover, educating men to accept their own feminine side would soften interpersonal relationships by spreading the message of teamwork. In the end, everyone would be happier and more loving. But if a more professionalized, that is, a more decentralized, capitalism is our real future, how does this sort of feminism tally with its demands? Does it require that men be coerced into being more feminine? Or will women be forced to be more masculine? Is this, in fact, possible? And if it were, would it conflict with the competitive imperatives of a market-based economy? Moreover, if it did, would rejecting competition undermine the prosperity upon which democracy depends?

Once the Marxist underbelly of feminism is exposed, it becomes easy to recognize that the alleged equivalency of men and women is a fable. Androgyny has
never existed and probably never will. Men and women are different, and these differences result from more than socialization. A genuine, non-ideological expertise regarding gender discloses a host of biologically grounded variables. These differences are not absolute, that is, they are distributed along overlapping normal curves, but they are nonetheless authentic. Just as men are, on average, taller than women, they are also, on average, more aggressive. Much more apt to compete with one another for hierarchical priority, their social status is, in addition, more dependent upon how well they perform. While women too like to win, and enjoy being respected for their achievements, they are less driven to battle for precedence. This predilection has biological roots, which, it must be admitted, are reinforced by social conventions. In other words, socialization follows biology and intensifies it. Under these circumstances some women will rise to positions of authority because they are perfectly capable of winning tests of strength, yet a larger proportion of men will continue to dominate public organizations. What is more, whatever their words, most women continue to prefer men who demonstrate an ability to win. When they select a mate, they gravitate toward vigorous winners rather than sensitive losers. Thus women too reinforce what biology has started. If so, then despite all the histrionics to the contrary, even legislation designed to enforce androgyny is doomed to failure.

By the same token, women are generally more verbal than men. They clearly talk more than their brothers and do better on academic tests of verbal ability. This should not be surprising in that they typically have more neurons in the area of the brain dedicated to verbal activities. Likewise, with their cephalic hemispheres more effectively linked together by a stouter corpus callosum, they are better at multi-tasking than their
male siblings. This physiological characteristic also seems to be related to what has traditionally been called feminine intuition. Whereas mental imaging procedures demonstrate that males utilize defined areas of a single hemisphere when problem-solving, females are noticeably more global. More than one section of both hemispheres tends to light up while they are thinking. On a behavioral level this appears to correlate with the generalized hunches in which women specialize—as opposed to the more linear reasoning men prefer. And despite all the jokes about their getting lost, men seem to be superior with respect to spatial relationships. They are apt to think in terms of directions, whereas their sisters are more landmark oriented. In former times, these disparities would have been taken as invidious. More specifically, women would have been accused of being illogical, or even stupid, whereas men were thought more levelheaded. Of course, with the advent of feminism, this was turned on its head, with men derided as insensitive boors. In the actual event, all this indicates is differences, with neither gender inherently superior to the other. Whatever the ideologues say, biology does not dictate moral supremacy.

It can even be plausibly argued that these differences are complementary; that both men and women benefit when they cooperate in applying their respective strengths to mutual concerns. Perhaps the simplest way to expose what is possible is to take note of a long established sociological observation. For decades it has been known that men tend to be more instrumental, and women more expressive, in their respective styles. Men are usually more comfortable in zeroing in on a particular objective and tailoring what they do to meet this endpoint, whereas women are more concerned with maintaining relationship equilibriums. Tell a man about a problem and he will advise you on how to
solve it; tell a woman about the same problem and she is more apt to commiserate.

Which response is better? It depends upon the circumstances, but what is more likely is that a combination of both is better still. This is observable every day in well functioning families. When they want help in repairing their bicycles, children usually seek a father’s advice; yet when they fall off it and skin a knee, they crave a mother’s comfort. Evidently, a meshing of both orientations is most effective.

If this is so, then it is fatuous to demand that men and women meet in an idealized androgynous middle. Both are better served if they allow the other gender to remain different. Indeed, part of what motivates heterosexual attraction is that each sex finds the other’s distinctiveness appealing. Most men like the idea that women are warmer and softer than they are, while most women are turned on by a man’s strength. Not only is there nothing wrong with this, but unless our biology is radically modified, it is not liable to change. Nor would such a modification be constructive with regard to establishing intimate relationships. As Emile Durkheim pointed out more than a hundred years ago, a gender division of labor facilitates intimate bonding. The fact that men and women have different abilities, and divergent inclinations, motivates them to specialize in dissimilar activities. “He” may enjoy tinkering with his automobile, while “she” unwinds by planting flowers. In doing so, both derive pleasure, but, as importantly, they avoid stepping on each other’s toes. Because each can succeed in a different endeavor, their respective achievements need not threaten the other. The success of one does not imply the failure of their partner. This means that they do not have to compete with one another. By dividing the territory, both can be winners. Competition, like it or not, is inimical to intimacy. In arousing envy under circumstances where it is easy to inflict
injury, it can launch a downward cycle of one-up-manship. With each party constantly reminded of his/her deficiencies, it is a small step to trying to get even. The need to defend one’s self esteem quickly becomes so passionate that there is no pulling back from the brink; and no way of reviving interpersonal sympathy. The other will have become an intimate enemy, and, perhaps shortly, an ex-partner.

For voluntary intimacy to flourish it is essential that men and women understand, and accept, the differences between them. A professionalized expertise with respect to heterosexual relationships must include an accurate recognition of gender disparities. Feminists, in denying that these exist, intended to foster egalitarianism, but instead succeeded in obfuscating the facts. They claimed to desire democracy, but instead instigated misunderstandings and strife. The point they failed to grasp is that the goal should not be to change a partner into what he or she is not, but to respect what a person is. Successful intimacy implies not only living with differences, but reveling in them. Indeed, if intimate partners are to love one another, they need to care about each other—warts and all. Sometimes it is difficult to feel sympathy for someone whose inclinations are so outlandish; nevertheless to be committed to a long-term relationship is to be motivated to be empathetic. It means becoming the sort of person who can engage in roletaking, that is, in emotionally standing in the shoes of one’s partner, even though he/she is so peculiar. The radical feminists sought to disrupt this mutual compassion by depicting men as villains. In doing so, they inadvertently made it more difficult for people to do what is in their interest. But this does not have to remain so.

Once more human needs are likely to trump ideological purity. Men and women who, of their own accord, seek out heterosexual intimacy are thereby motivated to
ascertain their differences and honor them. Already the excesses of androgyny are receding into historical curiosities. People are beginning to realize why they arose. Like their eventual extinction, these ideas can be blamed on to the Middle Class Revolution. As techno-commercial prosperity took hold, the old gender division of labor became unsupportable. It no longer made sense for men to leave home to be the breadwinner, while women stayed behind to clean house and raise the children. A combination of labor saving devices, public education, and longer life spans converted the housewife role into a monotonous irrelevancy. With little left to do that could not be accomplished without her, the “little woman” became bored and envious. Why should she be stripped of power and consigned to second-class citizenship, while her husband was stimulated by more meaningful work that was more amply rewarded? It was time for him to move aside and allow her a place in the sun. Obviously the best jobs needed to be distributed more evenly. Everything should be fifty-fifty. Anything less was exploitation.

All this, however, was based on a misapprehension. It was assumed that if the traditional division of labor was unfair, the solution must be the abolish any sort of gender-based division of labor. What was not appreciated was that newer kinds of gender specializations were being created. The historical housewife role might be losing its raison d’etre, but this did not mean that most men and women would be performing interchangeable tasks. Overlooked in the flux of change was that deeply ingrained gender differences would eventuate in distinctive occupational choices. Left to their own devices, most women preferred expressive jobs over instrumental ones. Allowed to pick out what they liked, they chose working with children rather than machinery—even when these tasks were outside the home. By the same token, most men gravitated to positions
of authority and tasks that were spatially oriented. This was not a plot designed to keep
them in charge. It was an expression of underlying gender differences, coupled with the
logic of a division of labor. If this is so, the future too will entail men specializing in
masculine activities and women in feminine ones; albeit of a different sort than their
ancestors preferred.

Within their marriages men and women will also develop divisions of labor,
although these are unlikely to be as stereotyped as formerly. Individuals who are
comfortable with who they are will negotiate an assignment of household tasks that is
consistent with their personal inclinations. Where once women did all of the cooking, a
modern couple may agree that the man will do much, if not most, of this. Where once
men repaired what was broken, many wives will assert a desire to be handywomen.

What matters is not how these role assignments are distributed, but that the partners agree
about what works best for them. The future will not be one in which there is gender
confusion so much as cooperation in being different. With personal professionalism
becoming more prevalent, the confidence of couples to decide how they collaborate
should grow. A better understanding of who they are, in tandem with what intimate
relationships demand, should allow them to adjust their patterns to their unique
circumstances.

**Negotiations**

All this assumes, of course, that the marital partners will become more competent
negotiators. It presupposes that they acquire the expertise and motivation to collaborate
on bargains that work for both. A synergistic and personalized division of labor, for
instance, requires that each understand the other and that both be concerned to develop a
pact that meets their separate, and joint, needs. Nonetheless, although negotiations may be central to a satisfying collaboration, they are not natural. People must learn to engage in fair-minded bargaining. Somehow, they must overcome the selfishness of childhood if they are to work out their differences. In the end, they have to learn that good deals cannot be one-sided. Coming to a compromise implies that you get some of what you want, but not all. In order to receive concessions from the other, it turns out that it is essential to make concessions in return. Hopefully, the resultant agreements increase the size of the pie such that both sides get more than they would have had they held out.

To begin with, productive intimate bargaining builds on a foundation of moral equality. Men and women may not be the same, but a marital couple must concur in the proposition that the happiness of one is just as important as the happiness of the other. What pleases them may differ, but the objective must be to attain parity in satisfaction. If one should come out ahead, this will be to the detriment of both, partly because the loser will feel aggrieved, but also because a loving partner will care that the other is forlorn. Many years ago the psychologist Dean Pruitt neatly encapsulated the appropriate attitude in what he called the Dual Concern Model of negotiations. This refers to the fact that both parties need to be simultaneously concerned about achieving their own needs and those of the other. They must seek win-win solutions via problem-solving activities dedicated to maximizing their mutual satisfaction. Consequently, as committed allies, heterosexual intimates must be internally motivated to look out for one another’s welfare. Each one, on his/her own, needs to think in terms of their collaboration—at least part of the time.
This sort of willingness to compromise depends, among other things, on both parties possessing emotional courage. It takes a leap of faith to trust that someone else will seek a fair-minded settlement, for if intimacy makes betrayal possible, it surely makes this achievable during role negotiations. Given that these sessions often deal with significant issues, and that one or both of the parties will have to let down their guard, exploitation becomes feasible. At such moments, the temptation to manipulate another’s dependency can be great. Courage thus becomes necessary to allow one’s vulnerability to emerge. For the best deals to develop, both need to take the chance that the other is trustworthy. If either sets up barriers based on suspicion, they will have difficulty perceiving each other’s needs or making concessions that are met with equivalent concessions. But to possess this courage implies confidence in one’s strength to weather a betrayal. Being open, and collaborative, assumes the personal maturity to survive severe disappointments. It also implies an ability to make allowances for another’s weaknesses and, when possible, to compensate for these.

The internal motivation to be a good intimate negotiator is, therefore, correlated with being an emotional adult. Successful spouses need to be well grounded and personally stable. They have to know who they are so that they can stay in touch with their individual needs, while possessing an inner equilibrium sufficient to prevent being thrown on the defensive by unexpected events. When things go wrong, as they often do in dealing with interpersonal matters, it must be possible to regain perspective. For most people these capacities derive from good early experiences. Growing up in a household with parents who were good negotiators provides a model of egalitarian bargaining. More significantly, parents who can deal fairly with each other are also apt to deal fairly
with their offspring. This allows their children to gain practice in Dual Concern negotiations. It also helps them develop confidence. Having experienced their needs as worthy of respect, they too respect them. They assume that their happiness matters. Moreover, they possess the self-direction to stand up for it. Perhaps paradoxically, they also acquire an ability to engage in role-taking. Because they are not consumed with defending their own rights, they can recognize the rights of another.

People who possess the internal motivation to be good negotiators are consequently apt to develop the interpersonal expertise that is also required. Comfortable within their own skins, they are able to engage in introspection. They can allow themselves to perceive themselves, with respect to both their strengths and weaknesses. Thus, should they discover the worst, they are able to fix it. Moreover, the greatest bonus derived from self-knowledge is a knowledge of others. Because people are remarkably alike on the inside—including men and women—insights into the self can be generalized. At minimum, they provide useful hypotheses from which to launch an exploration of an intimate partner’s needs. Should this not be possible, it is likely that personal growth will prove necessary. Individuals who are not mature enough to engage in accurate introspection, or sympathetic extrospection, may need to compensate for what they did not internalize earlier in life. Although a mature partner may help one acquire these skills, most of the effort to do so must come from the inside. Those who lack the courage, or maturity, to be good negotiators must somehow find the daring to acquire these. They must dig deep inside to overcome their personal limitations.

All of this, it must be understood takes time and patience. Neither a solid intimate relationship nor a reliably professionalized self arises over night. It is not as if
negotiating away differences occurs one afternoon, never to be revisited again. In real life, there are so many issues, a large proportion of which are unanticipated, that it is always necessary to make adjustments. Nor can one demand that a particular conflict be reconciled before retiring for the night. Some areas of disagreement are so profound that they take years to resolve. This is what commitment is all about. It entails having the tenacity, and the bravery, to remain in intimate contact despite the discomfort, and uncertainty, of not knowing where things will end up. Moreover, even with the best of intentions, perfect solutions may not be possible. A half a loaf may be the best one can do when the alternative is no loaf at all. In relationships, and negotiating differences within relationships, it is essential that one not make the perfect the enemy of the good. Limitations are a fact of life both on a personal and an interpersonal level. This does not indicate that love or happiness are impossible, but rather that neither is as ethereal as in the juvenile imagination.

Sex Redux

Nor does love have to be the enemy of sex—or vice versa. Intimacy does not need to preclude the pleasures of the flesh. The sex-saturated projections today derived from the media seem to indicate that the mundane bargains of long-term relationships are detrimental to physical passion. What one seemingly needs is the spice of romance, which is best nourished through mystery. Being stuck with a single partner is not only monotonous, but removes the surprises that make intercourse exciting. Given the accent on bed hopping, becoming familiar with an unfamiliar body is apparently a peak experience. It supposedly puts the senses on edge and makes a person aware of enigmatic tingles. There is, therefore, nothing like the thrill of sexual adventure. Not
only is it not immoral, but it is one of the great advantages of modern contraception. It truly is free love. That, in any event, is how the advocates of sexual liberation portray the situation. It is why they believe marital bondage is the wave of the past.

In actuality, this is nonsense. One of the little facts uncovered by contemporary sociologists is that married couples have more sex than singles. They do not have to endure the rigors of the single scene in order to find someone willing to go to bed. Nor do they have to bear the uncertainties of how a strange person might react. Will this other, for instance, be satisfied? Or will he/she laugh at one’s awkward ways? In the movies the body parts always fit together smoothly, whereas in real life there is many a slip when entering an unfamiliar boudoir. Marital couples, in contrast, know what to expect. They may not always be delighted by what is in store, even when repackaged in a new negligee, but at least they do not have to fear mortifying embarrassment. In the media, every hero is a stud and every heroine an amorous princess, whereas few strangers measure up to these standards. Neither do most married couples, but they don’t have to. They have other things going for them.

Not in every case, but in many, this something extra is love. Henry Kissinger is alleged to have remarked that power is a marvelous aphrodisiac. Not many of us will ever find out if he was right. But we have a better chance of discovering whether love is as effective. During the heyday of sexual therapy several decades ago, the initial expectation was that couples could be taught the mechanics of good sex. It was assumed that if they were trained in the best way to touch one another, they could be guided into an ecstasy of orgasms. The surprise came when therapists realized the most common cause of unsatisfactory sex was that the partners did not like each other. Regardless of
how they were instructed to stroke one another’s bodies, sparks did not fly between lovers who were not in love. To make contact with a person one dislikes, despite their physical allure, is rarely a turn on. It is more like dealing with a piece of meat than a stimulating paramour.

Aside from autoeroticism, sex is something that occurs between human beings, not merely human bodies. When two people become physically entwined, they respond not merely to the touch of each other’s skin, but to whom this other person is. If he/she is disliked, the magic cannot be there. The secret ingredient in good sex is caring, and caring is a consequence of love. Two people are most likely to be responsive to one another if they desire pleasure for the other and not merely the self. It is then that they notice how the other reacts and are motivated to make adjustments. This, to be sure, is a different sort of professionalism than has been associated with sex for money. Yet it is, so to say, the professionalism of love. It is about people who know what they are doing and care about doing it well. It is the product of competence, maturity, and honest relationships. It is also about individuals who have learned how to be their best selves in intimate union with another who has also made this discovery.

Competent interpersonal negotiations may sound too clinical to be sexually gratifying, but the reverse is true. Taking the time, and achieving the courage, to work through intimate differences is the best underpinning for physical pleasure. While it is not a substitute for the other advantages inherent in a loving relationship, such as thoughtful companionship, it is a windfall not to be sneered at. The ubiquitous media gymnasts may believe, along with Madonna, that sexual candor in the form of popular pornography is the key to personal fulfillment, but they are wrong. For most people, a
better and more rewarding future is contingent on building stronger interpersonal relationships. This depends on building on what has been learned about love and sex, and overcoming the myths of public promiscuity. So far, if the declining divorce and single parenthood rates are any indicator, this is the direction in which we have already begun to head.
Chapter 8

Generations

Learning Self Direction

*Life with Father* was life with an autocrat. It was rigorous and demanding. As depicted in one of the most popular plays of the early twentieth century, a half-century earlier fathers were expected to be imperious and stiff-necked. Dressed in starched collars and immaculate spats even at the breakfast table, when they ordered their children to behave, they did so. Furthermore, queries about daily activities were expected to be answered with a crisp “Yes Sir” or “No Sir,” all the while standing at attention. As everyone understood, it was up to the pater familias to dole out the family treasures as he saw fit, whereas his youngsters were to accept this with gratitude. Good manners and a cheerful disposition were assumed. Of course, most of this portrayal was overdone. Few actual families were as tightly organized. Nevertheless, the audiences at which this confection was aimed were amused. They took pleasure in contrasting the rebelliousness of their own raccoon-coat wearing and jalopy joy-riding children with the deferential conformity of a former generation. How the young were raised had obviously changed, with this latest entertainment helping underline the comparisons.

By the second half of the twentieth century developments had progressed so far that parents were advised to befriend their children. Instead of commanding them, or punishing a failure to comply, they were supposed to talk to them person-to-person. Reason, as opposed to coercion, was the order of the day. Parents were instructed to love their youngsters; not beat the devil out of them. Didn’t they recall when they were young and longed for parental acceptance? Didn’t they understand that feelings could get hurt
and confusions need resolution? Robotic children kept in line with a cat-and-nine-tails might have suited previous eras, but the modern world could not afford such rigidity. It required a more permissive attitude. Youngsters needed the space to grow into their potential. If furnished with respect, they would blossom along directions of their own choosing. Experts on their personal needs, they should allowed to judge these and the means of achieving them. This way their inherent genius would prosper and their horizons expand to everyone’s advantage.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, this was the conventional wisdom in many circles. Tutored by hit songs such as Neil Diamond’s *Forever in Blue Jeans*, not just a casualness in dress, but easygoing family relations had come to be venerated. Ironclad rules were long out of date, replaced by a relaxed appreciation of personal autonomy. Egalitarianism was supposed to apply to everyone, including the young. Although their great-grandparents never considered asking their children what they wanted, modern parents could not envisage failing to ask. The family was supposed to be a democracy wherein everyone’s opinions were valued. Were they not, how could the young engage in self-actualization? How could they discover their unique talents or hone their personal gifts? The idea that the young needed discipline was barbaric. It entailed being punitive, and, as everyone knew, children learned best when they were rewarded. Happy children were successful children. Loved by their parents, they loved themselves; hence were capable of self-management.

This, theoretically, was the triumph of self-direction. Vocationally and personally professionalized parents merely passed along the lessons that made them successful. They realized that competent discretion was essential in a techno-commercial
Gesellschaft society; thus they encouraged it in the new generation. The problem was in determining how best to instill decision-making skills. Discretion was one thing; but competent discretion might be something else. Since most self-directed parents had not been instructed in self-direction by their own working class parents, they were flying by the seat of their pants. Cultural insights having not yet caught up with social requirements; aphorisms derived from earlier times were not always applicable. Like fairy tales brought forward from the Middle Ages, the values and norms encapsulated in the conventional childhood lessons might be riveting, yet beside the point. What did it mean that one should never tell a lie or that romantic love should guide mate selection? Was it really true that if you could dream it, you could do it? In fact, parents said and did many things the effects of which they had no way of determining. Going as much by hunch and by golly as time-tested realities, they could not tell the impact of their actions until Johnny or Mary were adults.

Since personal professionalization was rarely a deliberate aspiration, what this entailed was hardly ever consciously sought. More particularly, it was rarely understood that this required instilling both a special expertise and internalized motivation. To the contrary, it was often assumed that the only thing needed was a good education. If youngsters were sent to first-rate preparatory schools where they achieved grades sufficient to enter elite universities, this would be sufficient. They would then get good jobs, which would afterward make them middle class and ultimately enable them to launch their own children on a successful trajectory. Living in neat suburban neighborhoods, surrounded by other good middle class families, would accomplish whatever was required. Indeed, this evaluation was not completely off the mark.
Schooling did make a difference; it did impart valuable lessons. Getting a good, professionalized job also made a difference. Meanwhile living amidst middle class companions had an independent impact; it provided models of professional behavior and surrounded the young with demands for competent decision-making.

Even so, this was not enough. Internalized motivation, in particular, depended upon a variety of factors. It is so complex that neither schools, nor jobs, nor neighborhoods routinely provided it. To begin with, youngsters benefit from an awareness of what is desired. Because self-direction entails more than allowing children to make their own choices, parents have to be conscious of what is required. For one thing, they need realize that it assumes self-control. Individuals who are completely spontaneous are not, on that account, self-directed. They are more akin to unguided missiles. What they do may come from the inside, but to characterize them as having direction is seriously mistaken. Since where they land is accidental, it is not pre-selected. If this sort of decision-making is on target, it is by happenstance. Competent self-direction, in contrast, is internal in that it is under intelligent control. Where it is going is intended and carefully guided. It is also disciplined in the sense that it can be pushed in one direction rather than another, which implies that it can be stopped and started as needed. Self-direction involves planning and structure. It is not the result of impulse.

This being so, if children are to learn self-direction, they must first learn self-control. While it is useful to encourage them to be themselves, it is disastrous to allow them to be whatever they want. Despite advice to the contrary, permissiveness is not consistent with competent self-direction. The child who is consistently given permission to follow his/her unrestrained instincts is thereby deprived of learning how to avoid
mistakes. To do anything that feels right fails to distinguish between what works and what does not. Nor does it entail learning how to seek one and not the other. In other words, a self-directed child must first acquire self-discipline. He or she must be able to pause and examine a course of action before undertaking it. He or she must, in addition, be able to change direction should this prove advisable. Such a child is not on automatic pilot, but capable of obedience to internal commands. This, to cite a noteworthy consequence, makes delayed gratification possible. It enables a child, and ultimately an adult, to refrain from pursuing immediately enticing rewards in the hope of attaining greater ones later on. This makes it possible to decide to stay in school rather than go beachcombing in the Caribbean.

Paradoxically, obedience to internal commands derives, in part, from an ability to obey external commands. Put another way, internal discipline follows upon external discipline. On the surface, this seems to contradict Melvin Kohn’s observation that middle class parent’s prefer self-direction over conformity. It appears to suggest that independent decision-making depends on prior obedience, which sounds as if it makes no sense. Nonetheless, it does. To scorn conformity does not preclude setting limits. Thus teaching creative writing does not imply an absence of grammar or spelling. Indeed, formative rules, once internalized, allow for greater flexibility. By permitting others to understand what is communicated, they make it possible to communicate a greater range of thoughts. To push this analogy a bit further, it would be absurd, in the name of freedom, to encourage everyone to create his own language. Doing so would be equivalent to having no language. All that emerged would be collections of sounds or
squiggles, without any interpersonal impact whatsoever. Language, including creative writing, occurs only because individuals first internalize standards imposed by others.

Teachers who insist that “ain’t” is not proper English, or parents who correct a child’s pronunciation, are making demands for a restricted response. Rather than be permissive, they are being punitive, at least to the degree that they disapprove of some formulations. In setting limits, they coerce obedience, but do so gently. This allows for wiggle room. If the young stay within some boundaries, they are allowed latitude in others. Unlike the working class obedience to which Kohn alludes, this is not compliance based on arbitrary commands. Rather it depends on reasonable standards that once internalized can be turned back on those who implant them. When a mother instructs a child to say “brother,” not “bubba,” and then she says “bubba,” the child can correct the very person who taught the original lesson. This is not the discipline of raw power, but of a common set of principles. As such, these can be adopted without relinquishing personal autonomy.

Nor is this personalized sort of discipline inimical to initiative. Self-direction implies that fresh ideas can come from within. Such persons, including young ones, can conceive of new ways to do things. They are able to be both creative and progressive. Strangely, arbitrary standards imperiously, and inflexibly, imposed tend to inspire uncertainties. Under these circumstances, a person is unsure what will draw a punishment; hence is inspired to enforce a vigilant defensiveness detrimental to originality. Personal initiative, in contrast, is contingent upon a confidence that comes from successful control. Rather than owing to permissiveness, it follows upon reasonable
discipline. This sort of control allows for experimentation and testing novel solutions. As long as it stays within the limits of decency, it is apt be applauded.

Self-direction also assumes emotional maturity. Parents who wish their children to become competent decision-makers must go beyond protective limitations. Although they may insist that a child not cross the street without looking both ways, they must also inculcate something more positive. Youngsters need to be guided into developing their emotional potential. Here the process of grooming a child begins with guarding against a self-indulgent spontaneity derived from primitive emotions. As should be abundantly evident, all humans are born with a tool kit of potentially intense emotions. Every normal baby is capable of experiencing anger, fear, and love. Each comes equipped with the means of crying, striking out, and smiling with joy. What is missing, however, are the skills to engage in the subtleties of emotional interaction. Once angered, infants throw tantrums; once frightened, they cry themselves into hyperventilation. It takes time, and self-discipline, to learn to how to express anger verbally or to conquer persistent fears bravely. Emotions must be socialized. They have to be channeled in some directions, not others. Let us take anger. This emotion tends to occur when a person is deeply frustrated. It aims at intimidating human obstacles into complying with one’s wishes. Unfortunately not every person reacts the same when threatened. One’s teacher is unlikely to be as impressed by a furious outburst as is a younger sister. Part of growing up entails discovering how status differences affect where, and when, to use anger. Those who go off half-cocked virtually ask to be dismissed as fools. Having failed to demonstrate the internal strength to master their impulses, they are ignored as unworthy of leadership.
Life also entails risks. Things go wrong. Plans fall apart. Friends disappoint. Sooner or later everyone is confronted with overwhelming dangers. Emotional maturity includes coping with these. Becoming an adult involves learning to deal with intense anxieties. It means acquiring the courage to face a plethora of terrors without being paralyzed. As per John Wayne’s advice, courage is not about being fearless; it is about grace under pressure. Skinned knees, bullies, and broken dreams are part of everyone’s experience. Unhappily, developing the internal resources to manage these is not. Learning to take the time to master the apprehensions that accompany failure is an ability not everyone acquires. Yet it is crucial to self-direction. People, who cannot contain their terrors, cannot think through hazards. Their minds are so clouded that they cannot assess risks accurately, nor develop successful counter-measures. Often they hold back from taking prudent gambles because they fear that disaster impends. For them, every potential mistake is potentially fatal. As a result, they are too busy constructing bombproof shelters to exercise guidance over others.

A closely related aspect of self-direction is an ability to be responsible. Utilizing discretion entails more than making decisions; it also involves being able to admit mistakes. Those who do not possess the courage of their convictions shrink from making public choices. Rather than be criticized for misleading others, they choose not to lead. In their mind’s eye they are bursting with brilliant, albeit unappreciated, ideas. Nonetheless they prefer anonymity to having to defend themselves from censure. What they lack is “people-courage.” Despite the castle’s they build in private, these do not make a difference because solid edifices cannot be constructed in isolation. A mental plan that is only mental lacks substance. Moreover, those who can handle responsibility
think in terms of consequences because they understand that they may one day have to answer for them. They realize that self-direction which translates into leadership will place them in competition with others who also wish to exercise leadership. This ensures that on an emotional level, they will recognize the intersection of responsibility and interpersonal courage.

