Conservative Claims of Cultural Oppression

On the Nature and Origins of Conservaphobia

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Preface

William Connolly writes that the crucial line of political division in America today is between those who "infuse a large quotient of care for the future of the world" into their desires, identities, and politics and those who instead "infuse a drive to revenge against difference and the weight the future imposes on the present."[1] This latter contingent of Americans has collaborated to create an "evangelical-capitalist resonance machine" comprised of an ideologically diverse alliance of capitalist elites, resentful secular males, and evangelical Christians.[2] These constituencies vary significantly in their belief-systems. But their sometimes incongruous ideologies are held together by a common resentment-based spirituality that smooths over doctrinal differences among this coalition's diverse membership, uniting them in such causes as militant opposition to regulating SUVs, intense support for capital punishment and reckless wars, tolerance of gross economic inequality and state torture, and the demonization of those who embrace neither Christianity nor unfettered capitalism.[3] Unrelated through these various causes may appear, they are but different manifestations of an underlying ethos that operates through, but is ultimately irreducible to, the distinct belief-systems of its adherents. "Each constituency," writes Connolly, "suppresses its differences of belief from the others to accentuate the affinities of spirituality between them,"[4] with the result that "[e]ach spiritual constituency amplifies dispositions in the other, until a resonance machine emerges that is larger and more intense than the sum of its parts."[5] These Americans are united, not by any common set of ideas, but by a common pathology, a nihilistic drive to foment rancor and division, an inexorable hatred for the forces of hope and progress that has become a perverse source of spiritual fulfillment. Such is the powerful drug that intoxicates the American Right.

Connolly gives vent to typical liberal sentiments. But where liberals see rancor and nihilism, conservatives see resistance and dissidence. They see the anger Connolly describes, not as spite and obstreperousness, a symptom of festering psychic conflicts, but as long overdue pushback against the cultural oppression that conservatives have long suffered at the hands of

[1] William E. Connolly, "Belief, Spirituality, and Time," in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, eds. Michael Warner, Jonathan Vanantwerpen, and Craig Calhoun (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), pg. 140.
[2] Ibid., pgs. 140-142.
[3] Ibid., pg. 142.
[4] Ibid., pg. 140.
[5] Ibid., pg. 141.

people like Connolly, the proverbial "liberal elites," who have a vested interest in denigrating their grievances as raw, unappeasable irascibility. An "evangelical-capitalist resonance machine" there may be, but conservatives insist that this resonance is being fed by their cultural oppression at the hands of liberals.

In what does this alleged oppression consist? Conservatives will frame the nature of their predicament in a variety of ways. But the core of their common grievance is aptly encapsulated in Joel Kotkin's indictment of the "progressive Clerisy":

> In ways not seen since at least the McCarthy era, Americans are finding themselves increasingly constrained by a rising class—what I call the progressive Clerisy—that accepts no dissent from its basic tenets. Like the First Estate in pre-revolutionary France, the Clerisy increasingly exercises its power to constrain dissenting views, whether on politics, social attitudes or science.
>
> The rise of today's Clerisy stems from the growing power and influence of its three main constituent parts: the creative elite of media and entertainment, the academic community, and the high-level government bureaucracy.
>
> The Clerisy operates on very different principles than its rival power brokers, the oligarchs of finance, technology or energy. The power of the knowledge elite does not stem primarily from money, but in persuading, instructing and regulating the rest of society. Like the British Clerisy or the old church-centered French First Estate, the contemporary Clerisy increasingly promotes a single increasingly parochial ideology and, when necessary, has the power to marginalize, or excommunicate, miscreants from the public sphere.[6]

Unlike the old French First Estate, the progressive Clerisy is not an official institution with a formal membership list. But conservative claimants of cultural oppression believe that it is all the more insidious for this reason. Enjoying the plausible deniability provided by a façade of democratic idealism, the liberal elites have quietly colonized a host of powerful social institutions—the judiciary, academia, public schools, large foundations, the media, entertainment, and others—through which they now pursue unofficially what earlier clerisies had to pursue officially. They do not marginalize or excommunicate in the name of some codified orthodoxy like Catholic teaching or Talmudic law. But conservatives believe that the cumulative social prestige arrogated by this "rising class" is the functional equivalent of such an orthodoxy, endowing the liberal elites with a special power to cut off debate and silence dissent. Seeking above all to maintain this power, this new secular priesthood will badger, scold, and bully all who defy it. And this means

[6] http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/06/07/watch-what-you-say-the-new-liberal-power-elite-won-t-tolerate-dissent.html

conservatives. If the latter strike liberal professors like Connolly as angry and obstreperous, this is as a natural human reaction to such a regime, a response to provocations whose very existence the elites decline to acknowledge.