A personal professionalism also entails personal expertise. Parents who intend to raise self-directed children must instill this too. They must want their offspring to understand how democracy works, what is entailed in heterosexual intimacy, and what is required to raise their own children. Most of all, they need to impart people knowledge. While many observers equate social demands with technical challenges, human obstacles impose the greatest difficulties. Professional jobs frequently concentrate on working with people. They entail coordinating, directing, and motivating other human beings. It should, therefore, not be surprising that they depend on understanding why people behave as they do. In a diverse society, this includes understanding what makes others distinctive. What is less obvious is that this begins by recognizing one’s own peculiarities. Because we humans are so much alike, appreciating the humanity of others starts with appreciating one’s own.

If self-knowledge is the key to other-knowledge, this expertise must commence with introspection. The parent who wants a self-directed child must go beyond issuing preemptory orders. He or she should occasionally ask what the child thinks. Once upon a time parents did demand that their children be “seen and not heard.” The internal feelings of the young were considered irrelevant, while their private dreams were derided as juvenile. Today both of these need to be cultivated. The subtle features of one’s
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personal nature are more easily recognized once they are given voice in interpersonal
conversation. Putting labels on wispy internal impulses gives them a solidity they
otherwise lack. Moreover, it bestows a dignity that makes them worthy of notice. This
allows a child to grow into an individual who is proud of being him/herself. Under these
circumstances different does not mean bad. Rather, it betokens a capacity to lead others
in directions they might not choose on their own. It also allows individuals to notice, and
respect, the individualism of others. As such, it supports their unique contributions.

**Family Socialization**

If these are some of the requirements for learning self-direction, what must
parents do to foster them? It has already been suggested that couples who establish
successful heterosexual intimacy thereby assist their children in becoming successful. In
loving each other, a mother and a father are able to love their youngsters and provide
them with a safe retreat from whence they can learn to be independent human beings.
This is fundamental, but insufficient. While it is important to appreciate that strong
families are crucial to socializing strong children, it is also important to understand how
this is achieved. Effective parents need recognize that some techniques for encouraging
internal motivation and social expertise are superior to others. The question next
becomes what works and what does not? Has our rapidly professionalizing society, in
fact, discovered the best means of professionalizing the coming generation?

Here, just as with heterosexual intimacy, society is in the midst of a learning
curve. As with male-female relationships, the arrival of the middle class revolution
transformed the ground rules. In the last chapter it was asserted that the crumbling of the
traditional gender division of labor prompted theories about androgyny that proved
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unworkable. Men and women spent years seeking an illusive parity eventually
undermined by biological disparities. Something similar has occurred with respect to
raising children. When the old order that recommended coercive discipline as a means of
civilizing the young was found wanting in a world more dependent upon competent
discretion, the initial response was simple-minded. In this case, the favored advice was
to be permissive. Children were to be allowed the freedom to develop into their best
selves pretty much on their own. Often this was depicted as “democratic” parenting.
Love and autonomy were going to be enough. They would provide a cushion of warmth
to surround youthful experimentation. They would then be able to participate in their
families, and communities, as fully equal members. In leaving them to their own devices,
their humanity would flourish to become an integral part of a village of all humankind.

What is today in the process of being discovered is that this conception is as
inadequate as androgyny. It cannot be the future of childhood socialization because it
does not work. Children raised by permissive parents do not grow into responsible,
emotionally mature individualists. Nor do they acquire the social knowledge required of
decentralized leaders. Parents who are traumatized by the prospect of being oppressive
have attempted to be the opposite, but in so doing have set their offspring adrift.
Unwilling to impose non-negotiable demands, they fail to provide essential guidance.
Their error is analogous to that made by the feminists. Just as the radicals assumed that
the breakdown of the old gender division of labor militated against any division of labor,
democratic parents conclude that domineering parenting must be superceded by non-
parenting. The opposite of tyranny is thought to be total emancipation. So mesmerizing
is this that many fail to notice that their children are children. They refuse to accept the
idea that biological immaturities, coupled with limited interpersonal experience, leave their offspring unequipped to make certain decisions.

Germane to this problem is a wise little book written by Mary Eberstadt. Called *Home-Alone America*, its title piggy-backs on a pair of highly successful movies. In it, Eberstadt charts the consequences of several sorts of permissiveness. As readers may recall, these popular films star Macaulay Culkin as a child hero accidentally left behind when his family goes on vacation. He then goes on to defend himself against criminal threats outside the experience of the ordinary child. Constructing Rube Goldberg contraptions to scald, batter, and traumatize the villains, he emerges intact. The reason these fantasies struck a responsive chord is that they reassured absent parents, and unattended children, that all would ultimately be well. The parents had not really abandoned their offspring, who besides, were precociously capable of protecting themselves. In fact, with the advent of dual career couples, latch key children have become unexceptional. With both father and mother out to work, sister and brother arrive home after school to find an empty house. It is up to them to change their clothes, prepare a snack, and complete their homework. Later on Mom or Dad may inquire about whether all went well, but for the moment there was no adult supervision to direct their activities.

As Eberstadt points out, this has left many children at loose ends. When very young they are consigned to day care; when a bit older they are relegated to the tender mercies of their peers. Let us consider day care. For all of its much touted professionalization, it does not provide the personalized love of a parent. However sensitive and compassionate day care workers, the children in their care aren’t their own.
They may be concerned about these toddlers, but they cannot furnish the stable attachments that make for emotional security. After all, they will not be going home with them, nor rocking them to sleep when night terrors arrive. Nor will they be there a couple of years down the line when their charges enter kindergarten. As such, they are an undependable source of protection. Whatever their personal qualifications, they cannot replace the bonding between a parent and child. Similarly, peer groups are imperfect substitutes for families. Although teenagers voluntarily seek their refuge, these cannot supplant the guidance of concerned parents. Adolescents may believe they know it all, but their social exposure is so limited they cannot. Someone must safeguard them from themselves, even when this protection is resented. What is more, while these soon-to-be-adults protest unwelcome restrictions, they recognize their necessity. They may demand complete independence, but on an emotional level they realize parental absence is a sign of neglect. Even they perceive that parental demands signal love.

Neglect reframed as democratic parenting is still neglect and is responded to as such. Eberstadt correctly argues that the anger frequently observed in day care is a protest against emotional abandonment. She is also correct in suggesting that the depression and drug use seen among teenagers have a similar origin. So too are the raucous rebelliousness of adolescent music and the irresponsibility of teenage sexuality. When tough love is recommended as a means of staunching these, it likewise signals parental disengagement. All too often parents who do not know how to raise self-directed youngsters, but accept permissive prescriptions, are thrown into a tizzy by juvenile demonstrations of displeasure. They cannot imagine what they have done wrong. How, they wonder, could democratic routines be injurious? Now unsettled by
unfair accusations, they clamp down with rigid constraints. In this, the pendulum has swung from one extreme to the other. Meanwhile, a recognition that mistakes have been made goes aglimmering.

A less egregious error, that is not really an error but an inadequacy, occurs when parents emphasize a perfectly reasonable method for acquiring democratic skills. As de Tocqueville long ago discerned, many Americans obtain practice in governing themselves by being joiners. They become members of bowling leagues, enroll in the PTA, and participate in homeowner associations for practical and avocational reasons. Moreover, in doing so, they become more self-directed. But if this is good enough for them, why isn’t it good enough for their children as well? Why shouldn’t they too be signed up for soccer leagues, be encouraged to play in the high school band, or go away to summer camp with the church youth group? Wouldn’t each of these also provide good practice in working well with others? Won’t they supply the structural props for making sensible personal decisions?

So certain do these propositions appear that many parents, especially mothers, become designated chauffeurs. One of their chief duties is to drive their children from one appointment to another. As Annette Lareau has documented, upper middle class parents expend huge amounts of energy organizing their children’s extra-curricular activities. As a result, the family devolves in to a whirl of social engagements. There is so much going on that parents and children become proverbial ships in the night with barely enough time to acknowledge each other’s presence. In fact these social rounds do provide constructive forms of structure. They can, for instance, be of enormous value in teaching the virtues of personal planning. They are also useful in demonstrating how to
allocate limited amounts of time, while maintaining commitments that are not always welcome. A problem arises only if they become too mechanical. Should they encourage emotional detachment, they can be self-defeating. In other words, purely external structure is not sufficient to inculcate internal controls. For this to happen, they must also be accompanied by direct parent-child interactions.

Once family relationships become too business-like, they forfeit the emotional dimensions that provide the best mechanisms for socializing the young. Under these circumstances individual professionalism is misinterpreted to mean that family members should be virtual strangers to one another. In fact, the expertise and internal motivation relevant to success as intimate relationships is highly personal. It entails emotional maturity and self/other knowledge that is both profound and deep. Functional families are composed of self-directed individuals who interact with the others honestly and familiarly. They not only perceive who they are; they are also in loving emotional contact. Within this arrangement, children acquire self-direction skills partly by observing them and partly by being guided into discovering them. Absolutely fundamental to this process are secure parent-child attachments. Just as intimate adults need to bond, so do mothers and fathers with their offspring. They too must care about each other and be dependably present for each other. John Bowlby and his associates made us aware of how traumatic the opposite, namely emotional separations, can be. Although their work is not as well known as it ought to be, it explains the mechanisms through which parent-child attachments are initiated and the sorts of dangers that threaten their stability. As such, it deserves to be studied by every parent intent on acquiring expertise in being a good parent.
One of the factors Bowlby emphasizes is responsive parenting. If they are to be trusted by their offspring, parents must be sensitively aware of their children’s needs and prepared to help meet them. A mother, for instance, must notice that her child is distress, recognize that this is due to hunger, then gently assuage this craving. This sort of responsiveness provides not only what used to be called “cupboard love,” but emotional support as well. It convinces that child that he/she is not alone and that the world is a safe place. Parents like these serve as reliable home bases. Because they are refuges to which a child can retreat in moments of doubt, they provide a defense against the normal fears of the young. In so doing, they furnish the courage to take essential risks. They allow a child to wander off on his/her own because he/she knows where to return should things go wrong. This then is the beginning of self-direction. Having a dependable attachment provides the confidence to let go and explore the world independently. It also internalizes a sense of safety that makes it possible to endure mistakes when the home base is no longer in sight.

Another contribution of good parenting to self-direction is giving directions and setting limits. It is difficult to overestimate the lack of knowledge of small children. They need to be taught such elementary facts as that fire burns and scraped knees heal. What kinds of food are nourishing, what sorts of clothing are appropriate to different weather conditions, and how money should be budgeted are all mysteries to the very young. Concerned parents do not merely send they offspring out to learn by trial and error. They provide explanations of what is going on, practice in performing challenging tasks, and boundaries on how far to proceed. One of the characteristics of middle class parents highlighted by Kohn is that they want their children to understand how and why
things work. In order to assist them in achieving this, they are prepared to answer
questions patiently. When little Johnny wants to know why the sky is blue, his father is
there to clarify the process, even when this requires addressing a string of additional
“why” questions. Responsive parents likewise go further and engage in roletaking. They
put themselves in little Johnny’s shoes to anticipate his confusions and provide answers
before he asks. Of special concern are perplexities about social arrangements. Children
often wonder why people behave as they do. Why was so-and-so mean to an African-
American or why did Harry and Jane fall in love? Parents who are themselves well
informed usually know enough to furnish illuminating responses. They thereby begin the
process of acquiring both self and other knowledge.

Setting limits is, of course, a more delicate matter. To tell a child that something
is forbidden will not be experienced as an instance of learning, but as a challenge to
personal autonomy. It appears to take direction out of a child’s hands and appropriate it
for the parent. The correct interpretation of this conundrum is that limits are about
practical, not just cognitive, knowledge. They are about guarding against the
consequences of impulsive action; not only erroneous conclusions. Some mistakes are
too serious to be allowed. It is one thing to confuse the saltshaker with the sugar bowl,
quite another to wield a kitchen knife like a sword. Parents who are unwilling to risk a
child’s displeasure reveal a lack of caring. They are more concerned with being
momentarily liked than with the child’s welfare. This, in fact, is one of the greatest
pitfalls of permissive parenting. It confounds the warm feelings of the moment with the
long-term requirements of prudent self-direction. Misled by their own insecurities, such
parents do not look ahead to the relationships they will one day have with their adult children.

The family is similarly the best venue for instilling personal values. Moral values are guideposts to action. They indicate goals likely to meet needs. In this sense, they are a sort of knowledge. A child who is ultimately to become self-directed must acquire this sort of internal compass. When presented with a multitude of options des, he/she needs to make distinctions. There has to be an inner mechanism pointing toward some alternatives rather than others. Values provide this in that they summarize the experiences of earlier generations. What a community agrees is best derives from extensive negotiations based on what has previously worked for its members. Parents having themselves been socialized in this moral consensus are able to pass along its wisdom. Having, for example, benefited from internalizing “family values,” they can recommend these to the next generation. They make it plain that a respectful heterosexual intimacy is a good thing; something worthy of being pursued and defended. They can also endorse other middle class values; values that have demonstrated their worth in underwriting the institutions of a techno-commercial society. Among these are beliefs in responsibility and emotional maturity. They also include a commitment to honesty, trustworthiness, interpersonal fairness, curiosity, merit, and universalism. Each of these is so crucial to stabilizing the personal professionalism required by a decentralized society that they will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter. In the meantime, it must be noted that these, along with the other family based supports for self-direction, are liable to become increasingly important. They are apt to replace permissiveness because they better serve communal interests.
Discipline

Before proceeding to non-familial forms of socialization, it is necessary to backtrack to reconsider a crucial element of self-direction, namely self-discipline and its relationship to externally imposed discipline. So confused has personal autonomy become with total freedom that any form of control is often rejected as tyrannical. Back in Victorian times, scholars distinguished between liberty and license. They understood that a complete absence of controls is tantamount to anarchy. Freedom, for them, entailed restraints. Liberty did not include acting in any way that caught one’s fancy, but only in those that were responsible. Nowadays this is dismissed as quaint. One restaurant chain went so far as to advertise that it had “no rules,” rather it was “just right.” Its customers were theoretically able to order whatever they wanted and to consume this without worrying about a stifling etiquette. Yet what kind of dining experience would they obtain if food fights broke out whenever teenager patrons were so moved? Would the management really stand back to allow any sort of frolicking its clientele chose? Were they to do so, they would probably be out of business within weeks. Total freedom may be idealized, but this is only because a myriad of controls are assumed. Members of Gesellschaft societies do not expect to be assaulted when they meander down a street window-shopping. They expect complete strangers to have sufficient self-control to keep their fists to themselves. In this, they are rarely disappointed.

Reliable self-discipline does not occur spontaneously. It is a consequence of socialization practices perfected over many centuries. Today shaking hands seems like an innocuous gesture. Few realize that it began as testimony that neither party had a
knife in his hand. On a less violent level, evidences of good intentions are regularly imposed on children by their parents. Most mothers and fathers must, at some point, prevent their children from throwing their food when they get excited. Many also have to intervene to stop an angry toddler from biting an obstreperous playmate. They literally instruct them to keep their hands, their food, and their teeth to themselves. Sometimes they even grasp a child’s arm to show him how to “make nice” or to shake hands. In this, they are imposing controls. They are forcing a child to refrain from some actions and engage in others. Whether or not the child wants to, he/she will have to keep his/her hands to him/herself. Whether or not the child wants to, he/she will be compelled to say “sorry.”

How this occurs has become so conventional that it does not garner much notice. Nevertheless the transformation in childrearing has been dramatic. Striking children with a hand across the face or a strap across the derriere were formerly so widespread that they were assumed to be indispensable. Children who were not physically chastised were thought to be in danger of being “spoiled.” They would obviously become so selfish as to be insufferable. Today this practice is considered abusive. The change is frequently attributed to abandoning punishment in favor of rewards. In reality, restraints have not so much disappeared as been modified to meet the needs of self-direction. What has happened is best illustrated by the “time out.” Few middle class children are nowadays directed to lower their trousers to receive corporal chastisements. They are instead ordered to retreat to their rooms to think things over. At such moments they are told that they will be allowed out only when they understand what they did wrong. Clearly what is occurring is that the child is being forced to internalize parental controls. A carrot and
The stick strategy is, in essence, being employed to force a particular choice. Either the child accepts the penalty of isolation or the “freedom” of compliance. The “correct” decision is internalized because circumstances have been arranged to impose a “voluntary” decision. It is like asking a child which he wants to eat—the carrots or the peas. The determination is hers to make; except that the range of options is so narrowed that the endpoint is constrained by the parent.

Time outs have the additional advantage of allowing a child to develop emotional controls. When a child is first sent to her room, she may be so angry that she sputters with rage. Barely able to contain herself, she paces up and down mentally rehearsing the injustices she has suffered. As time passes, however, her fury abates. She develops incremental tolerance to the intense emotion she is experiencing, that is, she is gradually be able to undergo it without wanting to strike out. In this more temperate state of mind she may be able to reconsider her options. Perhaps there are other ways to get what she wants without losing face. Maybe, at some later time, she can make a more persuasive argument that will win the day. Thus, when allowed to rejoin the family, she does so without reigniting a debate. In contrast, the child who is spanked will probably have a different reaction. When hand meets buttocks, his rage does not abate, but is further exacerbated. Parental fury serves only to arouse counter-anger. The child’s resentment will then rise to such heights that he is unable to think of anything except revenge. Instead of learning how to control an intense feeling, its power becomes unmanageable. In this situation, external discipline will have failed to instill internal discipline. Having been misapplied to enforce conformity, it does not permit the latitude that fosters self-control.
What also needs to be initiated is a dialogue between parent and child. The child not only has to be told what to do, but why it should be done. External demands are much easier to accept if they are recognized as in one’s interest. Nevertheless human events are so convoluted that a simple explanation will rarely do. How the facts apply has to be clarified. Thus, the connection between calming down and being able to attend a baseball game has to be elucidated in concrete particulars. Usually this involves both answering questions and responding to alternatives. What intervenes is a dialogue. The child must be allowed to put in her two cents and do so with vigor. Anything less will fail to install internal controls because a sense of injustice will persist. Having been stifled, the child is liable to conclude that her interests were not fully considered. In fact, what needs to take place is a kind of negotiation. The parent should not make all the demands; the child must be permitted counter-demands. She not only has the right to ask questions and make suggestions, but to insist that her claims be honored. Yes, it will be necessary for her to go to bed sometime, but why would it hurt to watch a special television program in the meantime? Surely a loving parent would appreciate the wisdom of this?

The nature of parent-child negotiations also changes over the years. Toddlers and grammar schoolers require more external discipline than do adolescents. Since they have fewer internal controls than their older siblings, the external limits must be more specific and less flexible. Probably the best way to characterize what needs to occur is as a “moving equilibrium.” There has to be a balance between the parties, one that remains stable, even though the parent has more power. In the Dual Concern Model of negotiations both sides are urged to respect the interests of the other and to engage in
problem solving that serves both. Unfortunately, the younger the child the less he or she can understand the true interests of either or envision ingenious solutions that satisfy both. This places a greater onus on the adult to compensate for what the child lacks. In other words, the parent must make allowances for the younger partner when deciding what to impose or how to impose it. With younger children, more must come from the adult and this has to be enforced more vigorously. With older children, who better understand their circumstances and possess the resources to impose their own will, a greater number of compromises need to be made. Teenagers must be listened to more carefully and their ability to resist better appreciated. Sometimes it is even necessary to allow them to make mistakes. In this case, the goal of self-direction is best served by combining a responsive discipline with adolescent self-expression. Conformity cannot give way to self-direction unless it is tempered with personal experimentation. This, to be sure, requires parents to let go, which risks serious missteps, but a professionalized independence is only won at the cost of occasional disasters.

If self-control and skill at negotiations are acquired via practice, an understanding that one possesses the capacity to exercise discretion is also. One of the corollaries of the permissiveness is the self-esteem theory. This asserts that adult success is dependent upon developing a “positive self-image.” A person who thinks well of him/herself thereby acquires the confidence to pursue glorious achievements, whereas one who does not shrinks from life’s adventures. According to the theory, every child should have his/her ego pumped up with flattery. Thus, he/she might be told that there is nothing that cannot be accomplished; that every dream is achievable and every hope realizable. Exposed exclusively to unconditional positive regard, the result is supposed to be self-
acceptance and self-assurance. Such persons theoretically grow up to love themselves and others, and are therefore primed to have happy, productive careers. This, at any rate, is the promise. The reality is somewhat other. Research does not demonstrate a correlation between success and unearned self-esteem. People who feel good about themselves, not because they have achieved anything, but because they have been exposed to incessant praise, rarely live up to expectations. Much to their personal detriment, an inflated conception of their abilities eventually clashes with real-world demands. Self-discipline acquired in the school of hard knocks has a different effect. Children who have to meet demands for identifiable performances discover that they have limits. Unable to live up to every requirement, they internalize an acceptance of their shortcomings. This provides the internal controls to regulate their aspirations and choose the doable. They become better planners and organizers precisely because they have a more realistic self-image and more grounded goals. Competent self-direction is thus a product of internal boundaries that have been set, in part, by rubbing up against external boundaries.

**Progressive Education**

At the dawn of the twentieth century, just as the Middle Class Revolution was gaining momentum, public education reached a take-off point. Whereas previously most children received only enough formal schooling to learn the three R’s, more were shortly expected to complete high school. Nor would it be long before a college education was standard. Moreover, with most work now done outside the home and more people interacting with strangers, it seemed to make sense to shift the burden of socializing the young to public institutions. The government clearly had the resources to hire experts to
prepare every youngster for the technical challenges they were expected to meet. These university-trained pedagogues were obviously better equipped to teach the complex subjects required by an industrialized economy. In due time, the disparity in know-how between the schools and families would be so great that the responsibility for grooming the young for life would be delegated to the former. Family parochialism would ultimately shrink in influence, supplanted by the egalitarianism of a purpose-designed system.

For several generations philosophies of education had been springing up like mushrooms, but they now reached their apogee in the progressive education movement. Spokesmen, such as John Dewey, rose to prominence. Their message was seductive. Akin to permissiveness in orientation, progressivism promised to prepare the young for modernity. Gone would be the rote training of the little red schoolhouse, replaced by experience-based learning. Taking a cue from Jean-Jacque Rousseau, students would be encouraged to explore the world on their own and participate in self-selected activities. These would tap into their inner most selves so as to actualize what was individually appropriate. Rather than cookie-cutter pupils trained for assembly-line tasks, they would develop into adults with the confidence to engage in critical thinking. Although not described in this language, they would become self-directed grown-ups capable of acting as professionalized selves. The fit seemed to be uncanny. Progressivism was apparently tailored for what was required.

Nonetheless, once more practice and promise diverged. Progressive education in renouncing discipline proved as feckless as permissive parenting. Far from being able to provide a superior substitute for traditional teaching methods, it gradually allowed
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educational standards to erode. As time passed, the average number of years spent in school escalated, whereas the demands for achievement declined. Eventually the measure of success became not what the student had learned, but how good he or she felt about the self. Children who were allowed to decide what they would study assumed that whatever they enjoyed would be sufficient. Examinations, as everyone knew, were biased. Because they were arbitrary, they overlooked the value of self-expression. What was more, they made invidious distinctions between students. In celebrating competition, they promoted the idea that some individuals were superior to others. Thus, some would be winners, while others would be losers. This was unfair. Worse yet, it was profoundly anti-democratic. Everyone deserved a chance at the brass ring irrespective of his/her achievements or underlying abilities. Given this belief, it was no wonder that international tests of science, history, and linguistic skills soon placed American students toward the bottom.

Progressive education made an assortment of serious errors, the most significant of which was that the school could substitute for the family. Its advocates imagined that by indiscriminately accepting whatever pupils brought to the classroom, they were being offered something analogous to love. By refraining from the criticism of the old-time, hickory stick-wielding pedagogue, teachers presumably sent the message that children were accepted for themselves. In addition, a patient tolerance of individual differences validated their inner selves and allowed the young to flourish. As opposed to the insensitive, discipline-oriented judgmentalism of the family, the classroom would provide the room to grow. It would not place students in straightjackets merely to please the whims of greedy capitalists, but would encourage them to attain what was more
important; namely, self-acceptance. The consequence was to proffer less demanding lessons, inflate student grades, and encourage social promotions. No one would be held back for the trivial crime of failing to learn. No one would be discriminated against merely because he or she was not academically inclined. To the contrary, creativity and personal satisfaction would prevail.

What this neglected was the need children have for discipline and emotional involvement. Formal education, if it is to be effective, cannot be totally accommodating. It must make demands or forfeit the possibility of positive results. External discipline is as crucial in the classroom as the living room. Rather than deprive children of their individualism, it provides a foundation for learning. Contrary to what is stated in schools of education, learning is not always fun; nor can it be. Some lessons are so complex that they take effort to master. Books must be read and computational skills practiced. Upon occasion, it is even necessary to burn the midnight oil. Likewise, there are always moments of failure. The meaning of a poem may not be immediately apparent, while multiplying fractions can remain a mystery. These difficulties must be taken in stride while maintaining the self-control to persist in applying oneself. Setbacks cannot justify giving up. Teacher demands, which is to say, externally imposed discipline, can assist in overcoming doubts. By pushing children forward, they teach the lesson that the young can do more than they think they can. This encourages internal discipline by demonstrating that disagreeable endeavors frequently pay off.

Devotees of progressivism aside, teacher demands are not automatically tyrannical. They may be resisted by the young, only to be appreciated in later years. Nor is student competition a genus of heartless oppression. Setting standards, then measuring
how well these are met, does create invidious comparisons—comparisons that can be distressing—nonetheless they also provide incentives. An internalized desire to succeed is frequently the product of a desire not to lose. Children, like adults, do their best because they too are hierarchical animals who do not wish to fail tests of strength. The notion that demanding quality performances damages a child’s sense of worth is itself self-defeating. While it is true that losing can arouse uncertainties, never having to demonstrate one’s abilities creates unrealistic illusions. Self-esteem grounded in self-indulgence is a fragile vessel. Thus, American students, when asked about their mathematical skills, routinely express confidence. Unfortunately international achievement tests reveal them deficient. How then will they respond should economic competition expose their weaknesses? Isn’t it better to discover these limitations in the classroom so that they can be overcome? Losing, because one has failed to live up to exacting demands, can spur effort. It can therefore prepare the way for actual victories.

Although formal education cannot substitute for the more fundamental lessons in self-discipline furnished by loving parents, it can assist in expanding a child’s internal controls. Classrooms have greater difficulty in fostering emotional maturity. They tend to be cold and detached. Much of what is accomplished in this area is therefore attributable to the children themselves. Peer groups provide relationships in which emotional skills are essential. A circle of friends will not endure the tantrums that might be tolerated by a parent. Nor do schoolyard chums abide irrational fears of dodge ball. They laugh at crybabies and shun their company. To this, the only appropriate response is an emotional one. The targets of peer-group taunts are compelled either to hold back their tears or to verbalize persuasive complaints. What occurs, in other words, is
emotional socialization. Children are taught how to use their feelings by being forced to use them.

Conversely, the classroom is, relatively speaking, emotionally incompetent. Its cognitive lessons are usually drained of emotional content. The teacher explains what must be understood and the student commits this to memory. Anxieties may attach to the prospect of giving an incorrect answer, but the materials themselves are not inherently passionate. More significant still, a teacher cannot have the emotional impact of a parent. However much an individual educator is loved, she has the same problem as day care workers. She too is not going home with her charges or even into their next classroom once they are promoted. Although her heart may go out to an abused waif, she cannot be a reliable source of emotional attachment. To intimate that she might is to make a promise she cannot fulfill; it is to offer a false hope that creates additional pain when it is not realized. Nor is classroom permissiveness an adequate substitute for love. Offering acceptance of itself cannot validate a child’s individualism because it does not recognize the child’s distinctiveness. A teacher who does not have the opportunity to get to know a student’s inner-most self cannot care about this anymore than a man or woman can experience love at first sight. Genuine emotional attachments take time to develop; hence they are exceptionally distressing to tear asunder. Were they even feasible in the classroom, their inevitable dissolution would be too excruciating to contemplate. While teachers can be emotionally supportive, they are not equipped repair the damage of a fractious home life. They cannot even be as emotionally supportive as religious institutions.
Schools specialize in imparting knowledge. They teach the facts and skills essential in a techno-commercial society. As a result, professional expertise begins in the classroom. A would-be engineer must first learn math; a would-be lawyer must internalize linguistic aptitudes. This is well understood by parents who urge a good education as bridge to adult success. Less appreciated is that the kinds of knowledge useful in a professionalized society are shifting. Technical skills, such as those required to become an accountant, have not lost their cache; they have merely to be supplemented by people skills. In a Gesellschaft society, where a larger proportion of jobs entail organizing and supervising a diverse workforce, human nature and group dynamics demand conscious study. The cultural particulars and interpersonal pressures, that make individuals what they are, need to be recognized if colleagues are to be motivated to work together. Seat-of-the-pants management styles have outgrown their utility in large-scale operations that depend upon decentralized decision-making. So vital have interpersonal sensitivities become, that they, and not merely technical information, must be encouraged starting with grammar school.

Paradoxically, one of the ways schools achieve this often has the opposite effect. Nowadays, progressive educators emphasize diversity. In this, they claim to develop the tolerance necessary in a multicultural society. In fact, they peddle a version of pluralism. By celebrating ethnic and racial differences, they encourage students to identify with their communities of origin. This has the effect of turning them inward as opposed to instigating an exploration of the distinctiveness of others. Instead of teaching students about what human beings have in common, it confirms their separateness, which makes it more difficult to accommodate individuality on the job. Although most modern
educators loathe the notion of stereotypes, they perpetuate these. In place of a genuine people expertise, they offer an ideologically based surrogate.

Among the other disappointing innovations of progressivism are bi-lingual education, whole word reading techniques, modern math, and the open classroom. Each was supposed to promote individual learning, but all were followed by lower achievement. That their advocates did not recognize this owes to a serious deficiency. Oddly enough, as public education has expanded, and professional credentials rose in importance, anti-intellectualism has been institutionalized. Teachers, it might be assumed, are dedicated to the advance of knowledge. As information specialists, they might be thought to love learning. But this is mistaken. Certainly in the lower grades, most teachers are uncomfortable with scholarship. Many go into pedagogy precisely because they are not good students. They realize that a degree in teaching is not intellectually demanding and that, once on the job, they will have the opportunity to concentrate on their own families. Furthermore, their employment will be secure and not interfere with their personal priorities.

In this, teachers receive succor from their professional socialization and professional organizations. Schools of education are notorious for their lack of rigor. For the most part, they do not concentrate on academic subjects, but rather on the pedagogical techniques whereby they are instilled. Their graduates learn how to cut construction paper and respect student needs, not the specifics of the French Revolution. Few contemporary organizations are as politically correct as E-schools. They revel in promoting diversity and permissive theories of socialization. Their principal emphasis is on being nice. They want to ensure that the objects of their efforts will hate sexism,
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racism, homophobia, and conservatism. To this end, they encourage textbooks so respectful of every minority they do not include anything provocative. If this means that history is rewritten to make it more edifying, they are prepared to do so. Eagerly assisting them in this mission are the teacher’s unions. Ostensibly committed to improved learning, they are more concerned with raising teacher salaries and providing job security. When they insist on smaller classroom sizes, their argument is that this will enhance student outcomes. Although they know full well that research does not support this conclusion, they realize that smaller classrooms employ more teachers.

It is probably not too strong to describe today’s teachers as aspiring to be neo-Marxist social workers. They are not so much concerned with imparting academic skills as with promoting equal success for vulnerable members of society. The poor, women, gays, and minorities have their sympathy. These are the constituencies to whom they aim their efforts and society’s resources. Once public schools took pride in programs for gifted students; today these are reserved for the troubled ones. Mainstreaming pupils with low IQ’s or emotional disorders is given greater priority than sending the best and brightest to elite universities. If the disruptions caused by special populations interfere with the study habits of the smartest students, not to worry, they are intelligent enough to look after themselves. What is ignored is that this egalitarianism was undermined by the very methods through which it was to be achieved. Sacrificing discipline does not raise poor students to academic parity. The actual effect is to supply them the room to flounder. Nor does celebrating minority distinctiveness provide a boost up the ladder. The real consequence is an excuse for failure. Schools cannot impose an equality of results in a world where abilities differ and where hierarchical distinctions cannot be
An accent on cooperation has its place, but not at the expense of competition. Indeed, in teaching that competition is immoral, that it is a vestigial legacy of capitalism, those who are at risk of accepting these propositions will lose out later on. If they give up because they feel that this is morally superior, they will fall behind. Ironically, it is the middle class students, the ones who receive encouragement to succeed at home, that come out ahead.

**Higher Education**

Something odd has also occurred at the university level. Formerly a bastion of intellectual achievement, colleges too have been under assault. With a larger proportion of students seeking a bachelor’s degree, the standards they are asked to meet have eroded. Just as in elementary and secondary schools, grade inflation has allowed students to move on despite not learning what their predecessors took for granted. If, nowadays, some high school students are permitted to graduate without knowing how to read, many college graduates receive a degree without ever cracking a book. A significant number do not attend classes, or write papers—these are purchased or cribbed off the Internet—yet they expect As or Bs in every course. If they do not, their professors feel their wrath. Some students insist that as their school’s customers, they have paid for their grades; hence if they don’t receive them, they will sue. Unfortunately, many academics go along to get along. They reduce the number of texts assigned, the page count of the papers required, and the complexity of the examinations administered.

Many professors remain uncomfortable with these lowered standards, but they are frequently imposed from above. As colleges have grown larger, the ratio of administrators to professors has tilted toward the former. One sign of this is that
professional educators are no longer content to confine their expertise to primary and secondary schools; they have now decided to reform higher education. With a larger percentage of administrators boasting backgrounds, not in academic specialties, but education, they demand what is euphemistically labeled accountability. Based upon the argument that the resources invested in higher education are too great to rely on chance, professors are required to demonstrate that their students are learning the expected lessons. They are asked to submit justifications of what they are teaching, explanations of their assessment techniques, and evaluations of their classroom performances as determined by the students. Department chairs, college deans, and academic vice presidents then appraise these. An illustration of this phenomenon is that, where not too long ago, tenure ensured academic freedom, today this has been supplemented by post-tenure reviews. On the assumption that lifelong employment encourages sloth, professors must continuously update their portfolios to demonstrate that they remain productive.

The trouble with this is that those who judge these outcomes frequently do not possess the expertise to make such judgments. Unfamiliar with the subject matter taught by their subordinates, they rely on generalized indicators of competence—such as classroom popularity. Actually, this paints too grim a portrait. In fact, university campuses across the nation are rent with struggles between their administrations and faculties. The administrators champion bureaucratic controls, whereas the professors uphold a more professional model. Asked why this is so, the former declare that they have a duty to rationalize higher education, while the latter defend the benefits of collegiality. Professors point out that at their inception, universities were associations of
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scholars. This allowed them to remain the authorities in their own classrooms. Dedicated to erudition, only they understood the intricacies of their subject matter; hence only they could determine what to teach. With the advent of the modern megaversity this changed. Colleges became too large, and diverse, to be governed by assemblies of professors who were dilatants with respect to the management of complex organizations. The upshot was that faculty senates became consultative, rather than governing, bodies. Fortunately (from the perspective of a professor), their professional influence has not disappeared. Administrators may have the last word about matters such as tenure, but faculty committees continue to make recommendations that are rarely over-ruled. This ensures that academic standards remain in place. Professors, who continue to be dedicated to professional competence, will not relinquish them easily.

Moreover, professors, as opposed to lower-level teachers, must endure a professional socialization before obtaining their positions. Most colleges today will not hire someone for a tenure-track position unless that person has, or shortly will have, a doctorate. Although, during the Victorian era, it was not unusual for faculty members to obtain their expertise from non-academic sources, a graduate school degree has now become mandatory. This implies years of rigorous study that transform a would-be academic’s personal identity. An intense and lengthy period of learning instills a significant body of knowledge, with which the candidate comes to identify. Moreover, this occurs within a community of learners that judges him/her by intellectual performance. Knowing one’s stuff is not optional. Even after graduation, a professor’s reputation depends on keeping up. Professionalism thus provides an expertise and internal motivation administrators cannot match. Few faculty members continue to study
their subject area because they want to please their deans. Fewer still become professors because of the financial rewards. They do so because they love what they do and intend to do it well. Despite all of the pressures to homogenize their efforts, they maintain high standards because they believe in them. Most also believe in inspiring their students. Precisely because they love their disciplines, they wish to pass these on to another generation.

The greatest threat to higher education, in point of fact, comes from another direction. The modern university has become a citadel of liberalism. Neo-Marxist concepts permeate most of the humanities and social sciences. In disciplines as diverse as sociology, anthropology, English literature, history, and communications collectivist theories run rampant. Countless professors believe it is their duty to awaken student’s minds to the oppressive effects of capitalistic greed. Intent upon participating in the emergence of an enlightened new era, they aim to instill a “critical thinking” that allows the young to “deconstruct” exploitive institutions. Where once the academic ideal was a marketplace of ideas, this has been superseded by an indoctrination in politically correct thinking. In subject area after subject area, surveys reveal that most faculty members are left wing in their political loyalties. In concert, they therefore constitute a closed circle of intellectual convictions. Among themselves they applaud their own perceptiveness, while they spurn the contributions of outsiders. This means that potential colleagues with divergent opinions are neither hired nor promoted. The result is a dreary uniformity that is self-perpetuating.

This emergent academic orthodoxy has two destructive consequences. The first concerns the development of knowledge. A self-satisfied conviction that the truth has
already been discovered is detrimental to further discoveries. It both undermines the motivation to seek new information and the ability to appraise alternate views. That which is different is unacceptable and therefore squelched. In an institution dedicated to expanding knowledge, this can be lethal. It undercuts the rationale for its existence. The second consequence results from the interaction of a left wing orthodoxy with a market-oriented society. Regardless of the opinions of a majority of professors, the United States remains capitalist. Moreover, its successes are largely attributable to this technocommercial heritage. It is thus for very good reasons that most of citizens are dedicated to democratic and market-based traditions. But herein lies the difficulty. Many parents have recently begun realizing that colleges teach contempt for their way of life. They, in essence, spend tens of thousands of dollars so that their children can be indoctrinated in views antithetical to their own. How long, it may be wondered, can this last? When will those paying the bills demand a change? Perhaps they will seek an alternative means of socializing their young. After all, higher education is of recent vintage. Today a university credential is a ticket to a good job, but if it becomes irrelevant, perhaps a different credential will do.

Lastly, there is the awkward issue of the feminization of higher education. Colleges were once the preserve of males, but this has ceased being the case. Today women fill more university seats, from whence they obtain the best grades. If this is so, whereas most positions of authority after graduation still go to men, there is a disconnect that deserves attention. Political correctness may dictate that one avert one’s eyes from this development, but realities are realities. A very important question must consequently be asked. How can a college degree maintain its prestige when an increasing number of
successful people do not possess the highest degrees? Will learning about subjects associated with feminine interests continue to be regarded as the best preparation for positions of power? Couple this with grade and credential inflation and the mystique of higher education may soon erode. If so, where will professional socialization occur? Will new institutions emerge? At the very least, a reorganization of higher education can be anticipated.

Parents versus Schools

Where does this leave us with regard to predicting the future? Surely what once seemed to be the direction of history cannot be. A permissive schooling that ends in an ideologically slanted higher education is not the best means of creating a professionalized society. It should be remembered that the educational institutions currently in place were installed as instruments for teaching a technical expertise. How well will they perform when required to teach “people skills” or emotional maturity? It once seemed that formal education would take over from informal socialization, but this must now be doubted. Formal education simply cannot provide what is required. The old-fashioned family will have to be reinvented to deal with needs that only intimate associations can handle.

As long ago as Plato’s Greece, it was assumed that parents could be eliminated. Too quirky to be controlled, and too selfish to be fair, their services could not be rationalized. The expertise necessary for preparing children for adulthood would have to be centralized in professionalized organizations. Now this hope is revealed to be a chimera. If socialization is to be improved, the requisite professionalization has to emerge from parents themselves. They need to enhance their understanding of how children grow and rededicate their efforts to preparing them for independent success.
Despite fashionable projections of the future, experience indicates that self-direction best emerges from family relationships. Families are not obsolete; and they will not be pushed to obsolescence. It is merely taking time for parents to develop the appropriate skills and attitudes.

Nor will schools disappear. If they cannot displace parents, neither can parents displace them. Mothers and fathers who do not possess technical skills cannot inculcate these. Nor can parents replace the social dimensions of formal education. The intense emotions of the family are no substitute for the extended relationships of the schoolyard. Indeed, the latter are critical for providing practice in the anonymous relationships of a Gesellschaft society. This is the primary reason why home schooling can never become the norm. In any event, a modus vivendi between the family and the school must emerge. The two need to accommodate each other because neither can achieve what is necessary alone. Both have to become synergistically professionalized if they are to produce the professionalized generations of the future. The learning curve moving us beyond authoritarian or permissive parenting must be supplemented by one that moves us beyond progressive or ideological education.

Perhaps the best way to wrap up what is likely to occur is to refer to Michael Barone’s conception of a Hard versus Soft America. He points out that most children are currently being raised in undemanding circumstances. They are neither required to exert much effort, nor blamed for failures when these arise. Often excused from competition by their parents and teachers, they become experts in excusing their own ineptitude. Concerned mostly with having a good time, they develop into irresponsible drones, with the school grades to prove this. But then magic seems to intervene. Slothful youths
graduate from college and go on to become the world’s most productive adults. Expelled from the plushy softness of a permissive childhood, they emerge into a marketplace where competition rules. Now the people around them are playing hardball. Now it is possible to lose. Confronted with a sink or swim alternative, most prefer to swim. They get down to the business of becoming professionalized at whatever they end up doing. This is clearly observable in the job market where most become capable, self-directed individuals. American productivity proves as much. Happily, this is also occurring at home. The current generation is learning to manage voluntary relationships and raise self-directed offspring. Extrapolating into the future suggests that things will continue to improve. Mistakes will be made, and foolish solutions propounded, but the logic of professionalization is inexorable.
All Thump and Epithet

Is professionalization really inexorable? Is it truly destined to extend into our private lives? Certainly contemporary society is more professional than its predecessors. Indeed, the amount of progress has been spectacular. Economically, the world has never been as subdivided into as many interlocking tasks or as efficient in meeting our material needs. Furthermore, a larger number of people hold down responsible jobs than was formerly conceivable. This, in turn, has had an enormous impact on our social arrangements. People today interact with one another in ways that their ancestors could scarcely have imagined. Plainly, the triumph of the weak integrative forces, if not complete, has been substantial. Communal solidarity is more reliant on social roles than during any previous era. We clearly see that a professionalized division of labor, i.e., a multitude of roles based on complex expertise and internalized motivation, has evolved in the occupational sphere. But something similar has also emerged in the civic and personal arenas. These latter developments have followed upon economic advances, although they have sometimes lagged behind. The internalization of a personal professionalism has had to await the evolution of a suitable foundation. Moreover, only when these various patterns were created could they be passed along to the next generation.

Nonetheless, revised modes of life have been emerging. A communal learning curve continues to produce numerous social innovations. Among these advances have been the routinization of democracy and the rule of law. Americans take these for
granted, but popular forms of government are only now spreading across the globe. In their train, have also come improvements in social communication and the tolerance of diversity. These have allowed billions of people to gain a better understanding of their differences and to accept role patterns at which they would once have bridled. Because their cognitive worlds have expanded, they are able to embrace a wider assortment of relationships. This, in turn, has facilitated eclectic social networks. Not just merchants, but ordinary people, are today prepared to cooperate with strangers, including foreigners. Indeed, their survival depends upon it.

On a more personal plane, albeit at a slower pace, hundreds of millions have participated in a revision of family roles. Here too a learning curve has been necessary to create the sorts of roles appropriate for internalization. With the nuclear family essential for socializing the young, the stabilization of heterosexual intimacy has proven vital. Men and women, who once entered marriage because they had no choice, today do so because they perceive a personal benefit. More and more, they take responsibility for keeping their relationships in good repair. This, however, has required that they understand the nature of gender differences and attachment processes. Since these facts are only now being clarified, it is only now that internalizing them has become possible. Similarly, while love has been part of the human repertoire for eons, the motivation to stay attached to a single partner has only recently become a thoroughly individual matter. As a result, more couples have had to develop the skills to negotiate their differences. In short, the professionalization of marriage is of modern vintage. So modern is it that it remains imperfect.
The same can be said of the mechanisms for raising self-directed children. The internalization of appropriate parenting skills has been contingent upon understanding how children develop and the manner in which they interact with adults. Few could factor the need for dependable attachments into their disciplinary techniques before this was fully recognized. Nor could parents be as strongly motivated to stay in intimate contact with their offspring before they appreciated the consequences of emotional abandonment. By the same token, they could not prepare to negotiate their roles with their offspring before the importance of a Dual Concern Model of bargaining was recognized. The difficulty, in making these advances, has, unfortunately, been exacerbated by theories that suggest formal education could replace family-based socialization. Here time has demonstrated the limitations of impersonal schooling. Haltingly, an accumulation of errors has exposed the Achilles’ heels of institutional learning. Needless to say, these factors resulted in the delayed achievement of suitable childhood socialization.

Side by side with these events has emerged an unsettling pattern. The forward progress of professionalization has not gone unchallenged. It is even fair to say that an anti-professional trend has surfaced. The register of evidence is substantial. Rather than expertise and internalized motivation becoming universal, they are frequently spurned as irrelevant. For many, superstition and vulgarity are more attractive. They reject the idea of becoming competent decision makers and embrace the notion that a combination of sex, drugs, and art will save the world. Fascinated by a vision of humanity that is all thump and epithet, they do not seek the strengths that would enable them to become self-directed adults. Many would rather not think at all. Provided with an opportunity to do
so, they choose to drift off in an emotional haze. Let others waste their efforts on trying
to control the uncontrollable; they elect to drop out.

Among the indicators of this attitude has been the celebration of raw sexuality.
Physical promiscuity is glorified as the most direct route to personal happiness. The act
of coitus is sought as a means of attaining total gratification. Those who favor this are
apt to believe that pleasure is the reason for living. More professionalized types value
achievement, but for these hedonists this is an empty prize. Only emotions strike them as
real and, therefore, important. Intensifying these becomes their goal; hence the attraction
of aphrodisiacs. These pleasure seekers tell us that nudity is a positive good; that to be
ashamed of the body is anti-human. They assure us that physical intercourse is natural
and unselfish. For better or worse, their influence has been so profound that battalions of
teenage girls have taken to dressing like tenderloin prostitutes. Midriffs are flaunted,
with derrieres accentuated by discrete tattoos. Tongues are also skewered, ostensibly to
make them more effective instruments for oral sex. Language too becomes vulgarized,
with lady-like expressions eschewed as hopelessly un-hip. In the play the Music Man the
title character attempts to sell a small town musical instruments by convincing its citizens
that the pool hall is corrupting their children. He warns them that if this continues, the
next thing they know their young will be using words like “swell.” Today it is words like
“suck” and “f-you” that have come into vogue. Worse still, those from whose mouths
they emerge rarely acknowledge that these normalize sleeping around.

Drugs too have been praised as providing a direct route to personal happiness.
Timothy Leary once advocated LSD as a device for “tuning in, turning on, and dropping
out.” Chemically active agents as diverse as marihuana, cocaine, heroin, meth-
amphetamines, ecstasy, and alcohol have all been lauded as gateways to a superior form of consciousness. The real world, the one professionalized experts attempt to understand and master, is derided as a mirage. It is presumably much better to have one’s senses heightened, one’s sexual pleasures multiplied, and one’s fatuous ambitions dulled. Temporal success and material goods are disparaged as illusory. They may seem to offer individual gratification, but they ensnare people into a world of cutthroat competition and corporal acquisitiveness. As such, they are false gods that pale in comparison with the mystical satisfaction of an altered state of consciousness.

Even art, one of life’s genuine virtues, has been venerated as superior to more mundane pursuits. Grubbing after money and political power are dismissed as shallow and tasteless. There is nothing ethereal about these goals; hence they are no match for the bliss of aesthetic activities. Only art is alleged to put people in touch with enduring truths. Whether the plastic arts, the performance arts, or the literate arts, these provide insights into the human condition that the emotionally bereft sciences cannot. Because they are in contact with the human soul, they elevate their aficionados to plateaus of excellence. More prosaic individuals, who demand empirical validation for their beliefs, thereby deny themselves access to important realities. In their quest for pedestrian answers, they overlook more meaningful avenues to personal fulfillment. This perspective has become so prevalent that it sounds like common sense. Yet sadly, in disdaining the world we see and touch in favor of one grounded in the imagination, it spurns humdrum matters of fact in favor of romantic fictions. Although it is true that aesthetic visions can be comforting, they are no substitute for observable truths. The latter furnish the basis for an expertise from which verifiable predictions emerge.
Knowledge of the concrete world, rather than touchy-feely constructs, allow for control over our environment. Art, on its own, provides us with astrology; whereas science gives us astronomy and astronomy supplies us with rockets to the moon.

Closely allied to an emphasis on sex, drugs, or art is the conviction that: “if it feels good, do it.” Each person is said to be an authority unto him/herself. If you personally decide to insult people, well go ahead and insult them. As long as this is authentic, it deserves to be honored. Likewise, if you wish to break a promise, you should not feel constrained by outdated principles. Loyalty to your own needs comes first. The highest truths, in other words, come from one’s individual gut. Feelings, as opposed to beliefs, are privileged. Since they are the essence of what makes us human, only they are worthy of admiration. This makes each person a specialist on what is right for him or herself, and justifies whatever conclusion may be reached. Still, were this attitude to become universal, the consequence would be chaos. People would drop out of society, with the result that social order would collapse. A Hobbesian war of all against all would be imminent—prevented only by the prior advent of mass starvation. Needless to say, this is inimical to professionalization. It precludes both a genuine expertise regarding reality or the motivation to deal with unpleasant facts.

Finally, the implications of modern music must be considered. What one hears on the radio or sees in music videos is so hostile to a professional attitude as to merit special attention. First, the abrupt editing associated with what is presented on media outlets such as MTV has been linked short attention spans. The images flash by so quickly that they leave only impressions, not deeply contemplated implications. In other words, thought and foresight are discouraged. Since these are demanding; they are discounted.
Second, the vulgarity of the language and the associated human gyrations are so corrupt as to have settled in the gutter. Women are routinely referred to as ho’s and bitches, while the police are insulted as pigs and murderers. “Artists” who revel in the label “gangsta rap,” often boast criminal records that explain their enthusiasm for dishonesty. Dressed either as ragamuffins or extravagant pimps, and surrounded by female pelvic thrusts, they angrily spew the language of the disaffected and uneducated. Third, the music itself is impoverished. All thump and insult, it is orgiastic as opposed to melodic. Simplistic rhythms force out almost every vestige of tunefulness. Once upon a time, classical music reflected the emotional discipline of a court-oriented society. Styles of dancing, such as the minuet, underscored the value placed on self-control. Nowadays this is completely gone. Volume has displaced harmony and a strong beat has dislodged counterpoint. Every alleged popular song sounds like every other, with their respective virtues measured in terms of an ability to transport writhing listeners outside of an introspective awareness. The less they are in touch with the world, the better members of the underclass seem to like it.

Most parents are not only conscious of these non-professional elements; they are distressed by them. Sometimes they urge their children to seek more elevated vehicles, but more often they are merely frustrated in these efforts. The fact is that the young are attracted to this music largely because it offends adults. They utilize it as form of rebellion. Some observers, therefore, advise parents to refrain from making odious comparisons with the music of their youth. They are reminded that fashions change and that their own parents once rejected their choices. Instead of condemning what they do not understand and arousing further opposition, they should recognize that the
contemporary scene it no worse than that of their youth; it is merely different. Since
music, like morality is relative, they should relax and allow the present generation to
define its own tastes. Not only is there no harm in doing this, but the real damage comes
from imposing outmoded styles. Were this successful, it would deprive the young of
their freedom and independence.

This rationale sounds reasonable to the contemporary ear. Most adults are aware
that fashions have changed. They realize that distinctive styles regularly supplant one
another, with each generation appreciative of that with which it is most familiar.
Nonetheless, there has, in fact, been an anti-professional sea change. Not just music, but
a generalized vulgarity, bespeak a discomfort with the Middle Class Revolution. What is
afoot is more than an attempt to assert teenage autonomy. There is an implicit fear of not
being able to measure up. Professionalization, it must be born in mind, is not easy. It
entails an intense and lengthy socialization and subjects a person to the potentially
negative judgments of fellow professionals. The many contemporary anti-professional
alternatives have one thing in common; none of them is particularly demanding. Sex,
drugs, art, and an anti-scientific, feel-good mentality demand little or no learning and
next to no personal commitment. Moreover, climbing into multiple beds, imbibing
illegal substances, glorying in personal tastes, or following gut feelings cannot be wrong.
None of these is open to being measured by objective standards. This most especially
includes music. Long ago the Romans coined the saying: De gustibus non disputandum
est (there is no disputing tastes). Those who dread contradiction can claim the sanctuary
of bankrupt noises and bad manners, so long as they equate these with art. What they
like is what they like, and that the end of the matter. Such is the legacy of heavy metal, grunge, and hip-hop.

Something else must be added. A host of programs and diversions, which enable those so disposed to escape negative judgments, abet these anti-professional strategies. As will later be elaborated upon, an appeal to “unconditional positive regard” seeks to impose an artificial, neo-Marxist equality on all of us. As long as nobody can be criticized for who or what they are, they are theoretically as good as everyone else. The problem with this is that if it were so, there would be no standards. If everyone was equally good, then they would also be equally bad. To eschew criticism because it is criticism is to accept everything as indifferently valuable. With music this would not only obviate the unique talents of a Mozart or Beethoven; it would also render unintelligible the lists of top forty hits the young find so appealing. Worse still, a complete rejection of merit is unworkable. Even the people who insist upon it, routinely live their lives otherwise. Nobody gets by without makes distinctions between better and worse. Doing so would take the interest out of ordinary affairs. It would make everything equally satisfying and, therefore, equally bland. The same applies to human beings. If all role players are equally competent, if all potential lovers equally appealing, and if all hierarchies completely flat, then distinctions make no sense. Everyone would thereby be reduced to grains of sand on a very flat beach.

Programs and Diversions

Ancient Rome was not a democracy. Even before the fall of the republic, its citizens had yet to internalize a commitment to the fair elections and legislative compromise that contemporary Americans assume to be innate. They were, to the
contrary, a very unruly group. Often equipped with personal weapons, they were not averse to overthrowing rulers who displeased them. Quite naturally, these leaders took this into consideration and sought means to neutralize potential grievances. Within the precincts of the capital city, where the populace might storm the centers of power, it was essential to keep the masses content. The strategy adopted to achieve this is well known. Understood by the Romans themselves as “bread and circuses,” it was direct and largely successful. Based on the instruments then available, it depended upon the same mechanisms that allowed the empire to expand. In the classical era, social solidarity was underwritten by what at the time were novel forces. A combination of military might and commercial success raised Greece, and then Rome, to European and Levantine hegemony. The Roman legions, in particular, as financed by extensive Mediterranean trade, swaggered from the Hadrian wall to the temples of Petra thanks to an iron clad, yet flexible, discipline. At home, the brute force, and unparalleled wealth, of their triumphs were harnessed to maintain social order. The exact way this was achieved differed from the strategies of conquest, but the underlying mechanisms were remarkably similar.

The relatively poor citizens of Rome, the so-called proletarians, could not be allowed to go without a share of the spoils of empire. They might not benefit from the slave driven industries that pampered their betters, but they demanded a piece of what their arms had helped win. One of the things they could not avoid noticing was that the growth of a market economy permitted their patrician rulers to transport luxuries to their Italian palaces from the remote corners of the domain. Since they too counted themselves citizens of the state, they looked on with envy and a sense of entitlement. Why shouldn’t the government provide backing for their lifestyles as well? Surely, they
too deserved something for nothing. This was provided by a dole that furnished ordinary Romans with their basic sustenance. Grain was literally brought in by the shipload, first from Sicily and later from Egypt. So vital was this source of communal security that the emperors bent every effort to keep the wealth flowing. Whatever the necessary strategies, whether military or political, these were implemented. Indeed, the restlessness that would follow upon a disruption of the corn trade was so feared it could not be allowed to occur. It literally threatened public stability.