Conservatives feel culturally oppressed because they are persuaded that the official face of contemporary liberalism conceals an agenda that is culturally and morally "thicker" than the supposedly "neutral" abstractions of freedom and equality through which liberals formally define themselves. Liberals may hold themselves out as selfless defenders of the public interest combatting the narrow prejudice and egoism of retrograde conservatives. But conservatives retort that these pretensions are an ideological screen behind which liberals foist a parochial vision of human virtue on an unwilling populace in a wide range of spheres, from politically correct education to avant-garde entertainment to creative constitutional jurisprudence. Conservatives can detect the machinations of a "progressive Clerisy" where liberals see only their principled policy positions because they regard liberalism as an all-encompassing vision and ethos, and not just a narrowly political creed. Much like patriarchy for feminists, Eurocentrism for post-colonial multiculturalists, or the bourgeoisie for Marxists, liberalism as now viewed by conservatives is an overarching cultural narrative of which the policy prescriptions are only symptoms. Liberalism is not just a political orientation, but a totalistic worldview and way of being that has crept into the American psyche itself and can always be discovered at work in the seeming trifles of social life and pop culture—suffocating conservatives from all sides. Liberalism is not sustained by reason and argument, but by the mores and pieties that liberals have quietly entrenched as the unquestioned, taken-for-granted background of things—a parochial ethos into which the populace has become progressively indoctrinated by small, often imperceptible increments. In issuing their claims of cultural oppression, conservatives seek to awaken their fellow Americans to this hidden reality.

While liberals have successfully pegged conservatism as authoritarian in the public mind, conservatives insist that the authoritarian tendencies of so-called liberals run much deeper than theirs. Diagnosing the roots of liberal hostility to home-schooling, Kevin Williamson observes:

> The Left's organizing principle is control, and the possibility that children might commonly be raised outside of its control matrix is an existential threat from the progressive point of view. Institutions such as free markets and free speech terrify progressives, because they are the result of arrangements in which nobody is in control… Home-schooling isn't for everybody, but every home-school student, like every firearm in private hands, is a quiet

> little declaration of independence. It's no accident that the people who want to seize your guns are also the ones who want to seize your children.[7]

Like many on the Left, conservative claimants of cultural oppression believe that "the personal is the political." Given liberals' insatiable lust for control, what were once purely private preferences on how to best educate one's children have now become political acts—"quiet little declarations of independence" through which to hold off liberal hegemony for another day. Conservative claims of cultural oppression seek, not to highlight liberalism's failings as a political philosophy, but to expose its transgressions as a *social practice* that works to demoralize and delegitimize those who remain loyal to "traditional American values"—gun owners, home schoolers, Trump supporters, Fox News viewers, housewives, church goers, the police, ranchers, small business entrepreneurs, and others. The ordered liberty of the conservative is a fundamental threat to liberal control and so must be slandered at every turn as a danger to the civilized order, the idea of which has now become identified with liberalism itself. If liberals oppose the home-schooling to which some conservative parents are drawn, this is because those parents cannot be counted upon to civilize their children in the manner prescribed—that is, to rear them as liberals. That is why those children must be seized for seven hours a day.

Conservative claimants of cultural oppression see themselves, not only as the losers in a "war of ideas" that was always rigged against them, but furthermore as a quasi-ethnic group being encroached upon by a foreign colonial power that is endlessly contemptuous of their native folkways and bent on replacing these with its own arbitrary cultural preferences. The *National Review* laments:

> The crusade against private gun ownership is, for the Left, a kulturkampf. The sort of people who are likely to own or enjoy firearms are the sort of people who are most intensely detested by the social tendency that produced Barack Obama et al. — atavistic throwbacks and "bitter clingers," as somebody once put it. The Left's jihad against hunters, rural people, shooting enthusiasts, and Second Amendment partisans will do effectively nothing to prevent lunatics from shooting up schools or shopping malls. That they would exploit the victims of these awful crimes in the service of what amounts to a very focused form of snobbery is remarkable.[8]

Notwithstanding their ostensible egalitarianism and pragmatism, the liberal elites are committed to their own particular brand of identity politics, complete with its own special kind of otherization. The "bitter clingers" who stand in the way of gun control are not merely criticized as misguided,

[7] http://www.nationalreview.com/article/389680/they-are-coming-your-children-kevin-d-williamson
[8] http://www.nationalreview.com/article/425018/umpqua-shooting-statistics

but despised as occupants of a lower moral and cognitive order, atavisms of a barbaric past that liberals alone have superseded. Whereas now eclipsed traditionalist hierarchies revolved around perceived differences in things like sexual purity, work ethic, religious affiliation, family pedigree, and ethnic bona fides, the new status hierarchy of liberalism is rooted in "cognitive elitism" and centers around a morally charged division between those who are "aware" and those who are not. The former have the psychic maturity to accede to liberalism. The latter lack it and must be reformed. This kind of identity politics will always take refuge in some pragmatic-sounding pretext—e.g., the dangers of firearms or the drawbacks of home schooling. But conservatives dismiss this pragmatism as an elaborate façade for a status hierarchy that liberals refuse to acknowledge. If this hierarchy goes overlooked by "thinking people," by the "educated," this is because liberals' near-monopoly on the means of cultural reproduction allows their own kind of identity politics pass under the radar, camouflaged in an aura of thoughtfulness and education. Thoughtfulness and education have themselves become ideological tools of liberalism, mere badges of honor to be conferred on some and withheld from others.

Conservatives believe they see through this illusion, however, and that the threat represented by this insight propels liberals to denigrate, not only conservative thought, but conservatives themselves. Alan Groves writes that "[b]y nature, many conservatives are placid, compliant, and respectful toward others. For the most part, we are civil, patriotic Americans who simply want to be left alone to be with our families (and yes, Mr. President, our guns and religion)." And so conservatives are left speechless and stupefied by the "never-ending onslaught of personal attacks, lies, and name-calling" that the Left rains down upon them.[9] Whatever their internal disagreements, conservative claimants of cultural oppression are united in the conviction that liberalism's rationalistic façade conceals a campaign of psychological warfare aiming to undermine the self-confidence of the conservative culture and supplant it with the liberal one. Hence the profound incongruity between the good-natured innocuousness of ordinary conservatives and the venomous vitriol to which liberals would subject them.

In carrying out these verbal pogroms, liberals dismiss conservatives' deepest convictions as outward manifestations of unconscious hostilities—not positions to be understood but symptoms to be diagnosed and diseases to be cured. While liberals may characterize their antagonism toward conservatism as just vigorous disagreement with a set of failed ideas,

[9] http://thecollegeconservative.com/2012/03/27/conservaphobia/

conservatives believe that this antagonism bespeaks something more visceral and reflexive, a primordial animus toward conservative identities. The real target is not anything the conservative may have actually said or done, but his basic God-fearing and freedom-loving nature, which the liberal elites despise as vulgar and retrograde. Hence the ignominious regime of mockery, slander, and intimidation that bullies conservatives into silence and submission. Knowing that liberals will seize on any pretext to slander them as bigots of one kind or another, conservatives and the ordinary Americans they champion have been gradually reduced to quiescence, rendered passive and deferential before liberals, who are privileged to define society's images of conservatives and conservatism.

This being their predicament, conservatives feel they must first overthrow liberalism's cultural hegemony before they can defeat it politically. To this end, they strive to expose what they contend is the Orwellian fraudulence of liberals' claims to moral and intellectual superiority. Jerry Shenk writes in *The American Thinker*:

> Objective? Diverse? Inclusive? Thoughtful? Reality-based? Benevolent? Not really. Progressives -- liberals -- are the worst offenders of their own axioms when they talk about the "evils" of those who dispute liberal versions of facts, policy, or, especially, morality. The bigotry liberals direct toward those with whom they merely disagree is staggering.[10]

Having anointed themselves the guardians of reason and enlightenment, liberals enjoy the plausible deniability to implement a sectarian agenda under the cover of universalistic virtue, like objectivity, inclusivity, benevolence, and so forth. But conservatives charge that this aura of superior virtue is only a sophisticated social illusion, the dishonest secular façade for moralistic or quasi-religious impulses, a hidden will to power that seeks only to uphold one parochial social identity at the expense of its rivals. To this end, liberals have projected their own moral and intellectual vices onto conservatives, who are now held uniquely responsible for what are universal human failings. Conservatives have thus become the hated *Other* of liberalism, despised as uniquely parochial, exclusionary, thoughtless, fantasy-prone, and mean-spirited. They are modern-day scapegoats, convenient repositories for liberals' own sins, the one stubborn obstacle standing in the way of the liberal utopia that their final defeat would usher. The liberal virtues are in truth gestures of identity-assertion designed to come at the expense of conservative ordinary

[10] http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2012/08/liberal_bigotry.html

Americans. Imagining themselves uniquely objective, inclusive, thoughtful, and so on, liberals have cultivated an automatic social reflex that dismisses conservative opinions as mental or emotional immaturity, mindless reptilian instinct, unthinking fear and hatred that are easily recognized as such by more evolved souls. With this social reflex having become integral to the liberal identity and with this identity now woven into the fabric of American life, conservatives find themselves suffocated by an insidious and pervasive conservaphobia, the last socially acceptable bigotry.

* * *

In all these grievances, conservatism appears to have absorbed the moral and intellectual reflexes of the Left into itself. For the essential argument of conservative claims of cultural oppression is that liberals have yet to extend their vaunted ideals—tolerance, diversity, understanding, etc.—to conservatives, the new pariahs of liberalism. Motley though these claims are, their unifying impetus is always to place the Left's historic enemies—conservatives and especially conservative Christians—in the role which the Left has traditionally reserved for conservatism's alleged victims—racial minorities, women, gays, and colonized people—while placing liberals in the role to which they have customarily relegated conservatives, dogmatic stalwarts defending their benighted, self-serving ways at the expense of other people's freedom and dignity. The Left strives to expose the inequalities that privilege men over women, whites over blacks, and straights over gays. But conservative claimants of cultural oppression strive to expose the inequalities that privilege liberals over conservatives and thereby to remedy what they judge is an inequitable distribution of social and cultural capital in America today. Upsetting this status quo means exposing how the moral and intellectual failings that liberals would associate with conservatives are being subtly reproduced in liberals' own treatment of conservatives. Liberals must be made answerable to their own professed ideals, which it has now fallen upon conservatives to uphold.

Conservative claims of cultural oppression seek to *blur* what liberals accept as a clear-cut demarcation between Left and Right. The Clerisy may think itself "progressive." But Kotkin suggests that its essential impulses were also those of the pre-revolutionary French First Estate, a paradigmatically right-wing institution in opposition to which the Left has defined itself

historically ever since the Left-Right dichotomy was born out of the French Revolution. With the political landscape thus redefined, it is liberals, not conservatives, who are stodgy defenders of the old order—and conservatives, not liberals, who are defiant outsiders speaking truth to power. The conservative claimant of cultural oppression seeks, not to defend some traditional "order of things" before which all upstanding, God-fearing citizens must kneel, but to unearth the *subterranean structures* of liberal discourse, to expose how that discourse naturalizes the unearned privileges of liberals as the timeless order of things, passing off a contingent status hierarchy as reason itself. In claiming cultural oppression, conservatives hold themselves out as the counter-culture to the dominant liberal culture, the last holdouts of resistance against the false consciousness of left-liberal hegemony.