Still, bread was not enough. A full belly was the bare minimum for preventing mischief. Idle hands could be dangerous. Average people had to be given something to do so as to keep their attention away from political intrigues. Their notice had to be engaged by other exciting events. This something turned out to be circuses. Whether the gladiatorial contests of the Coliseum or chariot races at the Hippodrome, the exhilaration of watching blood flow or animals maimed kept the masses entranced. Because this was a violent epoch, ordinary people identified with conventionalized carnage. Rather than take swords into their own hands, they enjoyed the vicarious thrill of witnessing criminals eviscerated by the blade. So enthralling was it to observe exotic creatures tearing into human flesh or skilled combatants dueling to the death with alien weapons, that centuries of Caesars, intent on placating the people, instituted games as a social reward. This practice became so universal that the number of holidays on the Roman calendar expanded to cover almost half the year. These “sporting” competitions were so constant that they aroused intense passions. In essence, a pseudo-military comradeship was employed to solidify the community in support of its martial leaders.
As strange as it may sound to compare Ancient Roman practices with our own, they have much in common. Social solidarity remains the requirement of any large-scale society; it is merely the mechanisms through which this is achieved that vary. The modern world is plainly not as violent, at least on a daily basis, but it remains a commercial society. In fact, it is much more commercialized. When it comes to maintaining social order, the military element has been superseded by social role integration, whereas the allures of wealth remain comparable. As a result, social conflicts are kept within bounds by devices analogous to bread and circuses. Those who would today be drawn to civil unrest are kept in line by a variety of socially sponsored programs and diversions. The objective, as was the case millennia ago, is to keep bellies full and attention averted from thoughts of rebellion. The difference is in how stomachs are filled and interest is sustained.

Karl Marx sought to attract the proletarians of his day to his cause by promising them that when communism triumphed it would ensure that social resources were allocated by the maxim: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs. Talented people would not be permitted to accumulate wealth out of proportion to the necessities of life; whereas poor people would be guaranteed the minimum comforts for a decent existence. Today’s neo-Marxists are not so draconian. They do not aim to settle proletarians in the domiciles of the affluent, as did the soviets when they took power in Russia. All they propose is transfer payments. The idea is to utilize the state’s power to tax so as to equalize social resources. The rich will be required to disgorge a larger proportion of their income because they can afford to, while the poor will be issued credits to make up for what they do not have. Described as a genus of social justice, this
arrangement presumably supplies everyone with the happiness they deserve. Of course, not all of the transfers will be financial. Many will take the form of government administered social programs. In order to ensure that people get what they need, the centralized powers will deliver services directly. Since government experts are the ones who best understand what is required, and because they are the least likely to be corrupted, their judgment is to be substituted for that of ordinary citizens. What is left unspoken is that this makes the beneficiaries dependent upon those in charge of furnishing their safeguards. They passively go along with what their superiors propose because they have been deprived of the ability to make independent choices. Infantilized by the generosity of shared wealth, they do not even complain about being denied power.

Yet just as with its Roman forerunner, this arrangement must be supplemented by a multitude of diversions. People continue to need amusements to keep their minds off their status. True, the violence of old is not as entrancing in a less militarized society. A Gesellschaft civilization, where few people go around armed, does not identify with blood sports. The closest most people come to death and gore are television detective shows. Almost every night they are mesmerized by portrayals of homicide on an electronic device that provides wall-to-wall entertainment on demand. For most people, the boob tube has become the central element of their leisure time. Nonetheless, blood is absent from these rituals. What attracts the attention of ordinary citizens is not the trauma of virtual combat, but the expertise of the defenders against violence. It is the role behavior of detectives, criminologists, and lawyers that fascinates. The ostensible cause of this is that in solving crimes, they symbolically protect the viewers from the uncertainties of a mass society. Essentially portrayed as urban heroes, the actors model
an expertise absent from the personal experience of the average onlooker. The same is true of the medical dramas. Here too conflict keeps the performances intriguing, but it is the ostensible know-how of the doctors and nurses that elicits the most respect. They are depicted as super-human task specialists who selflessly furnish support to their fellow citizens; in this instance, in the form of protection is from disease. People watch, in part, because they care about who does what with whom, but also because they identify with the successes of the protagonists. By proxy, at least, they imagine themselves as effective in controlling life’s problems.

These diversions operate by immersing people in a super-professionalism, but even more potent entertainments derive their magnetism from being anti-professional. They captivate viewers by rejecting the everyday demands of a techno-commercial society. Sex, drugs, art, and music, not to mention crime, are glamorized as alternatives to more dreary pursuits. Even when these are represented as leading to dire ends, they are framed as worthy of attention. This enables individuals who are not successful in their personal lives to fantasize about being distinctive. Fantasies of taking deviant behaviors to the extreme enhance their ability to feel unique. Beyond this, with each new season, the producers strive for unexpected plot twists. Because ordinary sex becomes prosaic; in order to capture a larger audience, it is spiced up with variations that observers never contemplated. Just as body piercings and tattoos escalated in numbers and location, so do forms of addiction or deviation. Marx it still remembered for condemning religion as the “opiate of the masses,” but this escape is out of date. In the modern world, bizarre distractions have assumed this distinction.
Many diversions are merely strange, but others are stand-ins for tests of strength. A desire for hierarchical precedence did not go out of style with the Roman arena. Most people remain frustrated in their search for personal victories. The methods used to prove one is better than the next guy have changed, yet the desire to come out ahead has not. This is best illustrated by the current mania for sports. Even more prevalent on television than police shows or situation comedies are athletic events. Baseball, football, basketball, boxing, horse racing, hockey, and motor sports can be accessed everyday of the week, and, on some channels, every hour of every day. Rooting for one’s own team has become as close as many fans ever get to being winners. Nevertheless, this can be sufficient. So splendid is the feeling of vicarious victory that some spectators pay hundreds of dollars to be present at these contests. Physical injury, while not necessarily part of the mix, augments the experience. Death may be less likely than in the remote past, but a broken bone on the football field or a rousing crash in motocross can be exhilarating. So too is arrogant vulgarity. Part of the attraction of wrestling matches is the brash defiance of the contestants. Nasty language and a take-no-prisoners attitude make it easier for aficionados to relate to particular protagonists. As if this were not enough, computer games enable even children to identify with their favorite champions. However young, they pretend to be super-heroes who massacre thousands of villains. In this case, the violence is more antiseptic. Although the graphics are more garish than ever, no one really gets hurt.

So ubiquitous have these restructured versions of bread and circuses become that many people, especially the young, consider triumph in them of greater importance than more substantial accomplishments. Dreams of becoming a rock star or an athletic
luminary fill the heads of millions of adolescents. In their imaginations, not only would this make them winners; it would transform them into immortals. Everyone would know their names and love them. They would become special. What is problematic about this sort of aspiration is that it is most prevalent among the lower classes. Those who have the least likelihood of professionalization are attracted to goals less likely to be achieved than more standard occupations. Instead of putting their effort into achieving skills that would permit them to move up the social ladder, they are diverted by chimeras very few actually reach. For a while, fantasies of victory keep them satisfied, but in the long run they will be more frustrated than they would have been had they more accurately perceived their options.

**Bobo Permissiveness**

Dealing with life’s disappointments is part of everyone’s experience. No matter how successful we are, our hopes always outrun our accomplishments. This being so, it is still surprising that among those most disillusioned with professionalization are society’s most professionalized. They have achieved successes that their ancestors would have envied, nevertheless they feel as if they have been cheated. Amazingly, those whose ascendancy rests on meeting high standards often conspire to lower them. They excuse vandalism as art, vulgarity as honesty, and ideology as science. The best way to understand why this is so is to allude to an observation of David Brooks. In surveying the contemporary suburban landscape, his gaze was attracted by the new upper middle class. Unlike the old elite based upon family lineage, members of this latest one have assumed prominence based upon their jobs and education. Brooks dubbed them “bobos.” A term of this own coinage, it refers to the fact that they are “bourgeois bohemians.”
Ensconced though they are in large homes surrounded by manicured lawns, or seated behind the wheels of expensive sports cars and humongous SUVs, they, notwithstanding, feel disrespected. They bridle at remaining subordinate to the traditional bourgeoisie. Smarter and better schooled than their bosses, they resent having to take orders from them.

The bobos are doctors and lawyers; architects and engineers; art directors and university professors. Not merely college educated, they typically have advanced degrees. Ever since elementary school, they have been better students than their peers and rewarded for it. Addicted to good grades, they acquired the knowledge and skills to convince themselves they knew best. The executives, who are their managers, may have the power to impose their will, but this is regarded as a travesty of justice. These crude boors may have elbowed their way to the top, yet their insights and tastes are incommensurate with their authority. Were the world more rationally organized, they, that is the professionals, would be making the more important decisions. The values and information that they acquired while in school would be applied to setting more appropriate standards. Brooks referred to this stratum as bohemian because its members remain devoted to the aesthetic principles of academe. Although they are advertising copywriters by day, by night they delight in reveries of penning the great American novel. In their soaring imaginations as the epitome urbanity, they resent the compromises of the marketplace. Were they given the authority they deserve, all this would change. They would do what was right, not merely profitable.

Despite the fact that they are notoriously privileged, despite their large incomes and relative autonomy, the bobos detest the economic system that pays their bills. So
affluent have they become that they believe they should continue to live well without having to sully their hands with commerce. In their mind’s eyes, they conceive of themselves as the equivalent of yesteryear’s country squires. Perhaps living off their investments, they should have the time to sail the seven seas, hike the tallest peaks, or compose lyrical symphonies. Their enemy, the reason they are trapped in degrading employments, is capitalism. A system dedicated to materialism for its own sake, it is committed to an unnatural distribution of wealth. The greedy get to live in splendor, whereas the more virtuous are consigned the leftovers. Worse still, the vulgar get to call the shots, whereas the sophisticated are held back. The only way to restore justice is to institute a collective social order. Even though this is rarely referred to as socialism; that is what it comes down to. To hear the bobos tell it, were they to run the show, property would be equitably dispersed and social democracy become the operative form of government. Furthermore, everyone would cooperate with everyone else, with no one feeling disrespected.

Sad to say, this utopian venture is usually not well thought through. Much like the nineteenth century socialists who imagined that property could be abolished, the bobos want to equalize power without working out the details. They are, in fact, oppositionalists. It is not so much that they love socialism, as that they hate capitalism. The goal is really to contradict the allegiances of their bosses. Since they do not know what collectivism entails, they do not desire it so much as the joy of causing the well-to-do discomfort. Furthermore, because it is the traditional elite they wish to cut down to size, they sentimentalize the poor. Since they conceive of themselves as deprived, they identify with those who are genuinely disadvantaged. In their hearts, at least, they too are
oppressed. They too have been quashed by insensitive tyrants who thus deserve to be overthrown. What is more, they long ago learned that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” Those who have been crushed underfoot by the same despots can increase their strength by collaborating on a counter-offensive. They can team up to tear power away from their tormenters. Unsaid, of course, is that when they win, the bobos will be the senior partners.

If the poor are to be the bobo’s allies, then their faults must be overlooked. It would not do to alienate potential friends by pointing out their weaknesses. Indeed, if there are any shortcomings, these can be attributed to the traditional elite. Were it not for their exploitive ways, the lower classes would not have been forced into a defensive posture. They wouldn’t commit crimes because they wouldn’t be destitute; they wouldn’t be coarse because they wouldn’t have been debased. The real problem is that they have not been respected. Had they accorded the courtesies due any human being, they too would flourish. Since everyone is born nice, if they were treated that way, they will actualize their best qualities. Given this Rousseauian philosophy, criticism is forbidden. Praise must be allowed to beget achievements worthy of praise and freedom the resources to manage freedom. What is needed, in effect, is permissiveness. Punishments must be eschewed in favor of rewards. Discipline must be renounced as a form of oppression. Simply allowing people to be themselves will draw out the good that was always there. In practical terms, this means withdrawing the police from inner city neighborhoods, permitting people to speak the language any way they please, and encouraging the poor to pursue occupations they find satisfying.
The incongruity of this permissiveness is that it contradicts the core values of professionalism. In order to become self-motivated experts, professionals cannot do whatever feels good. They must apply themselves to learn what is often difficult to learn, and discipline themselves to compete troublesome tasks. When bobos assure the poor that it is acceptable to be vulgar, to drop out of school, or to become naked sex kittens— that is, as long as these feel good—they are discouraging a professional socialization. Rather, they are facilitating behaviors that keep the less powerful, less powerful. The hypocrisy of this stance is revealed for what it is by observing that these recommendations are withheld from the bobos’ own children. Not only are they encouraged to go to school, but a failure to do so is perceived as catastrophic. The accouterments of self-direction may be verbally scorned, but their acquisition is nonetheless demanded. Bobos want their young to succeed; hence they apply pressure to do so. That they do not do the same when it comes to the lower classes bespeaks an indifference to their welfare. Despite all the happy talk about social justice, the reality is a perpetuation of social stratification. The government programs and social diversions that the bobos sponsor may be rationalized as democratic, whereas their consequences are anything but.

This is less duplicitous than it sounds because the bobos typically misperceive their personal situations. In this, they too are victims of the great Middle Class Revolution. Because professionalization has expanded as rapidly as it has, many professionals are trapped in a cultural lag. Having been raised by non-professionals, who had blue-collar values, they retain attitudes antithetical to their current status. Although they have become self-directed social leaders, they do not feel this way. On the inside,
they consider themselves working stiffs. When given instructions by others—as everyone to some extent is—they feel as if they have been deprived of discretion. But in underestimating their power, they overestimate that of others. They do not realize, for instance, that our society is dominated by middle class standards. Nor do they perceive that they shape much of what is done on their own jobs. More aware of their limitations than their authority, they do not accept the responsibilities they exercise. Feeling weaker than they are, they ignore the consequences of their decisions.

Before concluding this segment, a few words need be said about the mortal enemies of secular bobos. Religious fundamentalists are usually regarded as the opposite of liberals, but this is a blunder. Both can be remarkably obstructionist. Indeed, they are each more reactionary than progressive. Despite their mutual recriminations, the two are devoted to programs and diversions that offer a refuge from social change. Churches have long organized social interventions. As the sponsors of hospitals and charities, they provide an alternative to government-based welfare programs. Less permissive than their better-funded public competitors, they nevertheless encourage dependency. Occasionally more pernicious, however, are the ceremonial diversions furnished by organized religion. The smells and bells of churches, and the rituals of synagogues, distract attention from mundane problems. They give those in need of comfort something to do, while promising salvation in a later life. What better diversion from problems one cannot solve in the here and now than to postpone them to an indefinite future? What better way to forget about painful circumstances one cannot eliminate than to bury oneself in a book that records historic miracles?
Prosperous Losers

Life is not fair. Jimmy Carter said so decades ago, and was derided for his candor. Nonetheless, the future, whatever it holds, will not abolish the pain of losing. Some people will inevitably fall below others and hate the experience. Despite their best efforts, events will compel them to recognize their unrealized aspirations. Yet somehow they must endure the sting of failure. However full their bellies, or large their domiciles, if they have less than others, they will be impelled to avert their gaze from this distressing truth. To do less, entails being reminded of an ache that won’t go away. Thus, they require an anodyne. Put another way, they will need bread and circuses. Programs and diversions that can keep them from wallowing in their misery will enable them to keep going from day to day. By being mentally engaged elsewhere, they will not have to dwell on their losses. In an affluent professional society, such as ours, this is as true as it was in more impoverished times. The working and lower classes today may be more prosperous than the upper classes of the past, but they still suffer the pain of their relative inferiority.

If frustration causes anger, the question becomes: How do today’s lower orders cope with the inevitable irritations of their condition? What do they do when they realize that they have less power than others? If they lash out when given orders that they cannot countermand, won’t this expose them to retaliation from above? Since to occupy a lower status is to be less potent than one’s betters, such a course virtually assures further losses. If, however, social class losers merely reject the life styles of the higher orders, won’t this condemn them to remaining inferior? Since the professionalism of the middle classes is what enables them to maintain their status, refusing to seek the
same advantages is tantamount to reinforcing one’s weaknesses. Whatever one’s reason, declining to become a self-motivated expert is to embrace being less effective in tests of strength. It entails engaging in the same sort of oppositionalism that mother’s warn against when they advise their children not to cut off their noses to spite their faces.

Yet the frustration of losing does not lend itself to clear thought. Intense anger, to paraphrase Harry Stack Sullivan when he spoke of anxiety, is like a blow to the head. It empties the mind of rational ideas and replaces them with blind fury. Rage tends to produce oppositionalism, not because this makes sense, but because a person wants to get even. When someone experiences an insult that reveals his relative impotence, his first reaction is not how do I get stronger, but how do I return the favor. Primitive anger rises to the fore, with the probable consequence of an inept and therefore losing response. What is preferable would be a period of cooling down. The initial impulse needs to be contained to provide an opportunity to reconsider one’s options. This would make it possible to plan a more effective strategy. Unfortunately, such rejoinders take internal disciple. A person first needs to be able to control his anger. Merely taking action because it feels good is rarely the best choice.

The difficulty with bread and circuses is that diversions are not controls. To have one’s attention deflected from what raises one’s ire is not the same as applying one’s energies more effectively. To look away from a source of frustration may permit cooling off, but it is also necessary to look back and assess a defeat with dispassion. What went wrong has to be seen for what it is if an appropriate counter-attack is to be devised. Unfortunately, government programs that encourage dependence do not provide support for getting personally stronger. Nor do diversions that depend on extolling anti-
professionalism. If, in order to avoid being overwhelmed by a loss, a person abjures expertise and intelligence, he/she simultaneously abjures strength. However gratifying the imaginative revenge of rooting for a winning sports team, or seducing a defenseless young thing, or getting lost in a chemical haze, or spewing forth a torrent of verbal abuse, these do not add up to upward mobility. They temporarily make a person feel like a winner, but the next real-world encounter will demonstrate that he/she is not.

The fact that today’s lower classes are more prosperous than their predecessors compounds this difficulty. Having more money than power enables them to finance their own downfall. They literally purchase the sorts of diversions that keep them powerless. Thus, they go out to buy mind-bending CDs or tempt advertisers into sponsoring entertainments that glorify irresponsibility. The simplest illustration is provided in bankrolling a drug habit. People with an income large enough to procure cocaine thereby secure the right to drift along in comparative impotence. While under the influence, they feel energetic and astute, but when they compete with abstemious rivals, they fall short. Less extravagantly self-defeating are media-based diversions. Take contemporary music: its throbbing beat can fill the head, but does not lend itself to quite contemplation. A person may be assisted in floating away in a comforting cocoon of loud nothingness, nevertheless the next morning he is unprepared to meet the economic competition. Nor does advice to offend “the man” or exploit “ho’s” pay off. The simple-minded oppositionalism of most hip-hop lyrics is not the best guide to superior social tactics. That they reinforce what their listeners already believe does not make them constructive. That the poor pay to hear them ensures that there will be entrepreneurs ready to flatter their delusions.
Prosperous losers are vulnerable to bread and circuses partly because they have a need to cope with their losses, but also because they have been raised to be conformists. Growing to maturity in households where the demands for obedience were relentless, they could either comply or resist. If they elected to comply, they were likely to develop a habit of doing what others asked without reviewing its suitability. Later on this would include the imprudent recommendations of friends, media authorities, and advertisers. Told that a little marihuana cannot do any harm, they went along. Invited to a wild party, they did not contemplate the potential mischief. On the other hand, if they resisted, they were primed to be oppositional almost everywhere. The slightest suggestion of being imposed upon raised hackles that could be manipulated into an aggressive response. Advised, for instance, not to break the speed limit, they preferred to be rebels without a cause. Why should they listen to the elites when it is more fun to follow rock musicians who revel in trashing property and insulting the system? To heck with the “suits” and the horse they rode in on!

Another of the drawbacks of being non-professional is the lack of information it entails. A determined ignorance makes a person susceptible to many false ideas. The less someone knows, the easier it is to persuade him of what is not true. This makes the lower strata vulnerable to propaganda. They can be convinced that particular programs will help when they will not. Demagogues have always delighted in leading the ill-informed. Attractive lies, combined with a passionate delivery, have persuaded a populace to storm the Bastille or apply for welfare benefits. The end product is further degradation, but those who do not know better feel the elation of concentrated action long before it precipitates their downfall. Those steeped in ignorance are also susceptible to
the false promises of fiction. Vibrant fables are accepted as accurate representations of reality. What is seen on television or the cinema is confused with actuality. Thus, when Oliver Stone screened a pastiche about the death of John F. Kennedy, those unfamiliar with the president’s assassination were convinced of a wholly imaginary conspiracy. Correspondingly, those who watch sitcom casts switching partners with apparent impunity conclude there is no danger in promiscuity.

Ignorance is especially pernicious when it encourages people to model their actions after what appears to be glamorous. One of the worst consequences of media sexuality is that it has seduced millions of powerless young women into behaving like sluts. By dressing in the manner of their heroines, and flaunting their bodies as brazenly, they induce men to treat them as sex objects. A popular song by Shania Twain talks about being asked “to be a star” in the back seat of a car. For some, this is more than a figure of speech. Young women whose families have not had the resources to teach them the realities of sexual intimacy can confuse the allure of national exposure with personal happiness. They conclude that if they imitate what seems bigger than life, their own lives will grow larger. Not until they experience the degradation of being regarded as a prostitute will they realize that their opportunities have been reduced. Sadly the most egregious victims of pornography are members of the underclass who have been persuaded by their dreams to exploit their own bodies.

**Do-Gooders**

The worst effects of bread and circuses are attributable to the intersection of bobo permissiveness and lower class oppositionalism. When members of the middle class encourage those below them to fight back in ways that undermine their life chances, they
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promote social misery. They may think of themselves as doing good, whereas they do immense harm. Instead of professionalism becoming more widespread, its progress is embargoed where it is most needed. For better or worse, but mostly worse, bobos sponsor government programs allegedly designed to help the poor. It is also the bobos who function as media entrepreneurs. They may blame the greed of their superiors for their slovenly product, but as the creative forces behind most of what is offered, they are complicit in its vapidity. Although they rationalize their handiwork as a defense of free speech, it betrays a scandalous indifference to the impact on the underprivileged.

Not long ago, the columnist Mona Charen produced a remarkably readable summary of the implications of this do-gooder mentality. She outlined in chilling detail the consequences of a variety of government programs. Though implemented in the name of social well-being, they have had the opposite effect. One of these is public welfare. Instigated during the Great Depression as a means of providing relief for those who could not provide for themselves, its recipients were originally widows and orphans. By the 1960s and 70s, however, this had expanded into an entitlement for poor families, the elderly, the disabled, and the unemployed. Guarantied a minimum income, those who obtained checks were regarded as deserving the dignity, and security, once reserved for the gainfully employed. Now described as possessing a “right,” it became difficult to turn away anyone who claimed to be in need. This included alcoholics, the homeless, and individuals who refused to seek employment, as well as second and third generation teenage mothers. Ultimately, the numbers of those on the dole doubled, then tripled, and eventually quadrupled. Millions of people in places like New York City began to conceive of themselves as permanent wards of the state. So convinced were they of their
inability to care for themselves that they resented having their dependency questioned. Their helplessness became a badge of honor. Even though the program that fed and clothed them was supposed to be temporary, it was now looked upon as normal.

Perhaps the nastiest corollary of this was an explosion in unwed motherhood. Whereas less than fifty years earlier it had been considered shameful to bear a child out of wedlock, hordes of teenage girls promptly bore infants they not only kept, but that they proudly utilized as tickets to their own welfare checks. Now that they were mothers they could set up their own households, thereby to escape parental discipline. Best of all, they had an excuse for dropping out of school to remain at home, showered by the love of their babies. Some do-gooders deemed this a positive development. Old-fashioned moral restraints were to be cast aside to allow the poor the freedom to run their own lives. In an affluent society that had hitherto oppressed the underclass, this was a breath of fresh air. Clearly these young women deserved to live according to their own lights. If this affronted conservatives, so much the better.

As the welfare roles burgeoned, and illegitimacy rates exploded, a reaction set in. Some social scientists speculated that financial supports devoid of responsibility stimulated illegitimacy. These, in effect, provided an incentive to have more children, since with every child the size of the check went up. Nor did fathers have to contribute to family up-keep. A man didn’t even have to remain in the neighborhood after he donated his sperm. Meanwhile, the woman on her own could have as many children, by as many men as she desired, without fear of economic privation. Critics declared that limits had to be set, but welfare advocates strenuously objected. Nobody, they explained, bore children just to get a larger welfare check. Nobody became a single parent just because
she believed welfare would take care of her. People were more sensible than this. They understood that welfare was too skimpy to be worthwhile. Clients in genuine need deserved better than to have aspersions cast on them by greedy capitalists. This was to “blame the victim.” Permissive with a vengeance, bobo reformers even denied that parents were responsible for supporting their offspring. This was the duty of the state. Parenting was a biological entitlement irrespective of one’s status. So too was a right to live in comfort in an affluent society. Children, who did not ask to be born, deserved a piece of the economic pie. When the poor expressed anger at having to justify a redistribution of resources, they were merely speaking out against social injustice.

The consequence has been tragic. Denials aside, easy welfare promoted an eruption in illegitimacy. The numbers cannot be doubted, with almost a two fifths of all children nowadays born to single mothers. Welfare might not make motherhood profitable, but it removed the risks. In the final analysis, those affected knew that Uncle Sam would avert starvation, regardless of how irresponsible they might be. Nor did a social stigma discourage promiscuity when free love was extolled as more natural than abstinence. As a result, “families” composed solely of a mother and her offspring were reconceptualized as “multicultural” and, therefore, on a par with the traditional family. The middle class bobos making these arguments could afford to be tolerant of developments that did not impinge in their own marriages. Divorce was growing more common among them too, but they could compensate for its ravages. Those dependent upon welfare could not. They were stuck in a lower class world that deprived their children of opportunities their betters took for granted. Their ranks were studded with poorly supervised young men who drifted off into crime and equally unsupervised young
women who turned to sex for comfort. In the end, permissiveness fostered multi-
generational misery. It encouraged the destitute to defy the traditional proprieties. While
the do-gooders commiserated with their cries of distress, those doing the suffering lived
with the costs of rejecting old verities.

Odd as it may seem, the do-gooders also sought to protect the truncated families
they helped create. Whereas a man and woman remaining together for the sake of their
children came to be derided as out of step with the needs of personal freedom, a woman’s
right to raise her children, whatever her inadequacies, was assumed to be paramount.
Even if she were a drug addict, government programs made certain she could raise them
herself. Back in less enlightened times, abused children were routinely put up for
adoption. Rather than allowed to suffer the neglect of an emotionally crippled parent,
they were transferred to childless couples with the resources to do better. By the 1960s, a
misplaced empathy for the poor reversed this practice. Now it became customary to
place children in foster homes pending their return to their natural parents. Once the
mother got back on her feet, she was accorded an opportunity to resume her
responsibilities. Although foster parents tend to be less adequate than adoptive ones, and
most natural mothers never completely reform, many thousands of children are subjected
to the uncertainty of never knowing who will raise them. In essence, an idealization of
the multicultural family has thrust countless innocents into despair. Bobos, who believe
that everyone is basically good have, in effect, permitted out of control mothers to take
out their frustrations on youngsters who cannot protect themselves.

Another tragic confluence of permissiveness and oppositionalism was to be found
in the homelessness crisis. When tens of thousands--some said millions--of ragged souls
began turning up sleeping on heating grates, the media oracles trumpeted a housing emergency. The government was obviously not financing adequate public accommodations. With capitalism in disarray, private landlords were constructing only such residences as were profitable. A national investment would be required to fill this gap, but it would not be made as long as conservative politicians blocked compassionate policies. Once more, ordinary citizens were called upon to rise up and demand justice. Eventually, however, it became evident that the upsurge in homelessness was the product of chemical dependency and deinstitutionalization. Disheveled souls had taken to camping out in public places either because they were hopelessly addicted or mentally ill. With the mental hospitals closing down as a result of being condemned as inhumane, and with vagrancy laws no longer enforced because they were presumed to be unconstitutional, unkempt drifters were allowed to inflict their demons on passersby. It was not that housing was unavailable; rather those in need sanctuary refused to take advantage of what was. What changed was that the do-gooders would not sanction compelling them to move into these havens. Nor would they inflict what were perceived as punishments on hapless individuals too disabled to protect themselves. The upshot was to increase the wretchedness of the very persons the reformers sought to rescue.