This is the nature of conservatives' cultural oppression, or perceived cultural oppression. And I have written this book in the conviction that we cannot truly comprehend the passions that drive American politics without first comprehending these passions' wellsprings in this sense of oppression—and, just as crucially, in liberals' perennial incredulity before this sense of oppression, which they reflexively dismiss as an irrational distraction from the "real issues." Conservative claims of cultural oppression are not always labeled as such. But this clash of sensibilities and worldviews is always lurking there as the quiet yet all-important background of all the ostensibly narrower disagreements, imbuing these with a special symbolic resonance that is always amplifying the stakes and intensifying the conflict. And yet the origins and meaning of that special resonance have not received the intellectual attention they are due.

The conventional wisdom of liberals is that conservatism thrives on vague cultural resentments that duplicitously channel essentially economic grievances into symbolic obsessions with the depredations of an imaginary cabal of liberal elites, whose haughty pretentiousness is speciously contrasted with the basic goodness and authenticity of the conservative ordinary American, the much beleaguered salt of the earth. In this way do conservative propagandists divert the attention of these ordinary Americans away from the transgressions of their real ruling class, the business elites, who have known how to harness social conservatism to their own advantage. Liberals believe this diagnosis is amply supported by the historical record, by the story of the modern conservative movement, as well as by common sense about the average American's real interests. The hypocrisy and opportunism of conservative leaders seem like prime evidence for

the contrived nature of cultural wars rhetoric as the cheapest form of identity politics, a new opiate of the masses to which a sizable segment of the American electorate is now addicted.

But perhaps this received wisdom oversimplifies and leaves out something crucial, something that once recognized would place conservatives' cultural grievances in a new light that problematizes the conventional liberal diagnosis. As uncontroversial as this diagnosis may be in "sophisticated" circles, this very sophistication has yet to be scrutinized philosophically. And this is precisely what I endeavor to do here, by examining the philosophical assumptions about human nature and history that are built into conservative claims of cultural oppression—and, correlatively, the assumptions built into liberals' perennial incredulity toward these claims. What do liberals presuppose when they dismiss these claims as disingenuous? And what would have to be the case for them to qualify as "sincere"? As we noted, conservatives see resistance and dissidence where liberals see rancor and nihilism. Is there a truth of the matter here, or are these incommensurable perspectives that cannot be adjudicated rationally? And is this in fact a clash of "perspectives," or is it more fundamentally a conflict between different ways of being human? These are only a few of the many questions raised by conservative claims of cultural oppression.

Kotkin contends that the progressive Clerisy "operates on very different principles than its rival power brokers" because it wields, not economic power, but the power to regulate, instruct, and persuade. And the liberal reflex is to dismiss this latter form of power as somehow less real, as "merely symbolic," by comparison with the more "tangible" power wielded by conservative business interests. But perhaps this seemingly "hard-nosed" conception of power is an ideological ruse that grants liberal power the very plausible deniability that aggrieves conservatives. The old French First estate was not impotent just because it lacked the "tangible" power of the sword, for it exercised influence in many other ways that were not the less real for being indirect or diffuse. So what are the philosophical grounds for dichotomizing between merely symbolic grievances and substantive self-interest, and what becomes of the liberal self-understanding once this dichotomy collapses? The upshot might be to blur any clear-cut demarcations between Left and Right and provide conservatives' special brand of class struggle with a new plausibility. Perhaps the boundary line between Left and Right is on some level indeterminate. Perhaps liberalism produces its own conservatism just as conservatism produces its own liberalism. Liberals may dismiss conservative claims of cultural oppression as histrionics and contrivance. But as we will see again

and again in multifarious contexts, these claims raise questions that are profoundly philosophical, with implications that go to the heart of what it is to be human.

Liberals dismiss the conservative appropriation of liberalism as the politically opportunistic swiping of progressive lingo. But our question here is whether this appropriation admits of an intellectually serious defense once suitably refined and reformulated, whether conservative claims of cultural oppression are broadcasting some "higher truth" that withstands all the usual liberal retorts. Conservative depictions of liberalism's transgressions strike liberals as downright hallucinatory. But as we already noted, "liberalism" seems to carry broader connotations for conservatives than for liberals. This raises the possibility that the liberal self-understanding is on some level *under-descriptive* and that conservatives' cultural grievances harbor the seeds of a thicker, more penetrating description.

If liberals cannot be brought to acknowledge these grievances, this could be because their very identities blind them to that to which the grievances are *reactions*. It is a perennial theme of the Left that oppressed groups can perceive iniquities that dominant groups are disposed to overlook. And so the intellectually consistent liberal must ask whether the relationship between liberals and conservatives in America today might be yet another instance of this phenomenon. Perhaps liberals have transgressed against conservatives in ways that their very "liberalism" conceals from them. Liberals may dismiss conservative claims of cultural oppression as empty posturing, but is it not to be expected that a ruling class will thus dismiss the outcries of an oppressed group? Liberals' bemused incredulity toward conservative grievances may itself be a natural byproduct of the very oppression being alleged, because the dominant culture's language and concepts will always privilege the perspectives of its ruling elites, who shape the "common sense" to which oppressed groups are made to answer. The critical theorists of the Left have long made such arguments on behalf of racial minorities, women, and gays. Our question is whether they can also be made on behalf of conservatives.

* * *

These are the perplexities to which this book is devoted. The purpose of Part I, Chapters 1-3, is to outline the general worldview of conservative claims of cultural oppression. While their basic features are by now familiar to most Americans, I work to dissolve this easy familiarity and unearth these claims' philosophical dimensions. Chapter 1 seeks to achieve a clear view of the

field: What exactly defines a conservative claim cultural oppression and what distinguishes such claims from other expressions of conservatism? I argue that conservative claims of cultural oppression are what must become of conservatism once it absorbs the moral and intellectual reflexes of the Left into itself, and that this absorption has fundamentally altered the nature of conservatism, imbuing it with a new spirit that defies old stereotypes.

Chapter 2 then proceeds to outline these claims' recurring themes—including conservatives' understanding of modern American history, their sense of liberalism as covertly "elitist," and their sense of themselves as outsiders who have torn away liberalism's veil of illusion and now speak truth to a power that will not speak its name. Conservative claimants of cultural oppression are persuaded that liberalism is surreptitiously "moralistic" notwithstanding its pretensions to cosmopolitan sophistication, that many "ordinary Americans" have unwittingly internalized the liberal dispensation in contravention of their authentic conservativism, and that liberal intellectualism is a fraudulent pseudo-intellectualism, merely a social performance through which to arrogate undeserved cultural capital. We will seek to understand just why conservatives hold these beliefs, in the process separating their wheat from their chaff. Connolly holds that these beliefs are united by rancor and nihilism, but I will be examining their *conceptual* affinities and the ways in which they have absorbed the countercultural impulses of the Left.

Chapter 3 continues the discussion of Chapter 2 but with a specific focus on conservatives' sense that liberals have projected their own moral and intellectual failings onto them. Where liberals condemn conservatives as the mysterious relics of a benighted, bygone past, conservatives respond that liberals are the true atavisms—crypto-fascists, crypto-racists, crypto-aristocrats, crypto-imperialists, crypto-theocrats, and even crypto-conservatives. In all these cases as in countless others, a stereotype that has been historically pinned on conservatives is reformulated and then "thrown back" at liberals. Conservatives confront what they believe is an iniquitous social hierarchy that always credits liberals with reflectiveness, discernment, and empathy while branding them as smug, mean-spirited, and authoritarian. Overthrowing this hierarchy means exposing liberals as the greatest violators of their own highest ideals, pretenders and usurpers who may be condemned on their own terms.

With this groundwork laid, Part II, Chapters 4-6, proceeds to introduce a philosophical theory of conservatives' cultural oppression, to unearth the understandings of human nature and history that would provide their grievances with a new intelligibility. This, I argue, requires

conceptualizing liberalism and conservatism, not just as competing ideas, but also as competing forms of *consciousness*. It is this latter competition that explains both conservatives' sense of cultural oppression and why its nature has proven so difficult to clarify. But clarify is precisely what I do.

Chapter 4 argues that, with the liberal consciousness having been more extensively "modernized," liberals are positioned to *sublimate, intellectualize, and etherealize* their illiberal or moralistic impulses—and thus disguise them from view. As relative "pre-moderns," however, conservatives are not so privileged, and so their illiberalism is more readily discernible to the naked eye. This is the root of their cultural oppression because it is this advantage that allows liberals to project their own authoritarianism onto conservatives and invoke the power of the state and other institutions to undermine *other people's* illiberal hierarchies while their own such hierarchies remain shielded from analogous forms of criticism, regulation, and interference. What liberals hold out as their superior virtue is underwritten by this liberal privilege.

The liberal elites believe they stand above a retrograde conservatism because they believe their Enlightenment ideals liberate them from the various "hero-systems" to which conservatives remain beholden. Hero-systems are social teleologies, systems of collective meaning-production, and liberals see conservatives as compromised by an atavistic attraction to these relics of a benighted pre-modernity. However, the conservative suspicion is that liberalism is a hero-system in disguise, a hero-system that stays concealed behind a secular façade of enlightenment, pragmatism, and utilitarianism. Liberals may wish to see themselves as promoting ordinary human fulfillment shorn of any higher metaphysical aspirations, but conservatives perceive that liberalism is unbeknownst to itself motivated by a religious impulse and spiritual ideal that plays itself out through the medium of ostensibly secular goals. Liberalism is a hero-system that disguises itself as the transcendence of all hero-systems.

This contemporary truth, I argue, is the legacy of modernity's forgotten origins. If conservatives refuse to accept liberalism at face value, this is because they are viscerally attuned to its actual historical underpinnings. These consist, not in Enlightenment pure and simple, but in the *secularization of the religious asceticism* that laid the foundations of the modern world. This is why "progressive Clerisy" is in fact an apt label for the liberal elites, who embody impulses that first germinated in the West's pre-liberal past. The aspiration to "rise above" the merely human was once conceived in expressly theological terms, as fealty to the City of God over the City of

Man. Today, this aspiration has become secularized and transpires politically and culturally as the imperative to rise above conservatism toward liberalism, affording its adherents a special sense of spiritual purity standing exalted above the fallen realm of conservatism. Thus seen, conservatism is not a competing philosophy to be refuted but an ingrained sinfulness to be exposed and disciplined away. Yet this layer of social meaning is precisely what gets obscured by the Enlightenment narratives that assure liberalism's continued cultural dominance.