One last example of how a permissiveness born of irresponsibility facilitates misdirected oppositionalism is found in the court system. Here too bobos have introduced programs ostensibly designed to assist the powerless that, in reality, justify counter-productive protests. Once again, ostensibly in the interests of social justice, malefactors are permitted to do harm, often to themselves as well as others. With capitalism the designated villain of the bobo universe, those who broke its rules were
regarded as revolutionaries. Theirs was looked upon as a romantic complaint against the oppressiveness of a selfish elite. Crime was interpreted, not as crime, but as a strategy for reinstating social equity. Under these circumstances, it made sense to go to extremes in safeguarding the civil rights of the accused. Just because the police or prosecutors alleged that there had been a violation did not ensure there had. As the compliant minions of a corrupt system, criminal justice professionals were not above twisting the laws to serve their own purposes. It was, therefore, incumbent upon the supporters of fairness to shield the weak from their machinations.

Do-gooder reformers set out to gird the system with regulations designed to protect against legal abuses. Among the most egregious are the so-called exclusionary rules. In order to ensure that those who administer justice did not engage in heavy-handed procedures, evidence adduced by certain means could not be used to determine guilt. Whatever its probative value, a jury could not consider it. Thus a confession, however voluntary, could not be offered as proof if the proper Miranda warning had not been issued. Nor could a gun be brought into court if it were discovered without the proper warrant. Moreover, what constituted a reasonable search and seizure was not to be decided by the detectives on the scene, but by the lawyers after the fact. So convoluted did the precedents become that the police frequently erred on the side of caution. Rather than stop and search vehicles when they are unsure about whether they needed a warrant, some departments decided that it was better to avoid all searches. How many criminals received a free pass from an abundance of prudence is not known. That this was substantial is certain. So is the probability that many wrongdoers who might otherwise have been locked up emerged to violate the rights of blameless citizens.
The height of this hypocrisy was reached during Rudy Giuliani’s tenure as mayor of New York City. Having decided to implement the broken window theory of enforcing justice, he authorized his deputies to arrest, not just major violators, but small-time perpetrators was well. Before his administration took over, turnstile jumpers who effectively robbed the city of innumerable subway fares were allowed to proceed unimpeded. The amount pilfered was regarded as too trivial to merit intervention. Giuliani decided that allowing them to go Scot-free sent the message that the city did not care. He was determined to communicate the opposite message by apprehending even minor offenders. The most visible of these were to be the squigee men. Notorious for squirting liquid on the windows of cars stopped at traffic lights, then extorting a modest fee from the drivers, they were a scourge of city life. Now, even though they numbered just a few hundred and extracted only small change, they were to be arrested, and then rearrested if they returned to their customary haunts. So infamous had these pests become that when they disappeared people noticed. A little piece of civility was restored and the ripples spread outward. This, along with similar measures regarding graffiti, brought social order and a reduced crime rate. Even homicides declined by more than two thirds.

One might have imagined that the media moguls would have celebrated this success. The story practically wrote itself: an ungovernable city was suddenly governable. What made the headlines instead was quite different. The cynosure of journalistic ink was not a return of public order, but an alleged upturn in police brutality. A few high profile cases of abuse were reported as evidence that the authorities had lurched out of control. Inherently oppressive, they had instituted a reign of terror in inner
city neighborhoods. Although this was belied by statistics that demonstrated police abuses were down, appearances were manipulated to make it seem the reverse. The staid New York Times, which historically eschewed reporting on crime, used its front page and editorials to condemn official cruelty. Ordinary people had to be allowed the freedom of the streets without fear of police violence. Unsaid, at least in the liberal media, was that the goal was to defend permissiveness. Bobos had long recommended a non-judgmental attitude as the cure for crime. Now the success of a contradictory theory was placing this theory in doubt. Such a perspective could not be permitted to gain the upper hand. An attempt had to be made to prove that protecting freedom was more imperative than public safety.

**Contested Progress**

The Great Middle Class Revolution may have promoted an advance in professionalism, but this has clearly been contested. Not everyone, not even all professionals, consider it an unambiguous good. In fact, social change hardly ever occurs in straight lines. Where there are trends, there are usually counter-trends. Although prominent developments occur in one direction, others take an opposite course. This does not obviate the course of events, but it can obscure it. An increased professionalization is definitely coming about. Still, not every segment of society partakes equally of it. Both occupationally and socially reactionary tendencies are apparent. Change is not always welcome, hence the desire to impede it. Ironically both liberalism and conservatism are implicated in this. No wonder it is sometimes difficult to ascertain what is happening.
In order to determine what is, it is necessary to distinguish between social trends and social dynamics. Trends are about variations in statistics. When the proportion of events is modified in a predictable way, we have a trend. Thus, if fewer people die from cancer with each passing year, this is a trend. Social dynamics, in contrast, are about causes. They are not merely about what is happening, but why it is happening. Thus if carcinogens are found to be declining in the water supply, it is possible that the incidence of cancer will shortly fall as well. Trends extrapolate from numerical data, whereas social dynamics calculate the impact of contributory factors. The difference can be seen in projections of population growth. A trend-based analysis might conclude that census figures will go up by so many millions because it projects the current pace of increase into the indefinite future, while a dynamics-based analysis might predict a decline due to impending changes in fertility. In the one case a static universe is assumed, whereas in the other it is recognized that a more professionalized society, one that provides a greater assurance children will survive, motivates parents to invest greater resources in fewer children. This means that a declining death rate will be followed by a declining birth rate once an awareness of what is occurring kicks in. Similar sorts of dynamics apply to the nature of social solidarity and the consequences for professionalization. They are sure to dictate that some trends will be reversed as new causal factors come on line.

Some of the transformations attributable to a more decentralized, techno-commercial society are already evident. The shift in welfare policies is a prime example. A growth in permissiveness may have sparked a surge in AFDC caseloads, but this was reversed by widespread demands for personal responsibility. Ultimately the laws were changed to limit the benefits, which, much to the surprise of the bobos, impelled millions
of recipients to obtain employment. Something similar is occurring with respect to illegitimacy. Teenage pregnancies are beginning to decline, perhaps due to the reduced availability of welfare, but also because it is better understood that single parenthood is a prescription for failure in a market-oriented society. The situation with respect to homelessness is more ambiguous. Explanations grounded in a presumed lack of housing are less persuasive than they once were, nevertheless the political and psychiatric establishments remain unwilling to reverse the policies that sent the mentally ill out onto the streets. Too much political capital was invested in deinstitutionalization for its advocates to acknowledge that those with serious mental disorders are unable to cope with the demands of a decentralized, competitive civilization. They have yet to call for a return of involuntary hospitalization, hence the numbers of homeless remain relatively static. It may be predicted, however, that inpatient services will increase with the changing of the political guard. Since the causes of homelessness remain the same, the reasonableness of providing “asylum” to schizophrenics and hapless junkies should become increasingly evident.

The situation with regard to crime is closer to that of homelessness than welfare. Here too an investment of political capital dictates short-term rigidity followed by a long-term tightening of restrictions. Although the worst effects of permissive policing and rehabilitation-oriented corrections have been undone, the legal atmosphere remains hotly contested. Differences about the meaning of “due process,” as prescribed by the constitution, have resulted in ferocious battles over who should be appointed to the bench. Strict constructionists clamor for a return to a less activist judiciary, but they have been stymied by advocates of “civil rights.” Overheated rhetoric on both sides warns
either of a descent into lawlessness or an imposition of brutal tyranny. In fact, something other than these extremes seems in store for our heirs. Because competent, decentralized discretion is contingent upon self-motivated legal expertise, it, therefore, seems likely that criminals, instead of being infantalized, will eventually be required to pay for their transgressions. The need for social discipline should become more widespread as the need for personal discipline becomes more generally apparent. As it does, it should be more broadly recognized that a respect for rules is not necessarily a slippery slope to despotism.

In general, as professionalism expands, its impact will become more pervasive. Resistance to its requirements will not disappear, but abate. As the division of labor continues to subdivide, professionalized occupations should become the norm. This, in turn, will strengthen democracy and social tolerance. The rule of law will become more firmly entrenched and even the media should become more responsible. Certainly marriage will not be abolished. To the contrary, roles that allow voluntary intimacy will continue to evolve. Both men and women should better understand the realities of their shared situation and continue to hone the negotiation skills that permit them to hammer out workable bargains. As they do, they will also become more expert in socializing the next generation for self-direction. The informal emotional relationships of the home will become better aligned with the technical contributions of formal education. At present, we may be distracted by conflicts born of confusion, but further experience should demonstrate what is necessary. Some fear that social turmoil is evidence of decadence, but it is more likely a confirmation of contested progress. Optimism tends to be in short supply during periods of disorder, nevertheless it is almost surely warranted. The bread
and circuses that today typify popular culture need not foretell decline. They merely provide refuge during a time of confusion. A dynamic perspective explains this. It explicates why people become uncomfortable when subjected to rapid social change and why they seek to reverse its effects. But it also elucidates why the novelties consequent to professionalization will eventually be taken in stride. It suggests that current social tensions do not so much contradict change as indicate its presence.
Chapter 10

Personal Growth

Hitting the Wall

The television commercial promises relief. A man, or is it a woman,* lies tossing around in bed. She can’t fall asleep because she is worried about what she must do tomorrow. The voice-over is mellifluous. It explains how a “restless mind” can keep a person from obtaining a good night’s rest. The recommended solution is a sleeping draft. One little pill (Lunesta) and she will drop off into untroubled slumber. Untouched by this commentary is any discussion of why she cannot quiet her thoughts. It is apparently assumed that this is just a fact of modern life. But why is she worried? What is so unsettling that she cannot postpone thinking about it until the morning? For many people, adulthood is a time of deep disappointment. The waking dreams that enabled them to survive childhood founder in welter of perplexing demands. The hopes they once had; the expectations that inspired strenuous efforts, have not worked out as they imagined. They did not become rock stars, company CEOs, or president of the United States. They did not even manage to achieve a fairytale romance. To the contrary, they had to settle. They hit the wall and haven’t the slightest idea of how to get around it.

The promises that are made to the young and the exhortations to correct the errors of the older generation to which they are subjected, one day run up against reality. Never trust anyone over thirty may have been the rallying cry of the hippies, but, as they grew to maturity, they too discovered that matters were not so simple. Their parents had not just grown weary and bitter. Like everyone else, they merely learned that some things

* Its both—in separate commercials.
are not possible. They discovered that not everyone can be president; that not everyone
can even be a general. Some people must be spear-carriers rather than divas. In fact,
most people become spear-carriers. They eventually find out that they possess neither the
abilities, nor the opportunities, to become leaders of the pack. Worse still, they realize
that they are their own worst enemies. Somehow they keep making the same mistakes—
over and over again. Although, once upon a time, they were convinced they were smarter
than the average person, they cannot seem to stop doing stupid things. They make the
identical missteps in office politics; they get bamboozled by the same old arguments with
their wives; and they never invent the thingamabob that will rescue them from obscurity.

Having been told since the first grade that they live in a land of infinite
possibilities, they too expected to turn a corner to find a pot of gold. Having been
assured that there are no limits, merely new adventures awaiting their pleasure, they
wonder what went wrong. Why do they encounter barriers others never do? Why do
they have doubts or make gaffes? Everyone else seems to understand the game.
Shouldn’t they? Winning is evidently possible, but not for them. So why not? Why
haven’t they climbed to the top of the heap? Indeed, a market-oriented society does make
success practical. People often do achieve it. Then again many more don’t; at least, not
at a level commensurate with their aspirations. They find themselves stuck—as it were
trapped—by an inability to break loose. For them, the promise of professionalization has
been barren. They do not think of themselves as self-directed. They do not feel in charge
of their destinies. Told to be self-motivated experts; they snicker at the conceit. The
world is pressing down on them and they haven’t the power to press back.
The primary function of decentralized discretion, it will be recalled, is the flexibility to be responsive. The more complex social activities become the more necessary it is to make competent decisions at the point of implementation. Authority is thus delegated downward on the assumption that the people who know what needs to be done should have the ability to make the appropriate determinations. They must not be frozen by misgivings or trapped in stereotyped reactions. Allowed to adjust to circumstances that only they have the wherewithal to master, they will make more suitable choices than they would were they constrained by policies imposed from afar. The reward for this effectiveness is social mobility. By improving efficiency, they earn promotion to a higher status. Essentially having demonstrated superior strengths vis-à-vis others, they are acknowledged as worthy of leadership. Moreover, in becoming skilled at important tasks, they assume significant social roles. Theirs is thus a deference derived from their social contributions. If money flows from their efforts, as it well may, this is a sign of their success. The big house and fancy car are fun, but more important is the acknowledgement of their relative power. First and foremost, they feel good about themselves because they exercise control over events.

Then again, there is the business of hitting the wall. Life, as they say, is a marathon. Things may start out well, but as the miles add up the oxygen deficit becomes so severe that it may not be possible to take another step. Each additional stride becomes more difficult until it is unbearable to take another. Even though one is convinced of one’s merit, other runners seem to have greater endurance. What is worse, the forces holding one back, are invisible. The forward momentum stops, while the explanation remains elusive. This becomes a mystery without a resolution. Try as one may, there
does not seem to be a way to figure it out. If something else would work better, why won’t it make itself known? Perhaps, if the next guy is tougher, it may be possible to get stronger than he is. But what if one doesn’t know how to become more potent? This is the real wall.

When people are young, they believe that all that is needed is a little extra effort. As long as a person tries hard enough, victory is assured. Maturity, however, demonstrates that this is not so. Adults generally come to realize that it is sometimes necessary to learn lessons that are not immediately apparent and to develop skills that do not come naturally. Growing up physically is not the only sort of accomplishment necessary to become a competent adult. Internal growth is also required. One must become the kind of person capable of self-direction. One has to develop the personal controls and knowledge to make independent judgments. This entails, among other things, becoming both emotionally mature and intellectually subtle. A failure to acquire these characteristics will condemn a person to rigid impotence. It guarantees inappropriate rejoinders to life’s many challenges.

For a large number of people professionalization requires personal change. They must reorganize their private motives if they are to become flexible decision-makers. Yet a techno-commercial society is, of its very nature, fraught with change. Market-based transactions involving hordes of strangers spur innovations. Since no one controls the overall venture, no one can compel it in wholly predictable directions. Those in the midst of the maelstrom must, therefore, be able to adjust to developments they did not see coming. They have to be able to recognize when the circumstances have been altered and modify their plans to suit the new situation. An inability to do so is an invitation to
catastrophe. More specifically, in order to be a winner it is necessary to keep one’s balance as hierarchical arrangements are transformed. In any society, tests of strength bring changes in relative rankings. In a middle class world, these are accelerated by modifications in what constitutes a strength. Alterations in technology and social institutions revise who can best control social uncertainties or assemble the most potent coalition. A failure to recognize these shifts and make suitable corrections can leave a person on the losing side. Too strong a commitment to vinyl records, for instance, put many a music store out of business. It depleted their resources and threw them into bankruptcy.

Personal flexibility is also required to adjust to changes in the role structure. The social division of labor does not remain static as technologies and social institutions undergo modifications. A proficiency in making buggy whips may be admirable, but the market for this skill will be miniscule in world ruled by the internal combustion engine. Nor will there be much call for telemarketers after Congress outlaws most telemarketing. Likewise, if a person’s identity is tied up with flying biplanes, what happens after the shift to jets? Perhaps there will be an opening in a flying circus, but most of the new jobs will be elsewhere. If a pilot declares that you can’t teach an old dog new tricks and then settles down by the phone to await a call, the delay will be a long one. An inability to acquire fresh skills or an unwillingness to adopt modified working relationships result in impotence. To say I am “this” and will never be “that” when there is no “this” is to be dislodged from the division of labor altogether. It is to be left without a role and, therefore, powerless.
Even personal relationships require flexibility. In a world where most intimate associations are voluntary and where many more are impersonal, it is essential to take the measure of other human beings. To see only what one wishes to see because one is ill at ease with surprises is to live amidst fantasies. It is to be deprived of honest and stable attachments to others different from oneself. Anyone who attempts to negotiate fair bargains with a member of the opposite sex without discerning who this other is, is asking for conflicts. How can there be dual concern agreements if the concern is one-sided? How is it possible to offer another what he/she needs without accurately perceiving this? The same applies to strangers, albeit less so. A diverse collection of outsiders presents a kaleidoscopic spectrum of demands. In a multicultural society, what they want is not immediately evident. Unless a person is supple enough to recognize the unexpected, serious misunderstandings may result. To project on an unfamiliar role partner what is not there eliminates the possibility of cooperation. If the clerk is asking you to pay in dollars, but all you have are euros, and you don’t perceive this disconnect, the transaction may never occur. You will talk at cross-purposes until one or the other of you changes the frame of reference.

The reasons why people become rigid are manifold, but some are particularly salient in a professionalizing environment. One that has already been alluded to is cultural lag. The norms and values with which a person grows up can be internalized so effectively that they are maintained even though the circumstances change. One may, for instance, have been raised in a blue-collar milieu where being macho was obligatory. To strut and posture derisively in the presence of women was deemed a sign of masculinity. But if this attitude is transferred into a business office staffed by legions of women,
significant frictions loom ahead. Habits that previously made sense no longer do when they gratuitously insult the co-workers upon whom one must depend. Moreover, absent an ability to let go of the old ethos, a new one is unlikely emerge. A person will thereby be trapped by loyalties to the past. To cite another illustration, a belief that education is for sissies can condemn a person to enduring poverty. To refuse to study new-fangled methods, just because one’s father frowned upon studying, is to live in a time warp. It is to look backward rather than forward.

Perhaps an even more widespread cultural legacy is the working class loathing of making mistakes. With so many members of today’s middle classes educated by blue-collar parents, millions of Americans were tutored in conformity. They were taught not to take chances, but to obey orders to the letter. When they grew up, if they strayed outside the lines and stumbled over unfamiliar tasks, this was censured as evidence of incompetence. As a result, they became wary of taking risks. They never came to understand, because they were instructed not to, that learning entails making mistakes. Since no one is perfect, untried activities always occasion errors. The problem lies not in making these, but in refusing to learn from them. A working class background, however, can induce just such a refusal. Memories of having been chastised for breaking the rules may prompt a person to confound errors with a stubborn ineptitude. Rather than attempt something new, he/she is held back for fear of confirming his/her incompetence.

On a more personal note, someone can become inflexible if trapped in dysfunctional roles. Perhaps she learned that her job was to be a caretaker. Growing up in a home dominated by an invalid mother, she might have been instructed that her only value lay in serving the less able hand and foot. Unless she brought a cup of tea
whenever her mother moaned, she was likely to be disparaged as unworthy. Why, she may have been asked, would anyone love someone as callous as she? Although an outsider would recognize this maneuver as an unfair, a little girl would have no objective standard of reference. Dependent upon her parents for affection and sustenance, she would have hastened to accept their evaluation lest this become an occasion for rejection. In time, an internalized commitment to caring for the needy would become part of her self-image. As an adult out on her own, she would carry this heritage with her. Eventually when she married, it might well be to a man who expected the same sort of care. And when she had children, she would assume that unless she attended them with equal solicitude, they too would rebuff her.

Sigmund Freud called this configuration the “repetition compulsion.” He found that his clients seemed compelled to repeat behavioral patterns that caused them pain. Even when he pointed this out, they couldn’t seem to help themselves. While he interpreted this conduct as evidence of neurosis, it is far too common to be the product of inflamed nerves. Among the many instances that occur outside the clinical sphere are those provided by abused children. They often grow up to marry abusive spouses, whereas family scapegoats frequently enter relationships where they are again scapegoated. This sort of performance may be unwise, but it is not confirmation of a disease. It is actually a consequence of the nature of social roles. Derivative of the way these are created and maintained, it is prevalent because roles are so prevalent. One must not forget that only some of our social roles are occupational. Many others derive not from an economic division of labor, but from a family allocation of tasks. The scapegoat, the family hero, or the rebel all entail behavioral repertoires that fit specific
family niches. Unfortunately, many of these roles can be painful. If sustained, they prolong a person’s discomfort. He/she rigidly performs dysfunctional activities because these are inherently conservative. On the other hand, engaging in roles without making modifications allows people to coordinate their actions. It permits them to create networks of role partnerships because the parties know what to expect of each other.

Far from corroborating an innate defect, this sort of inflexibility stems from the mechanisms that hold societies together. Both the weak and strong forces that underlie social solidarity prevent personal change from occurring easily. In essence, the aspects of our social nature that allow our species to collaborate on vast enterprises ensure that some individuals will be ensnared by motives that are personally counter-productive. The fact that we humans are hierarchical, property owning, role-playing, loving, moral, and cognitive creatures enables us to join in stable multi-party ventures. The ranking systems, families, trade relations, moral structures, cognitive orders, and role networks upon which we depend to keep us aligned also constrain our private lives. These arrangements may not have been designed to keep individuals from adjusting to novel circumstances, but they have this effect. The forces maintaining social solidarity must be capable of preventing the parties from doing whatever they desire, but this can also prevent them from meeting their personal needs. The degree to which this occurs is dependent upon such factors as one’s place in a particular hierarchy or role structure. If, for instance, a person is at the bottom of a ranking structure, he/she is apt to be oppressed by the power of his/her superiors. Or if someone is assigned a role such as family scapegoat, he/she can count on being blamed for the fiascos of others. Even falling in
love with the wrong person can occasion personal misery. It can entangle a person in an attachment with someone dedicated to extracting revenge for imagined slights.

The issue next becomes how to extricate oneself from this sort of dilemma. If for social or personal reasons, one cannot adjust to changing circumstances, what is to be done? If an individual, for whatever reason, is not strong enough to climb up a social hierarchy, nor expert enough to negotiate satisfying social roles, how can he/she obtain the flexibility to make improvements? Is there a means of modifying the expertise and internal motivations needed for competent professionalization? In short, how is a person trapped in impotence to grow into someone capable of success? It turns out that there is a mechanism for doing so.

Letting go of failure is not a matter of will power. A person cannot simply decide to become a flexible winner. What must occur is a process called Resocialization. It is imperative to let go of what has gone wrong before moving on to something better. Whether the problem is a hierarchical disappointment, a role dysfunction, or an incompatible relationship, a period of mourning must intervene before it is possible to relinquish patterns that prevent improvements. Although most people only imperfectly understand the nature of resocialization, it is crucial to providing the elasticity needed in a middle class society. If individuals are to make major adjustments, they must comprehend what is required. Since resocialization is largely voluntary, unless they do, they are unlikely to make the appropriate efforts. It, therefore, seems likely that the nature of this process is destined to get better known. It also seems likely that it is apt to become institutionalized in a society that can benefit from its operations. Both for those
who hit the wall, and the communities handicapped by their dropping out, its time is coming.

**Psychiatric Malpractice**

However probable the eventual rise of resocialization, it is currently held back by a powerful counter-current. The kind of discomfort that arises from social failure is currently attributed to something other than the forces that create social solidarity. The usual way of understanding what goes wrong is in medical terms. Intense emotions are interpreted as medical disorders. More particularly, anxiety and depression are treated like illnesses. The acute unhappiness that accompanies hierarchical disappointments, role dysfunctions, or incompatible relationships is conceptualized as a sort of disease. When a person suffers the pangs of being unable to extract him/herself from setbacks, he/she is described as needing a “cure.” The idea is to make the bad feeling go away so that one can get on with life. In theory, this is all that is needed is to fix whatever is broken.

But if hierarchical losses, dysfunctional roles, and broken relationships can be debilitating, so can out-of-date cognitive frameworks. The notion that mental pain is a form of illness can be traced to ancient Greek physicians. In an attempt to be scientific, they postulated physiological mechanisms such as an imbalance of the four humors. If a patient had too much or too little blood, or too much or too little phlegm, his personality would be disturbed. Too much phlegm, for instance, made someone phlegmatic, that is, unnaturally apathetic. Instead of acting, he was sluggish. In order to restore health, it was therefore necessary to reduce the level of the offending substance. Nowadays this sort of thinking has been updated. When a person is feeling lethargic and goes to a physician for relief, the diagnosis is another sort of physical imbalance. Now the
“patient” is told that the problem is depression and the cure the restoration of chemical balance. She is asked to take a pill to adjust the level of neurotransmitters in her brain. Once this is achieved, normality will surely return.

In both the ancient and modern cases, a helper is enlisted to address what seems to be a mystery. Nevertheless, this can backfire. People who hit a wall tend to be confused. Yet so also can those who offer help. Despite their bravado, they too can be mystified by strange behavior. Those who experience a social loss have difficulty recognizing the cause of their misery because they are in the midst of it. Their feelings are so intense that they obscure their vision. Professional helpers are not so constrained, but neither are they present at the point of failure. Historically, physicians rarely delved into the social etiology of a patient’s distress. Trained in alleviating physiological maladies, they tended to look for these, which, not surprisingly, they found. Thus when a person complained of sadness and they knew that the limbic system of the brain is associated with strong emotions; they put two and two together. An a-ha experience convinced them there must be a neurological disruption. Although they did not have an independent confirmation of this disturbance, they acted as if they did. The patient was assured her wretchedness was understood and that a medication would heal her. All she had to do was trust the doctor’s judgment and follow instructions. This scenario, however, constitutes nothing less than psychiatric malpractice.

Several decades ago Thomas Szasz muddied the waters by proclaiming that mental illness is a myth. A psychiatrist himself, he asserted that patients merely had “problems in living,” which should not be mistaken for diseases. Most famously, he declared that conditions such as schizophrenia were personal problems; hence to subject
individuals suffering from them to hospitalization was tantamount to false imprisonment. Since then it has become abundantly clear that disorders such as schizophrenia and cyclothemia do have physiological etiologies. Researchers have been able to demonstrate genetic correlations and are closing in on physical evidence of brain disruptions. To put the matter plainly, mental illness has been proven not to be myth. Nevertheless, because there are genuine psychiatric illnesses does not establish that everything currently labeled a psychiatric disorder is. To assume this—indeed to insist upon this—is to misuse medical authority. It is to prevent people from understanding the social causes of their distress or taking the appropriate steps to overcome it. It thus serves to trap people in further misery. Convinced by an apparent expert not to do what would help them become more successful, they never engage in the social mobility of which they are capable. This, to be sure, is a calamity for them, but also for society, which is deprived of their potential contributions.

What is most worrisome about medicalizing personal distress is that it has become institutionalized. Psychiatrists have not merely made a mistake in underestimating the pain inflicted by hierarchical, social role, or relationship failures, they have applied pressures to retain their authority over all human pain. This not only deflects attention from the study of social mechanisms; it discourages efforts at resocialization. In league with pharmaceutical companies that make huge profits from selling psychototropic drugs, they have persuaded the average American that depression and anxiety are medical conditions. People are told that when they are out of sorts, that the key to feeling better lies in someone else’s hands. Instead of encouraging a personal professionalization that would emphasize the expertise to understand the nature of social losses and the internal
motivation to engage in resocialization, they insist that medical professionalism should prevail. The paradox, of course, is that of one sort of professionalization being pitted against another. How better to contest a trend that would diminish the business of one segment of society than by invoking that very trend. What better way to divert attention from what is difficult to understand than to tout a medical expertise to people who already believe in the general utility of expertise.

To add to this jumble, a variety of social scientists, who should be offering an alternative to medical theories of personal distress, have been diverted by their own hang-ups. Rather than delve into the mechanisms that create anxiety and depression after people lose tests of strength or botch role negotiations, they have been deceived by neo-Marxist visions. Although both sociologists and psychologists protest against medical imperialism, they have done so ineffectually. The sociologists, in particular, have counted upon a collectivist revolution to solve personal problems. Convinced that economic exploitation is the cause of most personal sorrows, they assume that egalitarianism can effect a cure. As a result, they have been content with half-hearted explanations of individual distress. In fact, they tend not to think in terms of personal distress at all. To the contrary, they conceptualize what goes wrong from the opposite direction. Theories of social control, rather than personal loss, characterize their hypotheses. Thus, when individuals experience anxiety and depression, they are described as deviant. A deviant is someone who breaks social rules, accordingly someone who is unduly emotional is conceived of as a rule-breaker. But because most sociologists are rebels at heart, they do not blame the rule-breaker. They instead condemn the rules and recommend eliminating them. Presumably, if the so-called
mentally ill are no longer labeled as “different,” they would no longer be breaking rules and the problem would be solved.