The result is the basic inequality that aggrieves conservatives. Whereas the hero-systems of the Right—e.g., "God, Country, and Family"—must operate in full public view, the hero-systems of the Left can operate surreptitiously within insulated institutional enclaves that provide them with a pragmatic veneer. This is what distinguishes the power of the Clerisy from that of its "rival power brokers," who do not enjoy the benefit of this plausible deniability. Hence the proliferation of conservative laments about the cultural decadence of various liberal elite enclaves, like academia, the media, Hollywood, and so forth, which are understood to be perpetuating this inequality and deception. It is these enclaves and the prestige they exude that allow liberals to imagine they have transcended the primitive, often unconscious identity-affirmation needs of conservatives in favor of a new rational autonomy that dispenses with these crutches.

But this self-image is only a liberal privilege and not a bona fide liberal achievement. Liberals have not repudiated illiberal sectarianism as such, but merely invested their sectarianism elsewhere than in, say, the traditional family or patriotic nationalism. The liberal elites have simply "privatized" their conservatism in various professional and cultural milieus, where they can indulge the same all-too-human impulses that the conservative ordinary American must display more openly—and crudely. Exercising far greater control over their cultural environments, the liberal elites are privileged to insulate themselves from whatever might threaten their own identities and thus *provoke* their intolerance. That is why they can be more tolerant, more "open" than conservatives, whose identities are more exposed to social disconfirmation.

Liberals can overlook this inequality because their Enlightenment-centric conception of history casts their liberalism as what naturally ensues from discarding the illusions and confining horizons of a benighted teleological past, of which conservatism is the regrettable contemporary residue. But Chapters 5 and 6 introduce an alternative paradigm of modernity that undermines this self-image and gives credence to conservatives' conviction that liberalism is a covertly sectarian ethos whose "organizing principle is control."

Liberals understand modernity as separated from pre-modernity by differential enlightenment, but the two can also be viewed as separated by differential "civilization." Seen in this light, pre-modern Europeans were defined, not only by their ignorance and superstition, but just as crucially by a personality structure much more given to the merely "animal" in human nature, to a kind of spontaneity and affective oscillation that would be considered abnormal today, a personality capable of experiencing the sacred and being invaded by spirit forces. Pre-moderns were not only ignorant but *unruly*, lacking the panoply of inhibitions now associated with normal adulthood and without our clear sense of the boundaries between inner and outer and between mind and body. Our enlightened modernity first developed, not because science successfully refuted theology, but because a new coalition of religious and secular elites collaborated to impose new disciplines and repressions on human nature in an attempt to uproot this pre-modern default consciousness and train the productive, sober-minded populace presupposed by a modern social order.

These disciplines and repressions have been culturally exalted as the achievement of a historically unprecedented self-possession, self-control, and self-transparency, the liberation of essential human faculties from the teleological illusions in which a benighted past once shackled them. But this self-congratulatory Enlightenment narrative conceals a darker and more complicated story that reveals molding and coercion where liberalism sees only liberation and "awareness." What liberalism upholds as autonomous self-possession is in fact the internalization of the new restraints and inhibitions of the disciplinary society. The modern liberal identity is not an unvarnished naturalistic lucidity, as liberals are wont to see it. For it embodies the contingent historical forces that first generated it, a new uniformization, homogenization, and rationalization that liberalism's Enlightenment narratives conceal or discount. These narratives trace our modern "innerness" to a certain psychic liberation from blind convention. But they overlook that this innerness is a kind of blind convention in its own right, the outcome of the disciplinary molding that quietly undergirds liberal ideals.

Conservatives are intuiting precisely this molding when they claim cultural oppression. Hence their powerful sense that there is something unnatural or inauthentic about liberalism. This conviction may not always be communicated persuasively, but it nonetheless tracks the historical process by which the modern liberal identity was actually shaped. Today's "cultural wars," I argue, are most profoundly viewed as a *contemporary recapitulation* of the struggles by which the

modern first emerged out of the pre-modern, a clash between elites seeking to inculcate the disciplines and repressions of the modern identity and the unwashed masses trying to resist this extirpation of their traditional, often disordered folkways—a role now filled by "traditional American values." If conservatives can feel culturally oppressed by power-hungry, control-obsessed liberals where the latter see only rhetoric and posturing, the reason is that, having less fully internalized the modern ideal of the self, conservatives are more viscerally attuned to its cultural contingency and more averse to the forms of disciplined, disengaged agency into which liberals have been more successfully socialized. Contemporary liberalism represents the apex of the disciplinary impulses that spawned modernity. It is the latest and most extreme outgrowth of the secularization of religious asceticism and the democratization of courtly sociability, the now forgotten pre-Enlightenment roots of progressive sensibilities. What liberals celebrate as their superior "civility" is a modernized and politicized variant of these supposedly superseded impulses. And it is these impulses that fuel "conservaphobia," liberals' reflexive repugnance toward conservativism as a kind of rude and crude animality, a sinful indiscipline and affront to the higher refinement of liberal sensibilities.

This is what conservatives ultimately mean by "political correctness." For the now subterranean historical inheritance described above is what gives liberalism a thicker cultural meaning than the liberal elites can acknowledge. Their Enlightenment-centric self-understanding conceals this thickness, conceals that liberalism is not only a set of principles but also a form of *training*, which is precisely what oppresses conservatives. Politically incorrect gun enthusiasts are the "most intensely detested" of liberalism's many enemies, as *National Review* notes, because they refuse this training, with the result that they now serve liberals as premier social symbols for the unhinged impulsivity and potential violence of the undisciplined, pre-modern self lacking the disengaged self-control and self-possession of the modern liberal identity. Having defined themselves in opposition to this barbaric past, liberals must shame and stigmatize all who would remind them of it. Conservatism and conservatives are replete with such reminders, and this is what provokes conservaphobia.

Conservatives may hold themselves out as civilization's defenders—"placid, compliant, and respectful toward others" as Groves says—but they are actually civilization's *discontents*. And liberals cannot tolerate this discontent, which is the ultimate target of their moral indignation. This relationship is the reason why liberalism produces its own conservatism just as conservatism

produces its own liberalism. Liberals' position at the vanguard of the modern West's "civilizing" process necessarily thrusts them into the role of disciplinarians, in reaction to which conservatives have cultivated their own special kind of emancipationist ethos. Hence the phenomenon of Trump, who is understood to embody this ethos and is thus favored by conservatives notwithstanding that his campaign rhetoric wasn't unequivocally conservative. Conservatives could have absorbed the moral and intellectual reflexes of the Left, developing a post-modernism and multiculturalism of the Right, because they are the targets of the same "civilizing" norms which the Left protests have been imperiously foisted upon non-Western peoples by a supercilious European colonialism. Hence the "very focused form of snobbery" which *National Review* discerns in the Left and its kulturkampf against gun enthusiasts. This is no empty ad hominem, but a reminder of liberalism's historical origins in the now forgotten wellsprings of modernity, which was born of elitist impulses.

If conservatives dismiss liberalism's universalism, tolerance, and reflectiveness as sophisticated social illusions, this is by virtue of their intuitive sense that these high ideals are underwritten by a disciplinary ethos, by a historically constructed way of being that now masquerades as timeless human nature. This false consciousness is why liberalism could have become normalized as a reassuring sign of mental health while conservatism has been pathologized as a disorder of the soul. Conservatives can feel themselves reduced to second-class citizens perennially disdained by a haughty coterie of "elites" because the elitism in question consists of the secularized asceticism of the modern liberal identity, one of whose features is a certain visceral contempt for those who have failed to properly internalize it—such as Trump, the ultimate symbol of conservative resistance to liberalism's "civilizing" mission. Liberalism is covertly illiberal because it can flourish only inasmuch as it is prepared to coerce its particular brand of self-discipline and self-control upon the unwilling, whose suffering and alienation in the face of this undeclared agenda never enters liberalism's moral calculus.

Despite their celebrations of a shared humanity, liberals believe in their heart of hearts that they enjoy a more self-regulating and self-transparent form of human agency than has been attained by conservatives, the "bitter clingers" lost in a hallucinatory world of imaginary cultural villains. But the Counter-Enlightenment narrative I defend reveals that what liberals celebrate as their higher-order rationality is in its subterranean structure a system of collective meaning-production, a hero-system that as such is on a par with the hero-systems of conservatism. There can be an

"evangelical-capitalist resonance machine" giving vent to a resentment-based spirituality because conservatives are reacting to *another* resonance machine that is now too internalized and institutionalized to be recognized as such, *another* form of spirituality that aims to extirpate human potentialities that are incompatible with its normalizing agenda. This is why conservatives can see themselves as resisting a false consciousness-breeding liberal hegemon and why they treat what seem like analytically separate issues as interrelated at some deeper level as varied expressions of this hegemon. If an evangelical-capitalist resonance machine could have succeeded in uniting a wide range of facially incongruous ideologies into a movement that is larger than the sum of its parts, this is because these ideologies cohere as varied forms of protest against liberalism's civilizing agenda.

Naturally, liberals will deny that they are elites given to intolerance and bullying. But they can do so only because drives that were once acknowledged openly by earlier generations of modern elites have since receded into the invisible, taken-for-granted background of things, covered over by a veneer of pragmatism, therapy, and moral common sense—e.g., gun control advocates' fears about mass shootings. But underneath this veneer, gun violence and other "policy problems" are being exploited to promote a thicker social morality than liberals will acknowledge, to promote the disciplinary ethos that conservatives encounter on an intuitive, visceral level that defies easy articulation. The resulting inarticulacy is what allows liberals to remain perennially insensible to the deeper truth of conservatives' cultural grievances, which conservatives must always struggle to convey. Conservative polemics against political correctness may rely on exaggeration and distortion. But the exaggeration and distortion form part of an attempt to symbolically encapsulate the exceedingly subtle forms of illiberalism at play within this subterranean layer of human experience, for which we lack an adequate vocabulary.