What this sociological solution has in common with the medical one is that both are fixated on the bizarre behaviors of the truly mentally ill. Schizophrenics are the focus of their joint attention. And why not? Schizophrenics are out of the ordinary. Troubled by hallucinations and delusions, they see, hear, and believe things, inconsistent with reality. They also exhibit odd communication difficulties. Among these is what has been called a “word salad.” Their words come out fast and furious, but so disconnected that they make no sense. In this, they disobey the rules for interacting with others. Although their physiological problems are real, in this sense they are deviant. Nonetheless, to conflate this sort of abnormality with the anxiety and depression associated with social losses is bizarre. When people hit the social mobility wall, they do not go crazy. They do not rush out into the street to dance half naked on the tarmac. Hierarchical, role, and relationship failures cause distress, but this is neither outlandish, nor unexpected. Quite the reverse, were individuals untroubled by their losses, they would be deviant. It is not only normal to hate losing, but also normal to fight against it. Resocialization is a reasonable means of overcoming losses. To tell people that they are defective for doing so is more than wrong; it is perverse.

If more people are to overcome their personal limitations, there must be a dramatic change in how their difficulties are conceptualized. Thinking in terms of disease or deviance places an undeserved onus on them and makes a difficult task more difficult. To assume that a cure is needed implies that something broken needs to be fixed, whereas a social loss followed by resocialization involves a process of
reorganizing one’s social engagements. The one implies passivity, while the other entails professionalization. Alternatively, to assume that deviance needs to be corrected implies a moral lapse, where there is none. The social forces that produce individual failures do not single out individuals because they deserve to lose. They have not committed a social infraction for which they ought to be punished. Rather, they are reacting as human beings in social networks held together by competitive mechanisms that regularly precipitate personal defeats. Human society is such that some people always lose. That, unfortunately, is the way things are. What remains indeterminate is who this will be and whether people can embrace the tools needed to move beyond their losses. Will society promote a professionalization that includes an expertise in resocialization? And will this enable more of them to develop the flexibility to overcome the internalized motives that prevent their becoming winners? The jury is currently out.

**Resocialization**

In truth, medicine and social control are not the only games in town. The distress of losing has spurred numerous efforts at personal growth. To begin with, intense emotions are too mesmerizing to have been completely overlooked. They are so mentally consuming that some people have speculated that immersing oneself in them is sufficient to take control of one’s life. Nowadays psychiatrists compete with a variety of cut-rate therapies that emphasize affective release. Being touchy-feely has become the Holy Grail for many non-medical interventions. Whether client-centered or holistic, they promise to help clients get in touch with their inner selves. Marinated in psychobabble and extravagant praise, they assure communicants of their potential greatness. One of their mantras is that if people dig deep enough to find their inner-child, it can be set free
to master the universe. They will then become so self-actualized that they can embrace their inner-bliss. There is, in fact, just enough truth in this approach to keep it in business. Resocialization, that is, the legitimate process of relinquishing dysfunctional patterns of behavior, also entails introspection and emotional growth. The two differ primarily in the ease with which they allegedly operate. Most of the more romantic therapies ask little of those who adopt them. They tell people that they are already wonderful and hence that whatever is troubling them is not their fault. All they have to do to feel better is be true to themselves. If they just find their authentic centers, the improvements will flow forth as from a cornucopia.

So uplifting are touchy-feely solutions that they make good entertainment. A host of television programs offer an opportunity to bear one’s soul before a national audience. Tears flow, insights multiply, and by the end of the hour the subjects of this emotional sauna vow that they have been cured (or soon will be). So too, vicariously, has the audience. That is, until tomorrow when there will be another cathartic fix. Although this drama fills the coffers of the producers, more tough-minded souls look toward more rigorous treatments. One of the places they take their quest is educational institutions. Here they encounter educators who trade in promises of critical thinking and explorations into the purpose of life. Literary texts are analyzed, historical commentaries dissected, and mental faculties scrutinized, all with an eye to discovering the secrets of the universe. The difficulty with this, although it is not insuperable, is that pedagogy is not therapy. Cognitive excursions into the human condition, however well intended, are no substitute for personal growth. Drained, as they are, of emotional content, they cannot effect the
desired personal changes. Schools can provide an understanding of what is needed; they cannot do what is needed to get there.

What then is resocialization and how does it occur? How do people acquire insights into their losses? More importantly, how do they relinquish the emotional commitments that induce a repetition of previous failures? The necessary changes must be more than cosmetic. They have to go beyond understanding what went wrong so as to motivate the reorganization of one’s internal priorities. A person’s plans and values, role commitments, and emotional skills all have to be modified such that he or she is capable of self-direction. The objective is to acquire the internal flexibility to make good choices vis-à-vis subsequent hierarchical, social role, and relationship interactions. Ties to patterns that cause pain must be loosened. Tests of strength must be won and satisfying attachments negotiated. It is essential to do these things, not merely to talk about them. Verbal bluffs do not facilitate many victories. They merely boast of them.

Resocialization is sometimes thought to be exclusively for the emotionally defective. The medical and deviance perspectives have led many people to assume that psychotherapy is for those who are crazy. The term “crazy” may be politically incorrect, but it is what most people mean when they refer to someone as “sick” or “different.” Nevertheless, personal growth is not for the psychiatrically impaired or the morally challenged. The mentally ill or criminally inclined are not good candidates for resocialization. The former tend to be too fragile to endure the rigors of a process. Their physiological disorders prevent them from coping with the emotional turmoil essential to internal growth. The latter may be tougher, but their oppositionalism is too deeply entrenched for them to work on their own difficulties. Because resocialization must be
voluntary, and they prefer to get even rather than change, personal growth is unlikely. This leaves the process applicable to those who are both sane and committed to individual improvements. They must understand that neither feeling stuck, nor enduring gut-wrenching emotional contortions, is a sign of personal weakness. Prying loose from ways of life that have been jammed shut is not evidence of an inherent deficiency. Being human merely implies limitations. Still, restructuring one’s internal priorities is not for the faint of heart.

The first phase of Resocialization begins with identifying and re-experiencing one’s losses. For the sake of brevity, let us concentrate on dysfunctional roles. Hierarchical and relationship difficulties are surmounted by similar means, but for the time being, they will confuse the issue. All right then, a role loss, that is to say, being trapped in a dysfunctional role, makes itself known via the distress of unmet needs. A person is unhappy for reasons that remain obscure. Moving forward begins with piecing this mystery. What role loss created this discomfort? Which roles should never have been adopted? If a person is a scapegoat, he/she needs to know this. It might be assumed that this is obvious, but people find ways to deny the pain of a bad situation. Having experienced the loss of being compelled to be a scapegoat, they hide this defeat from themselves. They engage in Freudian-style defense mechanisms to divert attention from what is too excruciating to admit. Repression, suppression, projection, rationalization, and outright denial are all pressed into service. As a consequence, these must be torn aside. Yet this is not easy. Having been distorted by many layers of protection, it will be difficult to distinguish facts from misrepresentation.
Worse still, this identification process is more than a cognitive enterprise. An intellectual understanding is insufficient. If change is to occur, a person must re-experience a loss in all its horror. Because the central mechanisms that keep roles from modifying are strong feelings, unless these are brought to the surface the old patterns remain in place. Even though the nature of a dysfunctional role may be perceived in appalling clarity, it will continue to burst forth in the repetition compulsion as long as it has not been dislodged from the unconscious. Unfortunately, the emotions that must be reactivated are very painful. People do not adopt unsatisfying social niches from a desire to be unhappy. Quite the opposite, these are imposed upon by role partners with the power to enforce compliance. In all likelihood, a scapegoat did not meekly agree to accept inappropriate blame. Perhaps, a parent threatened physical punishment. Perhaps, her siblings collaborated in this injustice. In any event, returning to the scene of the crime will bring back the anguish of these punishments, as well as the helplessness of being unable to ward them off. Who would wish to endure such anguish? Who, in her right mind, would relish feeling as miserable as back then? The only reason is the prospect that it might lead to greater freedom.

It should now be apparent why resocialization is not for the emotionally fragile. Dealing with strong emotions, like fear and anger, takes a stout constitution. Those who undertake resocialization without the requisite emotional toughness need to acquire it. If they have not been learned to endure intense feelings, the task cannot be put off. Sadly, those coerced into dysfunctional roles have usually not been provided an opportunity to develop emotional maturity. Growing up in households suffused in juvenile conflicts is not conducive to learning how to deal with powerful feelings. Emotional learning takes
time and a safe place to confront strong feelings. Moreover, it takes years to master. This was denied them. Emotional competence can be acquired by those who were forced to remain immature, but only, if as adults, they allow themselves to re-experience their pain.

The reason emotional maturity is so critical for resocialization is that during its second phase the potency of ancient passions must be dealt with. Once a person recovers memories of the losses experienced in role socialization, she will not be pleased. To be coerced into becoming a scapegoat is more than unfair; it is unjust. Who would not be outraged at this? The upshot is that the next stage of resocialization involves protest. A person becomes infuriated at what is remembered and re-endured. The mere thought initiates a desire for revenge. But this creates new problems. Getting angry summons apparitions of a parent’s former reaction. When small children protest against unfairness, it is not unusual for a parent to retaliate. As a result, the child, being a child, must cope with this wrath. Small, and inexperienced, there is little hope of defeating the attack through counter-anger. What is more likely is fear of what could be significant injury. Thus, if, during resocialization, a person objects too vigorously against past wrongs, old terrors will come back. Although she is now an adult, having re-experienced a childhood encounter, she will now feel like a vulnerable child. The dread that, at this point, occupies her attention will be very real. So potent will it be that many people prefer to reactivate their defenses. They return to a repression mode, prior to re-embracing the scapegoat role. Yet if they are to move forward, they must find the means of dealing with their fears. They must overcome the panic that once prompted them to abandon their own cause.
Then there is the issue of the anger itself. Intense anger can tip over into rage, and rage can go primitive. Very strong feelings are prone to going out of control. And when they do, they can inflict considerable damage. Yet if they do, the destruction can be worse than the initial frustration. A parent’s behaviors may have been unjust; nevertheless unthinking retribution can be more so. Even worse, because the parent who committed the original offence may not be available for retaliation, an innocent party may be recruited as a replacement. He or she will then be upbraided for sins in which he was never complicit. In this case, the repetition compulsion can occasion mayhem. The misunderstandings become so great that they create fresh grievances. Although the underlying impulse is to repair old wounds, temper tantrums will not mend what initially went wrong. What is necessary is greater emotional control. Still, it is one thing to feel a feeling; it is quite another to master it. Nevertheless, just as with irrational fears, this drive must be restrained. It must be harnessed to the task of winning victories, not the temporary expedient of venting one’s spleen.

Once the protest phase has proceeded for a while, a person engaged in resocialization will make a horrible discovery. However angry he or she becomes, this fury does not reverse earlier losses. Having once been compelled to assume the scapegoat role is not wiped clean even by complaining directly to the offending party. After all, the loss that created this dysfunctional role occurred long ago. A current promise not to do the same, or effusive apologies for having done it in the first place, cannot undo the damage. What was done was done. No matter how strong the sense of grievance or the commitment to make amends, the initial encounter cannot be nullified. After this reality sinks in, the protest will appear feckless. Getting angry about what went
wrong will feel like a waste of time. But this realization too will bring no relief. Indeed, frustrated remonstrations are themselves a source of irritation. Eventually, the sense of inevitability becomes almost unbearable. The impotence entailed by this disappointment begins to hurt. Indeed, it will hurt deeply. A person then becomes depressed. She is profoundly saddened by her powerlessness and sinks into an extended period of lethargy. This then is the third phase of resocialization. If she is like most people, she will hate this. She may even fear it. She might conclude that it is better to excise the offending feeling of sadness rather than endure its pangs. This, however, would be a mistake.

Depression, like anger, is a dangerous emotion. If intense anger feels as if might impel a person to commit homicide, intense sadness feels as if it might lead to suicide. Sorrow can be so all encompassing as to appear like a whirlpool from which one will never emerge. As much as one tries to claw one’s way out, one slides further down its swirling sides. So despondent can a person become that plunging into the oblivion of death may beckon as merciful relief. This can be as unsettling as the emotional turmoil of the protest phase. Indeed, it can feel more perilous. Despondent people, after all, do commit suicide. A sadness that feels as if it will never lift sometimes proves lethal. In this, the deeply depressed tap into the reality of childhood sorrow. Digging into the remote past can have the unintended side effect of reawakening a child’s vulnerability to grief. When the very young endure serious losses, they sometimes spiral into a fatal period of mourning. They literally give up on life and fail to thrive. No longer motivated to eat, they withdraw into a terminal lethargy. Is it any wonder then that adults who detect signs of depression in themselves often draw back? Is it surprising that they are reluctant to continue in a change process that feels as if it may become lethal?
Nevertheless, for most people the grief inherent in resocialization is transient. It generally lasts longer than people would like, but sadness, including profound sadness, tends to be self-limiting. A person descends into a deep trough that seems to be bottomless, but is not. Eventually the melancholy begins to lift and a person is poised to get on with life. The point of the emotion is not pain per se, but the pain is, in fact, part of what allows sadness to perform a crucial function. Sadness is essentially a change agent. It is the mechanism that permits people to cut their ties to what is lost. As with the grief inspired by death, it enables a person to let go of what cannot be salvaged. The pain that is associated with the process provides the space for it to proceed. While in mourning a person’s sensitivities are so great that he/she wants time to be alone. During this self-imposed isolation thoughts of what is lost fill the head. They are dredged up, turned around and inspected from a variety of angles, and finally accepted as beyond recovery. Other tasks are set aside in order to furnish the energy to endure agonizing memories and to relinquish the ways of life attached to them. Depression is, therefore, central to reorganizing a person’s internal motivation. Commitments to what one hoped would work have to be redirected once it is positively ascertained that they are useless. If a person has been living out a dysfunctional role, such as that of a scapegoat, he/she has to treat it as if it had died before moving on to another role. The individual has to recognize the hopelessness of this pattern before relinquishing emotional ties to the role partners who imposed it. Like it or not, the way these others required a person to think of him/herself, along with the strategy of accepting misplaced responsibility, must be set aside. Doing this may make a person feel isolated, but this is no different from the
loneliness experienced when a loved one dies. The good news is that people survive these deaths. They also survive the demise of dysfunctional social roles.

Once sadness has done its job, once it is no longer spurned as a quasi-illness, a person can proceed to greener pastures. In providing a decent burial for lost causes, it becomes possible to consider superior alternatives. At this juncture, the virtues of freedom become apparent. Cutting one’s ties to behavior patterns that constrained one’s choices provides the flexibility to do better. Since being self-directed entails adaptability, relinquishing roles that arbitrarily reduce one’s options enables a person to become more competent. In a society where professionalization is ever more prominent, individuals who succeed cannot be genuine experts if their emotional attachments limit their range of thought. Those who are only capable to stereotyped action cannot engage in constructive discretion. Theirs, in essence, is not internal motivation, but motivation determined by external influences—even though these occurred much earlier in life.

Finally, the last phase of resocialization is concerned with renegotiating improved social positions. Relinquishing that which has been lost would serve no purpose were it succeeded by equally confining attachments. One dysfunctional role that is supplanted by another is still inimical to self-direction. What is necessary besides letting go of stultifying behavior patterns is the skill to create better ones. In most cases, certainly for social roles, but also for hierarchical positions and intimate relationships, this requires a proficiency at negotiating. Individuals who do not know how to implement the dual concern model of negotiations are destined for disappointment. Unless they are in touch with their own needs and those of their partners, and also capable of adaptive problem solving, they are apt to generate further difficulties. In other words, to become a truly
professionalized self, one must acquire an expertise in productive negotiations. In
addition to the flexible motivation necessary for the give and take of working with other
competent human beings, a person needs an overview of how to proceed. Depending
solely upon intuition is liable to be disappointing.

This then is the general outline of resocialization. While it is not especially
complex, it is personally demanding. As should be evident, it combines within a single
process what are usually regarded as separate elements. Although they have been
conceptualized as distinct disorders, anxiety and depression, tend to go together.
Resocialization explains why. It also elucidates why anger often accompanies these two.
Nonetheless, an intellectual understanding of this is not a stand-in for the emotional
tumult of enduring the real thing. Resocialization, in the flesh, is disorienting. It has
taken millennia to pierce its mysteries precisely because those in its throes have difficulty
getting their bearings. Still, the nature of personal change must become familiar to
potentially professional selves. As the frequent *sine qua non* for social mobility, it must
lose its aura of inscrutability, lest people be trapped in their past.

**Personal Archeology**

In the *Symposium* Plato quotes Socrates as saying “The life which is unexamined
is not worth living.” Plato’s many dialogues are often intended to provoke just such an
examination. Many centuries later, in writing *Hamlet*, Shakespeare offered comparable
advice. “This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the
day, thou canst not then be false to any man.” The bard presents this as a piece of
wisdom that any young man should receive from a compassionate elder. Plato, of course,
was writing in the premier commercial city of the Mediterranean world. Athens had
recently grown wealthy by trading in wine, silver, and pottery. Its great men became
great because mercantile contact with foreigners compelled them to understand their
customers. In the process, they discovered that this was not possible without first
understanding themselves. Shakespeare’s England was not as economically vibrant. Not
yet the Britannia that would one day rule the waves, it was nevertheless poised to do so.
Tentative expeditions had been sent out to what would shortly become the Virginia
colony in the expectation that this would be commercially lucrative. As such, the island
nation was beginning to look outward with a shopkeeper’s lust for business. As a
consequence, its elite too was gaining an appreciation of self-knowledge. They were
beginning to understand that people who understand their own motives are better able to
adjust to the uncertainties of complex enterprises. This insight is no less relevant to the
beneficiaries of our Middle Class Revolution. We too live in a world where individuals
engaged in decentralized discretion can profit from honest introspection.

Closer to our era than Plato or Shakespeare, Sigmund Freud described what he did
with his patients in a kind of personalized archaeology. In introducing them to the
enigmas of psychoanalysis, he intended to elevate self-knowledge to an art form. Not
content with conscious examinations of the self, he advocated expeditions into a person’s
mental and emotional interior. In a room crammed with archaeological knickknacks, he
guided his clients in digging into their dreams. As they lay on an over-stuffed Victorian
couch gazing at the ceiling, he sat behind them urging an uncensored exploration of what
most frightened them. Whatever came to mind was to be said out loud so that its
implications could be determined. Initially this was very much an intellectual endeavor.
Freud started out believing that people who understood their “fixations” would thereby
overcome them. In time, he realized that unless their emotions were also aroused, nothing much was apt to happen. Ultimately one of his acolytes, Franz Alexander, encapsulated what was desired as a “corrective emotional experience.” Intense passions from the past needed to be recovered so that they could be reworked.

Many have assumed that the heroic sort of self-examination pioneered by the Freudians is reserved for psychotherapy. Convoluted explanations of what is involved convinced them that it was too esoteric for ordinary people to comprehend. It was certainly not something for the uninitiated. At the very least, trained professionals had to supervise the procedure. To do otherwise was dangerous. While it is true that competent professionals can facilitate an expedition into the wilds of the unconscious, it is not true that this is mandatory. Examining dysfunctional social roles can be frightening, but is not totally daunting. Ordinary people, who are not crazy in the psychiatric sense, do not have to fear going mad at the drop of a deeply repressed hat. If they are reasonably well put together, if they possess some degree of emotional maturity, they can withstand the disappointments they are bound to encounter. They can also stand up to the emotional gales that will blow once they enter the protest phase of resocialization.

Professionalized individuals need to understand their own motives so that they can understand the motives of others. But in order to achieve this, they require the courage to overcome the same sort of censorship Freud deplored. They have to break through their defenses so that they can confront their personal demons. As human beings, they too will have secrets they prefer to keep, yet would-be social leaders they require the daring to examine what might be disturbing. A reluctance to do so would leave them blind as they attempt to create communal plans. It would make them anything
but professional experts as they navigate complex terrain. The touchy-feely therapies, that have become so commonplace, tend to be shallow and unsystematic in investigating the unconscious. In telling people that nothing is their fault, they provide an excuse for sticking to easy answers. A genuine personal archaeology must be more tough-minded. It must go where most people prefer not to tred.

All of us have a prehistory that shapes our social roles and statuses. We grow up within families that have divisions of labor, hierarchical arrangements, and personal relationships, which become internalized guides to subsequent action. The lessons we learn, and the commitments we make, may not be dysfunctional, but nevertheless limiting. They direct us down some pathways and away from others. When the time comes to make an important decision, concealed blinders prevent making the best choices. It is, therefore, essential to know what biases our perceptions. If ours has been a poverty-stricken childhood, has this implanted a fear of penury? If we grew up amidst a gaggle of siblings, did this leave us lost in the crowd? Social scientists know, that factors such as birth order can affect the commitments people internalize. Thus first-borns have a tendency to assume responsibilities last-borns do not. Not just social roles, such as that of caretaker, but values, such as a belief in education, can be drummed into a person so effectively as to appear unquestionable. Even the sort of individual we find sexually attractive is the product of interactions that began in the crib.

Personal archaeology must be concerned with these matters. To understand who we are it is necessary to go beyond surface appearances. The rationalizations we use to explain ourselves to ourselves have to be recognized for what they are. While they may be effective in manipulating others, they can prevent an appreciation of the beliefs and
attitudes that tilt a decision in one direction rather than another. To accept them at face value is thus to be trapped by our personal histories. What is needed is a lifelong commitment to self-inspection. Personal growth in the sense of developing an accurate and nuanced self-understanding should be the goal of anyone who aspires to professionalized success. Digging into the unconscious cannot be reserved for the emotionally defective. Nor should it be reserved to the psychotherapeutic couch. The audacity to engage in expeditions into our personal histories should be part of everyone’s cultural heritage. Introspection should not be considered peculiar. To the contrary, it needs to be valued as something that any enlightened and ambitious person might pursue. Moreover, such self-knowledge should be sought for its own sake. If it is to be available for pragmatic purposes, it must first be perceived as a good in itself. To do otherwise, would interfere with going deep enough to do much good.

Furthermore, personal archaeology is an orientation as much as an activity. It is a way of approaching life as much as a series of questions. As such, it goes beyond what is available in school or the consulting room. Formal education, because it is a batch process, cannot furnish the requisite personalization. On the other hand, psychotherapy, because it is problem-oriented, does not deal in information for its own sake. People who want to become better at controlling their destinies must not await a crisis before engaging in introspection. They should not, for example, feel embarrassed about attempting to understand their relationships with their parents. This kind of candor cannot be regarded as egocentric or a breach of family loyalty. Today, many people act as if there is something faintly effete about self-examination. They treat it as something movie stars or eccentric millionaires do, but not solid citizens. Nonetheless, if society is
to become more professionalized, personalized understandings have to become more common. Indeed, we are moving in direction of normalizing individualized archaeology, albeit slowly. Daniel Goleman’s book *EQ* is one indicator of this. In promoting the importance of emotional intelligence, it argues for an examination of our emotional roots. Goleman is quite explicit in asserting that it is difficult to get ahead without doing so. Even the popularity of touchy-feely television talk shows reveals the impending legitimation of introspection. Still confined largely to a daytime ghetto, they have nonetheless made considering our childhood histories mainstream. Thanks to Oprah and Dr. Phil, the notion that a father’s rejection might lead an ordinary housewife to mistrust men no longer seems farfetched.

**Cyclical Growth**

Erik Erikson, in popularizing the concept of identity formation, discussed the need some people have for a psychosocial moratorium. When life has been difficult, the emotional demands of examining the past can be so intimidating that there is not much energy left over for other things. Holding down an exacting job or assuming family responsibilities, in addition to engaging in resocialization, can be more than the average person can manage. A moratorium, that is, a time-out from other obligations, is designed to provide this space. It is a socially sanctioned means of suspending responsibilities so as to divert attention to personal growth. The problem is that not many people have an opportunity for such a time-out once they have passed their teenage years. The closest most come is while they are in college. Although they are theoretically burning the midnight oil with study, for many this is party time. Undergraduates are often more concerned with how much beer they can consume or whether they will be able to afford a
trip to Cancun, than with grades or delving into the psyche. Frequently drifting about in aimless pastimes, they nonetheless have an opportunity to find themselves. They may not consciously understand what they are doing, but in following their impulses, they experiment with activities that throw light on what they think and feel. Theirs may not be a systematic form of introspection, but in trying to figure out what they will do after they get their degrees, they make important discoveries.

What, however, are more mature adults to do? If they need to engage in personal growth in order to free themselves for competent decision-making, where are they to find the space to embark on personal archaeology or resocialization? Assuming that cultural developments will further legitimize introspection, will this be sufficient to promote the necessary kinds of change? Mightn’t it also be necessary to develop institutional innovations? To hope that individuals on their own will do what is needed is probably optimistic. Merely providing social encouragement, when there is little time to pursue self-knowledge, could be a distinction without a difference. It is like telling someone to roll a boulder up a hill when both of his arms are engaged in holding up the roof of his house. Nor would it be much of an improvement to allow him to claim a mental disability. If a time-out can only be achieved by becoming defective, this is equivalent to advising a person to shoot himself in the foot so that he can practice running. The stigma of admitting to a psychiatric condition essentially disqualifies a person for the responsibilities he wishes to develop the strength to handle. To free oneself from a dysfunctional role only to discover that one’s flexibility is discounted because of a mental condition is a bad bargain. It is not an avenue to professionalized mobility as much as to frustration by other means.
The good news is that there have been some cracks in the medical façade. Other professions, such as social work and marriage and family counseling, have been loosening their ties to psychiatry. Although the status system of the helping professions is such that physicians dictate much of what is done, their directives are often honored in the breach. In their separate offices, or freestanding organizations, less prestigious clinicians offer their clients what they believe is needed. Sometimes this is self-knowledge and sometimes resocialization. The language used to describe these interventions differs; nevertheless the underlying activities are as previously described. What is happening cannot, however, be understood without recognizing the hypocrisy thrust upon people by the realities of third party payments. Because psychotherapy and related counseling services tend to be expensive, the practice of funding them through medical insurance has developed. But in order to maintain the fiction that these are medical interventions, it has become customary to furnish medical style diagnoses. Psychiatrists cooperated in this deception by issuing diagnostic manuals (the DSMs) to provide detailed instructions on selecting a suitable category. Social workers and psychologists participated in this charade by submitting the paperwork expected of them. When questioned about this, they separately affirm that what they are doing is related to traditional medicine, whereas behind closed doors they do something very different.

Psychologists have played an interesting role in this drama. Eager to maintain a professional identity apart of that of psychiatrists, their understanding of what they do is fairly distinctive. More concerned with personality styles and interpersonal relationships, they hardly ever think in terms of diseases. Even when they apply medical terms, such as “trauma,” they do not refer to physiological injuries. Among themselves, they are quite
aware that their clients are not suffering from illnesses; hence they chafe in their
servitude. For financial reasons, however, they are unable to break out of this dilemma.
Nevertheless, they continue to lay the groundwork for a competing institutional
paradigm.

Not yet officially contemplated are institutional arrangements that address the
moratorium problem. Nevertheless, on a practical level client demands have placed an
increasing emphasis on the so-called brief therapies. These tend to be time-limited
interventions. Originally designed as money-saving measures, they were intended to
keep down the costs associated with interminable hours of traditional psychotherapy. In
due course, however, they have been promoted as more effective than what they replaced.
By concentrating on defined problems, and solving them within a specified period of
time, they presumably force clients to work on their issues. Instead of allowing those in
pain to become professional analysands who regard their therapists as surrogate parents,
clients are compelled to take responsibility for their progress. If at some later point, they
may develop other problems requiring professional attention, which can then be dealt
with as they arise. In the meantime, there is an unrelenting concentration on the here and
now, as opposed to a hypothetical psychological breakthrough.

If, however, one stands back and examines what has been evolving, a different
pattern emerges. In the medical model, patients suffer from diseases that are to be cured.
The physician assists in fixing what is broken, after which the patient returns to health.
He/she has the measles, but later on does not. Personal growth is distinctly different. For
most people it is much more than a one-shot event. Significant growth takes time. A
personalized archaeology requires years to uncover bits of information, which are
revealed piece by piece, as if one were peeling an onion. Resocialization is likewise an incremental process, during which a person relinquishes one loss, followed by another, followed by yet another. Getting personally stronger is not a matter of overcoming a simple infection. There are no microorganisms to destroy. It is more like engaging in physical exercises that take time to have an effect. The major difference between pumping up muscles and acquiring self-knowledge and/or undergoing resocialization is that the latter are more intimidating. They take a greater effort to effect.

The result is that personal growth can be episodic. Instead of occurring all at once like a cure, the progress can be halting. For much of the time little will be happening until a person can find the space, or the resources, to dig into the past and mourn a loss. Unlike the single-shot moratorium envisioned by Erikson, responsible adults seek improvements in the spaces available between their family and occupational commitments. Theirs will, of necessity, be cyclical growth. Much as with brief therapy, they must deal with issues as they come up. In their case, they intermittently seek further self-knowledge or additional episodes of resocialization. Both on their own and sometimes with the assistance of professional counselors, they tackle what their external circumstances—and internal clocks—tell them that the moment has come to tackle. Although this blueprint is already occurring, the helping professions have yet to conceptualize it. They continue to think in terms of defined disorders rather than cyclical growth. What needs to occur is for the social view of personal change to become further institutionalized. When it does, those undergoing it are liable to benefit. A more accurate understanding of what is taking place, coupled with the greater legitimation of personal growth, should rationalize what can feel peculiarly irrational.
So where does this leave us with respect to predicting the future? Because personal growth is increasingly valuable in a professionalizing society, our culture and institutions should continue to evolve greater acceptance of personal archaeology and resocialization. The opposition will nonetheless remain stiff. So entrenched are medical conceptions of personal pain that they will not disappear anytime soon. Just as religious conceptions of distress continue to remain influential, so will their scientific successors. Even so, an awareness of the social factors that prevent people from becoming self-motivated experts will grow. The more members of the middle class encounter barriers to professionalized success, the greater will be the impetus to understand why. Moreover, as a larger numbers of them engage in personal growth, the greater will be the demand for an accurate evaluation of what is happening.

In the end, personal growth should be more systematic, less medical, and better socially integrated than at present. There may never come a time where everyone becomes all that he/she can be, but many more individuals will. Perfection is not the destiny humankind; nevertheless improvements are possible. To get some idea of what is feasible, it is useful to review the early talking movies. In retrospect, their naïveté is startling. The advice that the protagonists gave each other is not just dated—it is silly. Often absurdly romantic, it was frequently based more of fictionalized notions of love at first sight. Nor did the readiness of the players to partake in fisticuffs when insulted accord with current sensibilities. Amazingly, the heroes were not only prepared to poke the villains in the nose, and vice versa, but were lionized for their manliness when doing so. Nowadays, of course, we require mature individuals to resort to words rather than pugilism. We expect self-control, and, by and large, we get it. With respect to personal
growth, something comparable is liable to occur. The medical and deviance perspectives should recede into the background. And when they do, they will cease sounding like common sense. Intellectual and organizational fashions change, but only after their replacements gain a foothold. Of course, the changing of the “therapeutic” guard not yet having taken place, not everyone can imagine that it will. Once again, time will tell.
Chapter 11

Middle Class Morality

Interminable Strife

The fundamentalists declare that homosexuality is a sin. They tell us, quite accurately, that the Bible condemns same-sex liaisons. This is said to be God’s eternal will and, therefore, mandatory for all time. Until recently this perspective was reinforced by psychiatric opinion. Physicians were nearly unanimous in agreeing with Sigmund Freud that male-to-male contacts constituted paraphilias. In such cases, the object of erotic desire was inappropriate, probably due to a perverted socialization. Freud speculated that the libido, that is, a person’s sexual energy, got fixated in the wrong place during the Oedipal period. Instead of a little boy renouncing his love of his mother and identifying with his father, he continued to identify with her and hence as an adult wished to function sexually as she did. This was obviously a problem that required a cure. Adult homosexuality was a perversion that demanded professional attention. Unless a medical intervention enabled a person to grow out of his obsession, he was destined for a life of twisted misery. Although he might not be fated for an eternity in Hell, his temporal existence would be blighted.

To this, more secular voices shouted: poppycock! They have described homosexuality as a “sexual orientation.” According to them, it is just one of many modes in which human beings engage in physical intimacy. Whether an individual chooses it, rather than more traditional heterosexual models, is a matter of personal preference. There is no better or worse, merely different. The religious and psychological authorities who declared otherwise were dismissed as rigid puritans. They did not understand that
moral principles are relative. Mesmerized by self-righteous commitments, they mistakenly believed their own predilections were absolute. In fact, moral standards are socially constructed. Each community decides for itself what to believe, and, therefore, its standard is right—for itself. The relativists insist that every group, and every individual, has a right to pursue its own judgments. As importantly, they claim that no one has a right to judge anyone else. Because each of us is the sole authority on our separate commitments; we are the only valid judges of our own conduct. This truth dictates a live-and-let-live attitude; one that applies to the privacy of the bedroom, as well as elsewhere.

This divide between absolutists and relativists, between liberals and conservatives, has become the leitmotif of contemporary morality. For several decades a culture war has raged between those who wish to reaffirm traditional moral rules and those who hope to reinterpret them. Not only have the contending forces clashed over the suitability of homosexuality, but over a host of other matters. These have included abortion, euthanasia, family values, gender roles, and psychedelic substances. Not long ago, some of the more pitched battles dealt with stem cell research. New discoveries in biology suggested that it might be possible to take genetic materials from one individual and rework them to cure genetic difficulties in others. Everything from Alzheimer’s disease, to multiple sclerosis, to cancer might ultimately yield to this sort of strategy. This much is not controversial. What is, is the appropriate source of genetic materials. It turns out that the cells of young animals, that is, of embryos, are relatively undifferentiated. This enables their nuclear chemicals to be more easily converted to other purposes. Scientists have consequently attempted to culture these cells in vitriol.
The difficulty arises in where they obtain the DNA to begin the process. The conservatives maintain that all life is sacred. Because each fertilized human egg is a potential human being, destroying it to gain access to its genetic code is deemed the equivalent of murder. Portraying themselves as “pro-life,” these partisans are comfortable with experimenting on cultures derived from adults, whereas assassinating the defenseless unborn leaves them scandalized. To this, liberals respond with comparable vigor. They are as adamant in their assertion that those who are already alive deserve protection. Refusing to pursue medical breakthroughs that could save countless lives seems to them at least as disgraceful. Besides, the fertilized ova harvested come from fertility clinics were slated for destruction anyway. As the surplus product of a procedure that enables childless couples to conceive, they will never grow to adulthood—whether or not they are diverted to medical research. Wasting these, in order to preserve life, thus serves no purpose. At best a symbolic gesture, it may make some people feel good; but, at worst, it is tantamount to condemning many millions of the living to an agonizing death.

Quite clearly the passions of both sides of the culture wars have been aroused. Each faction believes that it is moral, whereas the other is not. Moreover, each is convinced that it is destined to win. With just a little more effort, or perhaps a more articulate evocation of what is at stake, both sides are confident the truth will triumph. Eventually all fair-minded persons will join the crusade, either for life or personal choice. The strife between the two may seem interminable; nevertheless both believe justice will eventually prevail. That the dynamism of their battles indicates more than the malevolence of their adversaries does not occur to either side. Entangled as they are in a
moral dispute, both are persuaded that a failure to succeed is equivalent to allowing evil to triumph. They cannot imagine that the energy of their quarrel implies that neither is apt to win. Because what they are fighting over is deemed so important, they cannot conceive that the ultimate answer may differ from what either supposes it to be. In fact, both are wrong. The conservatives are mistaken in believing that morality is absolute, while the liberals are just as mistaken in their conviction that it is relative. Neither faction understands how morality operates; hence both come to erroneous conclusions.

The absolutists assert that right and wrong are unchangeable. They say that moral standards are eternal, either because they derive from natural law or the mandates of a divine authority. People may make mistakes about what is correct; nevertheless what is ethical is an immovable beacon, the guidance of which any decent person ought pursue. To do less, or believe less, is to submit to anarchy. It would be to descend into an abyss of interminable disagreements. Morality, in contrast, must, by its very nature, be constant. It is a veritable a summit that people can climb when they have doubts about how to behave. Were it less stable, the confusions would tear society asunder. People could do whatever they liked, with the consequence that they abused each other. Who in his right mind would disagree with this? The thesis sounds utterly innocuous—nevertheless it is untrue. Human reason detached from experience may to tell us that moral rules have to be universal, whereas millennia of history reveal an entirely different story. An honest evaluation of the past demonstrates that values change. People in different eras have committed themselves to diverse rules and dissimilar goals. Fixed in their respective epochs, they cannot imagine how any one might come to a conclusion
other than their own. Nonetheless people grounded in different times and places have been as certain of incompatible endpoints.

Consider social attitudes toward horses. Back in the old West, a person who stole a horse was considered the worst sort of evildoer. To steal a man’s horse, if that man were a cowboy, was to put him out of business. More seriously, in confiscating a horse, if he were crossing a desert, it was to condemn him to death. As minimum, stealing a horse was to deprive someone of transportation in a land where distances were too great to be traversed on foot. The result was that horse theft was a hanging offense. The ordinary Westerner was so outraged by the act as to condemn it in the most violent terms. Horses were so sacrosanct that merely contemplating consuming their flesh turned strong stomachs. Compare this with contemporary attitudes. Horses are still appreciated, but they are not nearly as essential. With so many other forms of transportation available, and with most people living in urban environments, few are as intimately associated with equines. Those fortunate enough to own one may love it, yet most others are relatively indifferent. For the ordinary person, working oneself into a lather over the pilfering of a horse is unimaginable. To demand that someone be executed for the offense seems absurd. Obviously, something has changed. While theft is still reckoned immoral, the magnitude of the transgression is evaluated differently. Where once it drew a community together in justified indignation, today it is deemed a minor crime.

Consider, in contrast, the evolution of opinions regarding intellectual property. Back in the 19th century, at the same time that horse theft was reviled, plagiarism was a trivial concern. Writers felt few compunctions about borrowing from one another and critics were rarely outraged when they encountered such loans. In particular, with
academic history in its infancy, there were few professional historians. Those who made a living by writing about the past were just beginning to lay down the rules for how this should be done. At this juncture, they did not even cite the sources for their narratives. What had already been published was considered fair game to be recycled without attribution. That paraphrasing the words of a colleague might destroy someone’s reputation would have been found amusing. It would not have been condemned as unethical. With the growth of professional scholarship this stance has been transformed. Academics are now very protective of their writings. They expect that when these are reproduced credit will be given. Those who fail in this duty are dismissed as intellectual scavengers. Should their deeds be discovered, their academic status will plunge. In more than one instance, professors have been terminated from prestigious posts for this sort of infraction.

Today plagiarism is a big deal. It is thought to taint a person’s status as a scholar. In some contexts, it is reckoned a felony. Thus to purloin a computer program, and make a profit from it, is to open oneself to a lawsuit. In a market-oriented society, such as the United States, this has become the conventional practice. Still, in other societies, such as China, where a market-mentality is just taking hold, it has not yet become the norm. This is why there has been so much contention between the two nations over the protection of intellectual property. In any event, there can be no doubt that this too is an area in which moral commitments have transformed. Obviously, the absolutists are wrong in maintaining that there can be no morality without immutability. Moral standards clearly can shift without morality self-destructing.
So far this analysis may seem to vindicate the relativists. If moral rules and values can be modified, this would seem to indicate that they are socially constructed. Moreover, if they are constructed, then they can presumably be tailored to meet the needs of particular communities. Each can decide for itself which rules and values to honor, without fear of contradiction from any other. All thus have exclusive jurisdiction over what they decide is correct. This conclusion sounds straightforward, but the trouble with it is that it treats moral determinations as if they were arbitrary. The inference is that people can construct moral codes anyway they please. If they don’t like a particular rule, all they have to do is recast it suit their desires. This interpretation is especially congenial to reformers. It apparently authorizes whatever utopian conventions they deem appropriate. As they might put it, if they can think it, they can make it happen. In other words, they are proud to engage in improving social conditions. In addition, because they are morally sovereign within their own domains, they can tinker with moral standards safe from outside interference. Since what they advocate is relative, foreigners are prohibited from poaching on their territory. These interlopers should butt out and confine themselves to their home turf. Thus, if one society decides to adopt cannibalism, observers from elsewhere must keep hands off. Whatever revulsion they experience, it is incumbent upon them to preserve their judgments to themselves. Since rule making is the business of those affected, outsiders should stick to their own business. Let them judge what is within their own purview and allow others to judge what is within theirs.

This is wrong on several accounts. To begin with, moral rules are not subject to arbitrary construction. Although morality is socially created, it is not within the compass of any individual to modify it any way he/she wishes. As a social phenomenon, its
principles and values are socially negotiated. This means they depend upon a social consensus no individual can dictate. Potential reformers may seek to influence the process—they may even succeed in this—but they cannot guarantee that they will. Others may disagree with them, either during the negotiation, or later on. Since no individual, or group of individuals, has absolute power, other views may come to dominate. Nor can would-be reformers impose any sort of rule they desire. That which most people can agree upon derives from an interaction between human nature and their external environment. Murder is universally reviled because almost everyone wants to live. Were human beings more like praying mantises, they would not object if women cannibalized their mates during coitus. Similarly, if human beings did not form romantic attachments, cheaters would not upset them. A desire for loyalty makes it certain that no society can institute free love in its most extreme form. Telling people that it is acceptable to couple with whomever one desires, whenever one desires it, is a formula for interpersonal conflicts that would make a Hobbesian war of all against all look tame.

Nor are the rules and values that societies adopt detached from their circumstances. Regulations, such as those about horse theft or intellectual property, are clearly shaped by technological and environmental circumstances. When these mutate, as they frequently do, interpersonal relationships can be transformed. And when relationships change, so may the norms that keep them within bounds. Thus when water becomes scarce, the rules for conserving it are more vigorously enforced. Or when immigrants besiege a society, the way that outsiders are treated may undergo an overhaul. Concerns about the distribution of property, to cite an active historical worry, have been repeatedly modified by changes in the nature of property. Hunter-gatherers lived in a
different moral universe from agriculturists, who lived in one profoundly different from
industrialists. To mentally conjure up a specific decree will not make it operative if it
fails to meet the human needs of a community.

Nor is it the case that would-be moralists are insulated from the judgments of
others outside their community. Individual societies are not separated by impermeable
boundaries. To say that each has the right to set up totally independent standards is
fatuous. When the British, in colonizing New Guinea, outlawed cannibalism, who was to
stop them? Had the natives objected that they were entitled to keep their traditional
customs, by what authority were their conquerors bound to honor this demand? To cite
another instance, what, if after watching American movies, Indian teenagers (in India)
begin to clamor for a right to choose their mates? Can their parents insist on arranging
marriages by declaring that Western standards have no authority in south Asia? Try as
they may, those who find themselves the target of moral imperialism cannot win merely
by asserting that what they say is right because they say it is. Assuming, as relativists do,
that within a given society contending factions work to modify the rules, why can’t
contending societies do the same? Why, if one is stronger than another, can’t it exercise
its power in the service of what it believes? As a practical matter, this does occur, and
occur frequently. To say that this is impossible because each society defines morality for
itself is no more than verbal mumbo jumbo. It ignores the fact that if an outside power
imposes moral changes, it now defines morality. It becomes the agency constructing the
rules.

Not only is relativism an ineffective moral palisade, it is logically incoherent.
Relativism tells us that societies should not interfere with each other, but where does this
“should” come from? If there is no moral authority other than that exercised by individual societies when they construct their rules, from whence derives the legitimacy of an injunction against rules crossing social borders? Were the relativists consistent, they would refrain from making judgments when one community intrudes upon another. They would look away from what is none of their business. Instead, they jump in to demand that the more powerful party step back. In this, they too act like absolutists. Somehow the rule that everyone should be a relativist is treated as if it were beyond dispute. It is regarded as privileged. In fact, relativism is rife with hypocrisy. Most relativists raise the idea of sacrosanct communal rules only when their own views are in dispute. The same assertion is usually held in abeyance when they criticize the commitments of others. Thus, should they decide, as they generally do, that female circumcision is equivalent to genital mutilation, they have no compunctions about crusading for its elimination. Should the targets of their efforts object that theirs is a cultural tradition, the relativists remain unimpressed. Suddenly they find this custom an unambiguous evil. Even when they fight for the rights of homosexuals, they descend into contradictions. Thus, when they claim that everyone has the right to his/her own sexual orientation, from whence does this “right” arise? Isn’t this sort of thinking absolutist? Would these relativists even consider the possibility that a society could reconstruct its rules so as to eliminate such a right?

One of the more extreme forms of relativism has come from the pen of Alan Wolfe. Although in a review of contemporary morality, he initially sounds skeptical of relativism, he ultimately concludes that American society is moving toward an acceptance of the right of every individual to independently decide his/her personal
commitments. Wolfe explains that with most people better informed than their ancestors, they reserve the right to judge for themselves. The problem here is that if everyone is an independent oracle, no one has the right to judge anyone else. Each becomes an authority unto himself; with the result that social authority vanishes. All that would have to happen for a person to escape censure is to change his/her mind. There would no longer be moral standards worthy of the name because none would be capable of enforcement. Morality, like it or not, is social. The prescriptions it upholds are both socially constructed and socially imposed. Although differences in individual beliefs are legion, this does not prevent the development of a loose consensus. Most of the time there is sufficient agreement for people to collaborate in compelling others to conform with a variety of standards. Disagreements do not disappear, but a reasonable degree of uniformity emerges. The proof of this is, as it were, in the pudding. Most people are not murderers or thieves. They do not live in separate domains oblivious of the opinions of others. Most know what is expected of them and they usually submit to these mandates.

Another way of phrasing extreme relativism is to assert that people should be non-judgmental. Nowadays it is often claimed that to be truly civilized, it is essential to offer everyone “unconditional positive regard.” Because every person supposedly deserves respect, everyone deserves equal respect. No one should be criticized for presumed shortcomings lest he/she suffer reduced self-esteem. One public service television commercial went so far as to advise viewers that the only person who has a right to judge others wears a black robe, carries a gavel, and sits in a courtroom. Were this true, morality would be obliterated. There would be no moral rules distinct from legal statutes. Morality, after all, is about judging—and punishing—others. When
someone lies, a moral person is upset by this violation. When someone commits a murder, a moral person demands justice. To be indifferent to these trespasses is to be immoral. In point of fact, to be truly non-judgmental is to acquiesce in a myriad of horrendous acts. So too is offering everyone unconditional positive regard. It is to refuse to distinguish between the good and bad. Those who feel just as warmly toward liars as truth tellers thereby reward moral depravity. They, in essence, tell others that it doesn’t matter what they do because they will be accepted no matter what.

But if both relativism and absolutism are wrong, where does this leave us? Does this mean that there is no such thing as morality? Clearly not. Morality is a universal social phenomenon for very good reasons. People, in every functioning society, make moral judgments. Were they to refrain from doing so, chaos would ensue. Were they to allow any sort of conduct to stand, many of their fellows, as predicted by Hobbes, would engage in behaviors that would make social cooperation impossible. In order to reduce conflicts when interests collide, there must be agreed upon standards. But how do these arise? And how is a consensus modified if conditions change? There may not be a Hobbesian social compact, but obviously there is a mechanism for achieving this because it does occur. Morality does undergo modifications, and manages to be honored even when it does.

**Scalable Values**

Morality is adjustable. It has to be. But it cannot be infinitely adjustable because this would undermine its authority. Perhaps the best way to describe the requisite standards is as “scalable.” Though moral rules and values change, they cannot do so arbitrarily. To the contrary, they have to be scaled to meet evolving circumstances. They
must be modified to fit the behaviors that need to be controlled. A scalable morality, as opposed to one that is infinitely adjustable, is both flexible and stable. When change is required it changes, whereas most of the time it is sufficiently predictable to maintain its authority. Morality requires commitments that motivate people to honor some patterns of conduct while rejecting others. Nonetheless, it also requires that these commitments periodically be modified. How this is achieved has implications not only for what the rules will be, but also for the sorts of difficulties communities experience in shifting between flexibility and stability.

Human nature is more or less stable; nevertheless how it adjusts to fluctuating technical and interpersonal circumstances can be ingenious. Since there is no Hobbesian Leviathan with the power, or the wisdom, to impose the requisite modifications, the question arises as to how this happens. How do people with different views, and competing interests, decide to pursue the same values? There is also the secondary question of whether this mechanism has unintended consequences. Does the way they arrive at a consensus condemn them to situations they did not envision? The answer to the first question has already been suggested. Moral rules and values are socially negotiated. A myriad of human beings engage in what amount to on-going bargaining sessions so as to arrive at a loose consensus. They may start out with different positions, but they end up with sufficient agreement to cooperate in enforcing common standards. What then is the nature of these negotiations? And do they have unexpected implications?

Before going forward, it is essential to clarify the nature of moral rules. Despite the absolutists (and relativists), these imperatives are only loosely formulated. They are
not definitive; that is, they are not set in concrete. The best way to describe moral rules is as informal. There is no official codebook that circumscribes all the canons to which everyone subscribes. Some people think of morality as like the Bible (or the Ten Commandments). They do not realize that it took centuries for Church councils to determine which books would be contained within the sacred texts and which ones excluded as apocryphal. With morality, there is no corresponding council to legitimate some injunctions, while rejecting others. Nor are there official formulations of particular rules. Although some statements garner broad assent, how these are interpreted is open to dispute. Take the rule against lying. Most people agree that lying is wrong. Where they disagree is in deciding whether specific utterances constitute lies. Was it right to tell aunt Mary that her new dress is pretty? Wouldn’t have been more honest to say that it makes her look like an old hag? After all, isn’t telling her she looks good when she does not an untruth? Some sophisticates describe this species of falsehoods, not as lies, but as instances of “tact.” In their view, they are not fabrications, but examples of good manners. Others, just as adamantly, retort that a lie is a lie. They advise onlookers to keep their mouths shut, rather than state an untruth.

In fact, there are many exceptions to the rule that one should not lie. Advertisers, for instance, feel little guilt in exaggerating the benefits of a client’s products. For them, this is honest puffery. Rules, as they implicitly understand, have qualifications. Moral standards make exceptions to what they require. Almost everyone recognizes that these exist. Most, for example, agree that white lies are an exception to the lying rule. Nevertheless there is no official, universally accepted, compendium of such qualifications. Most people assume that they know them without ever being explicit.
They also assume they are in rough agreement with others, although they lack definitive proof of this.

Since people do not literally sit down to compare notes about moral rules, or the exceptions to them, they can never be completely sure about the extent of their accord. Even though this introduces irreducible levels of confusion, it also permits wiggle room. They can assume that they are part of the same consensus even though they never verify its boundaries. This is one of the means through which morality achieves its plasticity. When conditions change, people are able to make adjustments in their interpretations without announcing them. What was a lie suddenly no longer counts as a lie. They use the same words, and assume they are being consistent, when they are not. Outsiders too assume a consistency that allows them to go along without objection. One person may, for example, strongly favor providing greater personal opportunities by reducing federal regulations, whereas another, apparently concurring, believes this must be achieved through further government programs. Both subscribe to the principled idea of expanding individual “opportunities,” even though they support diametrically opposed policies. The same sorts of confusion allow for ostensible agreements about values such as “freedom” and “equality,” where one person means the freedom to speak and another the freedom to not be insulted.

When genuine moral changes occur, as they do, the negotiations that bring them about tend to be polarized. Although these dialogues are as unofficial as the rules they modify, they can nevertheless be quite vigorous. Interested parties choose up sides and then defend their views against others who feel like enemies. There is no official list of who belongs to one side or the other; nonetheless those involved have a good idea of who
is a friend or foe. They generally determine this by what people say and often by how
they identify themselves. Thus, when moral questions arise someone may admit to being
either for or against gay marriage; either for or against utilizing stem cells for medical
research. What quickly develops is a good guy-bad guy mentality. Now, for those
actively engaged, the issues appear black and white, with the other side in desperate need
of defeat. From one’s own side, partisans demand orthodoxy. Allies are supposed to
share identical commitments. Although the exact nature of these beliefs may be
indeterminate, a verbal conformity is enforced. As to the other side, the demand is for
capitulation. Theoretically, these miscreants must convert to the correct viewpoint. In
reality, there often develops an emergent position neither side originally entertained.
Apparently contradictory opinions are synthesized into something new that more
adequately meets the needs of a larger constituency. Moral standards are, by this means,
scaled to communal needs via a give and take that no one completely wins, but that few
completely lose.

Meanwhile this entire process is bathed in intense emotion. Moral judgments do
not arise from quite contemplation, nor are they enforced via reasoned persuasion.
During moral negotiations the parties tend to hurl unpleasant charges and counter-
charges. Each side accuses the other of malevolence and demands amends. And when
they do, they do so passionately. To put this crudely, they get angry. They experience
what they more politely refer to as “moral indignation.” How dare the other side promote
immorality? How dare it resist supporting what is right? The glare in the eyes of the
combatants is intended to intimidate the opposition. Anger is a potent interpersonal tool.
It is an instrument for overcoming frustrations by breaking through human barriers. But
it is also an apparatus that can go out of control. Exasperation that arouses counter-anger can devolve into a downward spiral. The parties reciprocally provoke ever greater anger; anger so extreme it passes over into rage. Rage, however, can be primitive and unthinking. It breaks free from social constraints, occasionally becoming homicidal. This being so, when moral negotiations escalate into moral battles, the level of violence can become deadly. Wars have literally been fought over moral disagreements. Heretics have been thrown into prison or burned at the stake. Traitors have been drawn and quartered or exiled for life. At such moments, both sides lose track of which rules meet human needs and insist only upon revenge.

Anger not only helps us negotiate moral standards, it is also a mechanism for enforcing them. When others violate important rules, they are generally forced to comply via angry demands. As the first line of defense against wrongdoing, the emotion alerts people when they have stepped over the line and urges them to step back. Here too, of course, anger can be transformed into rage. Regrettably, in this case, it too can become excessive and destructive. But there is another side of anger. Often, when morality is successfully socialized, it is because anger creates an internalized version of itself; one better known as guilt. Children are chastised for moral transgressions by their parents in the expectation that this will modify a youngster’s subsequent behavior. Irately telling a small boy not to take another cookie is intended to stop him in his tracks, but also to curb future temptations. The parent’s injunction is designed to be converted into the voice of conscience. Once adopted by the child, this heated derivative of adult displeasure is supposed to make him angry at himself if he takes too many sweets. In this regard, guilt is an excellent means for enforcing social control. Present even when external control
agents are not; it quietly makes moral rules more effective. Of course, like anger, guilt
can be overdone. When unreflective, it too can prevent a person from meeting basic
needs. The demands of external authorities can be so compelling that he or she never
independently weighs the benefits of a particular act.

Among the other emotions implicated in negotiating and enforcing moral
standards are shame, disgust, and love. The first of these impels people to avoid the
negative attention associated with rule breaking, the second treats violators as if they
were noxious substances, and the third seduces them into doing as others desire. Like
anger, each of these can be internalized, but like anger, each can be over-done. They too
can befuddle a person’s thinking and impel him/her to engage in conduct that would be
considered immoral were it not done in the name of morality. Thus, a person in the
throes of shame can be so embarrassed as to avoid all human contact, while one
transported by love can comply with requests to inflict injury on third parties. Because
morality is not emotionally neutral, it is both compelling and potentially fickle. As long
as strong feelings are in place, people energetically fight for what they believe. Yet
should their feelings change, they can pivot on a dime.

Informal rules and values that are socially negotiated by polarized constituencies,
and saturated with emotion, not only allow for an oscillation between stability and
change, they also permit an integration of multiple, competing interests. With no benign
authority sufficiently omniscient to harmonize the needs of millions of individuals, there
must be some means of allowing input from diverse quarters. The old-time political
philosophers speculated about the efficacy of a social contract that coordinated social
needs, but this was a myth. Even in hunter-gatherer times, there were too many people to
meet in a single assembly where everyone would be equally heard. In a Gesellschaft
society the mere thought of such a gathering is mind-boggling. Thankfully, a substitute
has been found in the everyday interactions of millions of strangers. People do not have
to communicate with everyone else in order to achieve a moral consensus. All that is
necessary is a network, or rather a profusion of overlapping networks, where they make
their demands known. During their daily rounds people engage in gossip, and political
machinations, that eventually add up to social trends. They do not intentionally negotiate
the rules and values that guide their behaviors, but nonetheless participate in the
equivalent of large-scale bargains where intersecting influences come from many
directions.

Perhaps the best analog of moral negotiations is the commercial marketplace.
When people trade goods and services, they do not submit to the authority of a central
mediating service. What occurs is more decentralized. A host of individuals make
separate bargains that they believe will meet their respective needs. Although mistakes
are made, the players are better able to determine what works for them than would an
economic sovereign. Once all of these inputs are factored together, Adam Smith’s
invisible hand takes over. It determines values based upon summing up individual
demands and motivates the provision of an appropriate supply according to where the
profits lie. No one calculates the overall balance, but it is as if someone had. The same
sort of thing happens with morality. A kind of rough balance emerges from the give and
take of informal factions composed of many individuals, each of which contributes to
what amounts to a chorus of demands. While no one is in charge, interactions occurring
all over the board bring conflicting perspectives to the ultimate agreement; perspectives
that no single mind is capable of entertaining. This, of course, takes time, with many a painful slip along the way.

**Moral Pitfalls**

As should be abundantly apparent, moral negotiations are not a straight-line process. With so many players, and so many of them unclear as to what is transpiring, the creation and enforcement of moral standards is unlike linear reasoning. The parties do not put forward self-evident premises from which they derive unambiguous conclusions. Not only is what is going on obfuscated by the informality of the process; it is also obscured by the machinations of the protagonists. Even though it is not possible to achieve a definitive moral victory, that is what many of the participants desire. They want to win, and win on their own terms. In order to achieve this, however, they are not above cheating. While some of the players have more integrity than others, a significant proportion are willing to lie, coerce, and manipulate their way to success. So self-righteously intent are they on imposing their moral visions, that they even fool themselves about what they are doing. The consequence of this is that morality can lurch from one extreme to another. The end product may integrate diverse interests better than might a single moral authority; nevertheless the intermediate stages can be discombobulating.

Contested progress is the norm in morality. Generations, and sometimes centuries, can go by before important disagreements are resolved. It literally took hundreds of years before the religious discord between Roman Catholics and Protestants was settled in an agreement that mutual tolerance was preferable to continued doctrinal strife. The current culture wars are no different. Liberals and conservatives may have
been going at it hammer and tongs for decades, but this is not very long in the scheme of things. Unbeknownst to them, they are embroiled in a moral negotiation that is apt to result in bargains they have yet to conceive. The same is true of the disputes between absolutists and relativists. Although neither side can imagine being wrong, their conflict will itself generate the evidence that creates a suitable compromise. While the most active combatants may never acknowledge that they have been in error, a more moderate middle should emerge to set the dominant consensus.

One of the side effects of moral polarization is that extremists often hold aloft the banners of partisanship. Shouting louder than their peers and adamantly proclaiming their opposition to wickedness, they inevitably draw attention to themselves. Determined to be leaders of their respective factions, their vociferousness lends them greater visibility. Others less engaged in the fray conclude that these activists know best and allow them to move to the fore. But such extremists have another advantage. Because they care so much, they persist when others do not, which permits them to set the agenda. The problem with this is that the most enthusiastic partisans also tend to be ax-grinders. So intense are their personal commitments that these bias their judgments. Although they care more than others, this has less to do with the needs of their constituents than with their private histories. A salient example would be those feminists who gravitated to the cause as a result of having been abused. When they crusade against the horrors of rape, they do not so much embody the experiences of other women as their own. Thus, in characterizing all heterosexual relationships as exploitative, they misrepresent the difficulties with which most women grapple.
Ax-grinders push social movements toward extreme positions. Their demands are as radical as they can conceive and as zealous as they can manage. If the goal is to defeat a contending faction, it helps to distinguish one’s position from that of the enemy. Potential converts who are clear about the differences between them more effortlessly recognize which flag to rally around. Thus when a spokesperson declares she is in favor abortion under any circumstances (or against it no matter what), there are fewer misunderstandings due to subtle refinements. Black and white commitments sharpen calls for action. They are easy to perceive and simple to state. They also tend to be at the endpoint of the moral spectrum. This means they often go too far because they ignore the complications of the real world. If men exploit women—which makes males the enemy—then one should never consort with them. After all, this might be construed as going to bed with potential rapists. The next thing one knows is that the ax-grinders recommend either celibacy or same-sex liaisons. This is no mere hypothetical. Many extreme feminists did exactly this. Then too, some on the other side have been as excessive in advocating indiscriminate heterosexual intercourse—merely for the pleasure of it. Among other things, radical positions such as these tend to be so simple-minded that when implemented, the damage is extensive.

But that is not the way the partisans see it. They perceive extreme simplifications as idealistic. They do not realize that they have been swept away by unthinking passions. From where they sit, the goals they pursue shine with undimmed beauty. Others may fear the pitfalls, but they detect only a future of unsurpassed excellence. Ordinary people are corrupted by mundane facts, whereas they are convinced that their moral triumph will transport humankind onto a higher plane. After others see the light, the rest of the human
race will become better than anyone imagined. Unswilled by personal interests, people will rise above themselves to bring eternal happiness to everyone else. For the zealots, the limitations imposed by human nature can be brushed aside as artifacts of corruption. The requirements of social solidarity, for instance, are dismissed as erroneous interpretations of communal needs. So luminous is their ideal that it eclipses every potential caveat. So glorious is the impending future that it justifies whatever coercive acts prove necessary. If orthodoxies must be enforced by punishing one’s allies, so be it. If stubborn opponents need to be eliminated as enemies of the people, well, revolutions require one to break some eggs.

If this portrayal sounds excessive, a survey of some of the ideals pursued in the quest of moral purity should disabuse the skeptics. Bear in mind that the Marxists wanted to eliminate all private property, that the feminists intended to eliminate almost every gender difference, and that the progressive educators sought to make every lesson fun. Moreover, some reformers argue that the family must be disassembled, some postmodernists contend that truth is an illusion, and some fundamentalists even now insist the every word in the Bible is literally true. The nature of morality is such that when people are uncertain about how it should be adjusted to emerging circumstances, would-be saviors emerge to proclaim that they have the answer. Enraptured by their personal certitude, they then proceed to collect allies by promising more than they can deliver. Others, dissatisfied with their situation, perhaps having hit the social mobility wall, are eager to be led. They become true believers because they need to believe, but this prompts them to participate in moral warfare that makes things worse. Unable to
distinguish between good intensions and viable moral standards, they enforce the one with as much vigor as the other.

With respect to the future, it is safe to predict that extremism will persist. Fresh ideals will always beckon with assurances of perfection. In a Gesellschaft society, where uncertainties can be expected to multiply, so will ideological solutions. Because science can never furnish all the answers people seek, alternatives asserted with sufficient energy will be seized upon by gullible souls. This is why it is essential in a professionalized society for people to understand how morality operates. For most of history it has been acceptable for humans to operate from the seat of their moral pants. Vague feelings of what was right or wrong enabled them to jump into the game, although once embroiled in it, their ability to discern what was taking place usually evaporated. The implications of advanced technology, a mass society, and rampant commercialization make this approach dangerous. In a world where individuals are dependent upon an increasingly sub-divided division of labor, too firm a commitment to erroneous ideals can be fatal. Should these interfere with essential transactions, people can literally starve to death. Should they trigger military actions, many millions can be wiped out.

Morality too needs to be professionalized. The time has come to understand how the process operates. Neither absolutism nor relativism can be allowed to set our agenda. With change occurring at an accelerating pace, the need to scale our rules and values to evolving circumstances is imperative. People, especially members of the middle class, need to become experts in how morality is constructed and maintained. If they are to lead others in negotiating appropriate regulations, they cannot afford to be deflected into juvenile extremities. The days when idealism, and more particularly political ideologies,
could call the tune should be drawing to an end. Part of growing up must entail becoming morally mature. Self-directed social leaders have to recognize ax-grinding when they encounter it.

But whether this recognition is occurring, or will occur, remains an open question. Many bourgeois bohemians obviously continue to be attracted to empty idealism. They seem more concerned with the aesthetic charms of various social promises than their practicality. While it would be nice to suppose that they will learn to be more responsible, the evidence is ambiguous. Moral progress will continue to be made on some fronts, but political enthusiasms will also persist. If we are lucky, most of the more serious mistakes will be corrected before they pull us down. This seems to be happening with respect to radical feminism and socialist utopianism. Fewer people are recommending androgyny or government ownership of all property. If we are really lucky, an expertise with respect to morality will become institutionalized. Part of a personal professionalization may one day include a tough-minded understanding of how morality operates and how it goes astray. If it does, fewer false promises will make it into action.

Middle Class Standards

In a professionalized society, morality is perhaps more important than ever. Within a world populated by billions of interdependent strangers, the rules governing how they interact need to be steadfast. If unacquainted individuals are to trust one another, they have to be able to depend on moral commitments they cannot independently ascertain. They need to know that someone they have never met can be relied upon not to knife them in the back. Likewise required is confidence that a plethora of merchants
will provide wholesome products at reasonable prices. The implication is that these
strangers will, more or less, have internalized a variety of rules and values that are, more
or less, consistent with their own. This assumption of a loose moral consensus will be
confirmed in the commitments of these outsiders as verified in the predictability of their
conduct. While it is impossible to be certain how strongly someone else believes in
telling the truth, it is possible to identify specific lies—that is, if one pays attention. In
fact, this is achieved most of the time. Most of us are sufficiently secure in the honesty of
others to trust our welfare to their ministrations. We do not venture into the marketplace,
nor walk down the street, consumed by a dread of misfortune. Not only do we expect
truthful, non-violent, communications; we also expect others to exhibit a moral
commitment to their jobs. We assume that they will perform competently because they
are internally motivated to be competent. In other words, a professionalized division of
labor assumes personal attachments to rules and values that allow us confer occupational
authority upon strangers.

Internalized moral standards, as opposed to those imposed by external control
agents, are put in place through socialization. Individuals learn what is expected of them
and that they will be punished for violations, but also how to make independent
emotional commitments. They are taught to experience guilt, shame, or self-contempt
should they fail to comply with broadly accepted principles. Since babies do not come
equipped with a detailed, emotionally charged, conscience this must be implanted later
on. Not surprisingly, the mechanisms through which this is achieved parallel those that
create self-control. To become a self-disciplined adult a child must first be subjected to
external discipline. By the same token, learning to comply with moral rules begins with
submitting to ethical demands. If moral standards are to be internalized, they first have to be enforced. A moral suggestion, which remains only a suggestion, is as ephemeral as the words of which it is composed. Children do not become moral agents because they are intellectually persuaded this is a good idea. Were they to discover that there are no consequences for violating social prescriptions, there would be no incentive to perform what does not come naturally. Selfish to begin with, they would only become more so.

Nonetheless, not all moral demands become internal prescriptions. This is the case with children who reject the directives of self-interested parents. Thus, a mother who demands constant attention may find her efforts to play the martyr mocked by her offspring. This is also true of adults who are unimpressed by the claims of self-serving moral negotiators. To wit, radical feminists have been notably unsuccessful in persuading men to condemn their own masculinity. Rules and values that are broadly adopted tend to be fair, consistent, and flexible. They must at least appear to meet the conditions of dual-concern negotiations. In addressing the needs of those who adopt them, as well as those who promote them, such norms appear to be a good bargain. They seem safe to internalize because they look like the best available deal. Prudent to adopt, not only because they are balanced, they also appear dependable. Since they promise to be even-handed, they are trusted to guard against later treachery. In other words, because their supporters seem genuine, they are judged unlikely to pull out the rug if changing conditions make this advantageous. In addition, potential rules should be flexible. They must be open to honest renegotiations, should circumstances require this. Standards that are too rigid have the advantage of being predictable, but the disadvantage of tying
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people to harmful bargains. Flexible norms are less simple-minded. They are geared toward real-world complexities.

In general, for people to internalize moral rules, they have to believe in them. It is not merely that they are enforced, but that their enforcement is accepted as equitable. Still, prior enforcement is imperative. If no demands are made, then compliance, whether internal or external, is not necessary. Should moral relativism be interpreted as moral permissiveness, social order dissolves in a sea of selfishness. Most people simply follow the impulses of the moment. It is thus crucial that people achieve a consensus they are willing to enforce. As society changes, those affected require a rough agreement as to what they will demand of one another. Theirs must be a reasonably consistent coalition. Absent this sort of concord, they would push and pull in so many directions as to make their mandates ineffectual. It is the power of moral alliances that provides individual demands the clout to command internalization.

This being so, what are some of the moral standards that have emerged as a result of the Middle Class Revolution? What rules and values have people begun agreeing to as they have participated in a professionalizing society? Moreover, do these conventions make it easier to operate as self-directed decision-makers within an uncertain, hyper-commercialized environment? The answer in some cases will be yes; but in others, not yet. First, some nascent middle class standards are already well settled. It took time for many to materialize, but they have become so broadly accepted as nowadays to seem unexceptional. Who today does not believe that bribery is wrong? Giving people money under the table for special favors strikes most of us as cheating. It undermines the level playing field that we believe needed for commercial fairness. Since everyone deserves a
chance to make fair deals, we are offended if this is obviated by secret payoffs to selected players. Our goal is high-quality deals, not ones that arbitrarily enrich some of the participants. On some level we understand that without this kind of universality, the marketplace could not factor in the information needed to craft an efficient distribution of resources. It is, for similar reasons, that nepotism is widely rejected. To give special favors to some persons because they are friends or relatives is to reject selecting the most qualified. It is, therefore, also to favor inefficiency. As a result, most contemporaries are offended when the rules are bent for personal reasons. They feel so strongly about this that this attitude cannot be expected to change any time soon.

Also broadly accepted are norms against public violence. While the media fascination with interpersonal carnage might seem to indicate the reverse, day-to-day practices have grown noticeably less brutal. Take dueling. Its decline is evidence that gratuitous violence has been found inimical to a market-oriented society. Where once public figures challenged each other to contests from which only one emerged alive, this sort of fatal negotiation discourages the quite bargaining needed for complex deal-making. As a consequence, resorting to swords or pistols has come to feel uncivilized. But other sorts of violent behavior have also moved toward extinction. Bear baiting was once popular, but it along with cock fights and dogfights have virtually disappeared. It is noteworthy that where they survive, this tends to be among immigrants or the lower classes. Public executions and open floggings have also ceased to exist. A bare century and a half ago, these were well-attended popular entertainments, but no more. Things have proceeded so far that capital punishment itself is deemed cruel and unusual by a vocal minority that would like to see it outlawed. Even “the board of education” has
gone the way of the rack. Many people have come to the conclusion that any form of corporal punishment is tantamount to torture. They would no more consider hitting a child with a piece of wood than challenging a rival to a shoot-out in the middle of Main Street. Even those who consider spankings normal agree that too much, too often, is abusive.

Democracy too has developed into a conventional value. Although many of the Founding Fathers worried that rule by the people could turn into rule by the mob, few today object to a nearly universal franchise. One person/one vote has become the definition of fairness. Men and women, rich and poor, the well-informed and ignorant are all thought to possess a self-evident right to political participation. So internalized is this commitment that virtually all Americans are prepared to defend their freedom to choose their representatives. They also expect the losers of elections to stand aside and let the winners assume the authority conferred by the majority. Similarly, cheating is discouraged. Some ballot-box stuffing occasionally occurs, but when it is uncovered it is rebuked as a disgrace. Nor do politicians routinely poison their rivals. They may seek to destroy their careers, but putting them in the grave, as did Renaissance grandees, is thought to be immoral.

Less well established, but clearly developing toward a nearly universal ambition is personal growth. The utility of becoming as stronger is, within a professionalizing community, difficult to doubt. A mounting dependence on decentralized self-direction makes it increasingly important that those delegated authority be capable of handling it. It is also progressively more apparent that those who wish to move up the social ladder must be capable of winning. If they are to be respected as leaders, when they are
challenged, they need to be adept at prevailing in tests of strength. Both self-knowledge and a willingness to undergo resocialization can no longer be regarded as the province of an elite minority. Since middle class professionalization is about broadly distributing power; ever greater numbers of individuals must acquire the personal skills to wield it competently.

As has already been observed, the pivotal skill required for personal growth is self-control. Proficient self-direction is not possible for those given to acting on impulse. Unless they are emotionally mature enough to contemplate what they do before springing into action, their decisions are apt to be inadequate. When it comes to attempting to prove superior strength, half-baked strategies typically lead to personal defeats. By the same token, when it comes to designing communal activities, undisciplined leadership is perilous. It is for good reason that most people are not prepared to submit to the authority of loose cannons. They recognize that an inability to manage one’s internal environment is correlated with an inability to assess what needs to be done on a larger scale. Once more the media icons are deceptive. Contemporary entertainers seem to be celebrated for their spontaneity. An ability to portray an unmediated authenticity is esteemed as evidence of their humanity. Nonetheless celebrity must not be confused with social power. Being someone with whom others can identify ought not be conflated with leadership. Even today leaders are chosen for their propriety, not because they are wild partygoers.

Closely associated with self-control is personal responsibility. When asked what they value, most Americans routinely endorse this virtue. They want to be led by people they trust. If someone is going to make plans to which they submit, they would like this
person to care about doing it right. They want him or her to be aware of the consequences of particular choices and to seek the best outcomes. This person ought also be someone who is willing to take the blame for mistakes. Potential leaders who lack the courage to handle criticism are suspected of an eagerness to pass the buck. More concerned with escaping punishment than making good choices, their attention is occupied by the wrong matters. They will likewise be under suspicion of cowardice. Since cowardice is associated with fear, and intense fear is linked with clouded thinking, they are thought to be too insecure to deal with grave uncertainties. Yes it is true that more people claim to cherish responsibility than live by it; nevertheless it continues to be sought.

It should also go without saying that a professionalizing society honors personal merit. On a certain plane this is actually true. But merit has also been dismissed as a fraud. One of the reasons so many working class children aspire to become rock and roll musicians is that they do not believe that this takes a special talent. Heavy metal, grunge, and hip-hop are perceived to be more about attitude than musicianship. The most outrageous acts are understood to be the ones that garner the most attention. Said to be valued for their originality, rock stars are really lionized for a brash oppositionalism. Merit is more substantial. It is demonstrated in quality work, not merely the appearance of quality. In a Gesellschaft society where people do not always have the direct access to evaluate excellence, they must frequently make do with an outward show of distinction. The growing prominence of impersonal forms of communication has exacerbated this tendency. When all one sees is the flash and glitter of the cinema or the thump and dazzle of the concert stage, the surface sheen can obscure the shallowness of the product.
Special effects take the place of profound insights, but few notice this as they luxuriate in the warm fuzziness of an effective diversion.

Even so, quality matters. Most of those who deserve the authority of professionalism eventually demonstrate their superior skills in the consequences of their decisions. Abraham Lincoln long ago warned that you can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but not all of the people all of the time. The same applies to professional merit. Razzle-dazzle may bamboozle countless people into believing that expertise is merely a scam to achieve power. They will have noted that at times a vaunted expertise is all façade and little substance. But they will be wrong if they believe that expertise is only a matter of perception. They will be even more wrong if they succeed in devaluing merit. Fortunately, this will not occur. The failures that would flow from disregarding competence would be too severe for even a celebrity-obsessed society to endure.

If appearances can be over-valued, so can dishonesty. Middle class morality, like all morality, is forged in the white heat of social experience. Under these circumstances, the temporary renown of fame will eventually be revealed to be less substantial than genuine expertise. Ultimately, so too will the lesser value of insincere communications. Nowadays an ability to manipulate others is perceived as admirable. It is venerated as clever. Advertisers, political spin-doctors, and intellectual snake oil salesmen compete with one another to see who can set the public agenda. In some quarters, it has become customary to assert that no one is ever really honest. Everyone is alleged to have an image to sell, some more effectively than others. Communications are portrayed as a matter of framing messages rather than of getting them right. The post-modernists go so
far as to tell us there is no right or wrong—except, that is, for what they say. Only there is a right and wrong, and the people who are honest most of the time deserve our trust. What needs to develop, but has not yet come to pass, is a consensus that honesty warrants respect. Too frequently, cunning manipulations are rewarded. When this occurs, there needs to be a general revulsion. Although on a personal level, integrity is admired; the same has to take place on a communal stage. In the long run, this is essential if demagoguery is to be contained.

One of the additional virtues of personal integrity is that it helps to sustain justice. If there is to be a universal moral order, it is crucial to be able to determine who has done what. Social sanctions cannot be effectively applied if manipulated appearances can divert people from their proper object. In this case, a professionalization of morality is contingent upon applying the same rules to everyone. People cannot be treated differently because they are mistakenly believed to be different. Such favoritism creates grievances that provoke unnecessary conflicts. When it is difficult to determine where the merit lies because perceptions have been distorted, who deserves to win a test of strength can be obscured. If this translates into special treatment for some individuals, the whole notion of honoring expertise and internal motivation is placed in jeopardy. Justice is about a transparently fair playing field where the best decision-makers are allowed to percolate to the top because they are best. Thomas Jefferson promoted an “aristocracy of merit,” but this would be impossible without agreed upon standards that are honestly and impartially enforced. In fact, we are better at this universalism than in the past, but improvements remain possible.
Sometimes capitalism is condemned as inherently conservative. It is alleged that marketplace economics is the enemy of change. Once more the conventional wisdom, as packaged by neo-Marxists, is dramatically wrong. It was the ascendancy of the techno-commercial society that first introduced the notion of progress. In former times, most educated people desired nothing better than a return to a presumed golden age. They wished to recapture the glory that was Rome or the primitive democracy of folk societies. Few imagined that they could achieve more than their heroic ancestors. It was literally a century ago when some scientists opined that everything that could be invented already had. Indeed, the same year that powered heavier than air flight occurred, it was dismissed as impossible. Now with rockets to the moon and hand-held computers everyday experiences, we expect change to continue. Not only that; we expect change to accelerate and believe most transformations will be improvements. For us, history has a forward direction, and it is upward. As with our predecessors, dislocations in our personal lives can be disconcerting, yet we look to them with eager anticipation. Progress is a modern and a professional value. Firmly established in our psyches, we foresee many social, as well as technological, innovations. Most of these, especially the social ones, will probably be less dramatic than we have been led to believe, but their impact will be cumulative. Genuine social improvements tend to be ameliorative rather than revolutionary. Small advances tested in the crucible of daily life eventually snowball into larger ones. Oddly, the process whereby extremes are smoothed out benefits from a piece of ancient advice. The Greeks, millennia ago, counseled “moderation in all things.” They warned against dramatic novelties that precipitate
unanticipated disasters. We too are in danger of an excessive optimism that cannot verify its predictions. This too is a truth middle class morality must incorporate.

One of the contributions of liberal thinking to moral developments has been an emphasis on tolerance. Although sometimes identified with the permissiveness of relativism or the pluralism of multiculturalism, open-mindedness need not be confused with either. Tolerance of religious, ethnic, racial or gender differences within a society that values competent decision-making should come naturally. Because competence is not consistently connected with any of these categories, those who confound group membership with merit are apt to succumb to inefficiency. They select the wrong people for important tasks, with the consequence that they lose out in competition with less biased rivals. Tolerance is good business in a techno-commercial environment. So too is individualism. Assessing people for who they are, rather than who their ancestors were, makes for more accurate judgments. With all the tales of woe about an alleged American bigotry, it is easy to overlook the degree to which social justice has prevailed. Racism and sexism have declined. And they will continue to decline. No longer do most people assume that if you are different, you are automatically inferior.

Which brings us to one of the most contentious issues of the culture wars. Occasionally the term “family values” is regarded as if it were synonymous with reactionary fundamentalism. Nevertheless, as should have been made clear earlier on, supporting family integrity is not identical with supporting the patriarchal family of yore. Our needs for voluntary intimacy and socialization for self-direction have seen to that. While the tasks assigned to the nuclear family have become more constricted, they remain critical. This means that although arbitrary paternal power will decline, norms of
heterosexual faithfulness and parental care will not. Human love is not a myth. It is real and powerful. It is also different from raw sex. Sexuality matters, but its vulgar manifestations are detrimental to the modern companionate family and hence should eventually be curbed. What will probably happen is that our understanding of interpersonal attachments and emotional socialization will become more sophisticated. As we better understand the limits of the human heart and physiological lust, we will better tailor emerging moral standards to promote what works.

Lastly there is the matter of religion. It too has become contentious. Conservatives often assert that morality is not possible without religious faith, whereas liberals believe that it is not feasible without a more secular orientation. Once again, both factions are in error. Either outlook can, in fact, promote a commitment to morality. They both provide guidance to individuals who find them congenial. Moreover, neither seems to have the potential to defeat the other, nor would society benefit from such a victory. In the long run, the two will, therefore, subsist side by side. Just as the Protestant Reformation eventuated in a tolerance of doctrinal differences, the Middle Class Revolution should produce an acceptance of differences in religiosity. Believers and non-believers can nonetheless agree to the same professionalized moral consensus. The reasons for their commitments may differ, but the consequences can be equivalent. With both influenced by the same social developments, what they demand may eventually be impossible to tell apart, except for the language in which it is expressed.

A Professionalized Orientation

The impending dominance of professionalization will make unprecedented demands of the self-motivated experts at its core. As they assume the reigns of
leadership, they will have to come to terms with the requirements of an obdurate reality, the bruising conditions of vigorous competition, and the limitations of what is achievable for them and their communities. Progress cannot bring perfection for anyone, never mind everyone. The cradle-to-grave welfare state has proven a chimera that will eventually dissipate like a fantastical dream. Visions of one great loving family should give way to a more accurate assessment of what is possible, given the constraints of both human nature and social coordination. This implies that both culturally and structurally people must grow accustomed to coping with uncertainties that will never cease to exist. This, to be sure, takes courage; lots of it. The fact that things can, and will, go wrong requires that more of us master our fears. As expert role players dependent upon the competence and good will of other expert role players, there is only so much we can control. At some point, we must make a leap of faith and endure what comes.

A professionalized orientation includes effort, competence, and self-direction. It embraces self-knowledge, self-discipline, and personal responsibility. It likewise attempts to do what is best, but is prepared to fix what goes wrong. Since the good life entails an ability to engage in intimate sharing, as well as to tolerate existential loneliness, our successors will have to do both. There will never be a final victory for “the good.” There will never be a time when suffering disappears. Human existence is at best a mixed blessing. It always has been and always will be. Those who expect a revolution to create a heaven on earth are bound to be disappointed. Like the rest of us, they will have to cope with the minor and major irritations to which flesh is heir.

But this does not mean nothing can be done. The inevitable problems do not vitiate the possibility of improvements. Human society can indeed become more
professionalized. A greater proportion of its members can move toward a self-motivated expertise. They can thereby participate in making incremental advances. Nonetheless, conflicts over what is to be done, and by whom, will persist. There will still be winners and losers. There will still be cheaters and murderers. On the other hand, morality can be scaled to emerging conditions. The rules and values we enforce can better fit the circumstances in which we live. This should make it more likely that our descendants will fulfill their individual and communal needs. Disappointments will, of course, remain. But the additional possibilities within a more decentralized society should provide some consolation.

There is also the interesting quirk that, with respect to morality, one of the weaker social forces can improve the operation of an intermediate one. A more accurate cognitive understanding of who we are, and what is possible for us, is of itself a slender reed. Merely comprehending what we are up against can only go so far. When this is coupled with morality, however, the impact is multiplied. The emotional neutrality of knowledge is enhanced by emotional imperatives negotiated within an environment of more accurate information. As larger numbers of people understand the implications of honesty, responsibility, and self-control within a techno-commercial community, they are more likely to demand these of each other. Greater numbers will seek personal growth, universal standards of tolerance, and family solidarity. Needless to say, the true believers will still be entangled in web of failed prophecies. They will continue to concoct rationalizations for why their predictions did not work out, but a growing accumulation of social knowledge is likely to impress the less ideologically committed. No longer moved by fairy tales about a coming utopia, they will come closer to insisting upon what is
possible. And when they do, they may smooth out the rough edges of potentially extreme social negotiations. If so, the future should offer us a gentler ride than the one our ancestors endured.
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