Part III, Chapters 7-10, extends the theory introduced in Part II, elaborating on its implications for a range of questions and controversies. Chapter 7 argues that liberals can dismiss the conservative appropriation of liberalism as resting on false equivalencies only because they refuse to take their naturalism to its logical conclusion, to where conservatives' cultural grievances can be seen as "tangible," at which point the equivalencies begin to make more sense. If liberals dismiss these grievances as merely "symbolic" or "psychological," this is because their putative secularism retains significant vestiges of a Christian past, like belief in mind-body dualism and

free will, which obstruct a more fully naturalistic, physiologically embedded understanding of human beings and their political ideologies.

Understood on this level, as a *way of being*, conservative claims of cultural oppression are not just an assortment of irritable gripes about the world—the conventional liberal diagnosis—but a physiological and existential revolt against the disciplines and repressions of the modern, liberal order, to which some are less well-adapted than others. These disciplines and repressions explain conservatives' powerful sense that liberals are engaged in an "assault" against their values, for this is precisely what is transpiring on the synaptic, neurological level of human functioning that is elided by liberals' ostensibly hard-nosed utilitarianism. The violence done here remains "real" irrespective of whose arguments on abortion or school prayer are stronger, because the arguments are always secondary to this more primordial layer of human conflict, which is where conservatives' cultural dispossession is taking place. This is what intellectually sophisticated liberals typically fail to recognize, and as a consequence of their very sophistication and rationalism.

Here is the "higher truth" at which conservative claims of cultural oppression are always intimating. Liberals may be the ones who most ardently defend science and naturalism, but it is conservatives who are the more viscerally naturalistic at the primordial level of embodied human experience, where the dualisms by which liberals would distinguish their principled high-mindedness from conservatives' hidebound prejudice and egoism become untenable. What liberals dismiss as the politically opportunistic swiping of progressive lingo reflects conservatives' more naturalistic, less rationalistic understanding of human beings in general and liberals in particular, their profound sense that liberalism's official rational morality grows out of a pre-rational identity that is being imposed alongside what purports to be moral idealism pure and simple. Liberals cannot see the broader context of their idealism because their antiquated Enlightenment view of reason as predominantly conscious and disembodied leaves them insensible to this layer of human experience, and so overconfident of their ability to recognize oppression and inequality. The conscious categories through which they would distinguish their own cosmopolitan idealism from the narrow parochialism of conservatives can capture only a fraction of what transpires at the deeper level of our unconscious functioning, in the merely animal of human nature, where liberalism's neutral abstractions lose all meaning. This is what the symbolic grievances are ultimately symbolic *of*.

Chapter 8 further fleshes out the implications of my theory through a series of case studies examining a range of social issues, including gay rights, feminism, distributive justice, criminal responsibility, racism, and the therapeutic tendencies of progressive education. In all these cases, liberalism can be seen to promote an unspoken hierarchy between those who have internalized the disciplines of liberalism and those who stubbornly refuse them. With conservatives having been judged lacking in the higher civilization and consciousness of liberalism, they naturally become targeted for its particular brand of stigmatization—which is being effectuated *through* "the issues," right alongside, and as an integral component of, liberal idealism. Liberals may not dehumanize their enemies as crudely as traditional bigots, but they engage in subtler forms of dehumanization under the cover of plausible deniability. Whatever the issue, liberalism's ostensible commitment to neutral abstractions like openness and critical thinking conceals a thicker social morality. And this morality demands that liberalism's opponents be branded as bereft of "awareness," mired in a barbarian past of rude and crude folkways, and thus as engaged in forms of social oppression and blindness that it is liberals' responsibility to uproot. Since these claims to superior awareness can only be vindicated socially by discovering novel forms of oppression and blindness to replace those which have recently been eliminated, liberalism's definition of what genuine freedom, dignity, and equality require of us is propelled by the force of its own inner logic to become further and further removed from conventional understandings of these principles. It is this ever-widening chasm that fuels what we have come to call the "culture wars."

Chapter 9 narrows the focus to the problem of religious neutrality and investigates conservatives' conviction that what liberalism advertises as its religious neutrality disguises the machinations of a secular counter-religion. Conservatives believe that what passes for religious neutrality is no high ideal, but the ideological tool of secularist hegemony, and hence liberal domination. Here as elsewhere, conservative claims of cultural oppression invite liberal incredulity. Here as elsewhere, that incredulity is dissolved by the Counter-Enlightenment narrative I defend. Liberals will dismiss worries about the encroachments of a religion of secularism or "secular humanism" as cynical and disingenuous. But they can do so only because their Enlightenment self-understanding overlooks the ways in which vestiges of a religious past have been incorporated into our putatively secular norms and ideals, whose *religious* function is to exalt their defenders as persons purified of the superstition, paganism, and idolatry of religious conservatives.

In so exalting themselves, liberals surreptitiously promote a new variant of the very religiosity they purport to repudiate. I argue that the relationship between religious conservatives and secular liberals is most profoundly conceived as a contemporary recapitulation of the relationship between conquered pagans and conquering Christians endeavoring to uproot these pagans' idolatry. What liberals call religious neutrality is an intellectualized, sublimated, and secularized iteration of this ancient ambition, which now operates within unacknowledged layers of social meaning rather than through formal creeds. This plausible deniability is why conservative anxieties about the encroachments of an aggressive, evangelizing secular humanism *sound* paranoid and conspiratorial. But like all conservative claims of cultural oppression, these apprehensions become intelligible once placed in their broader historical and philosophical context, which always reveals the larger truth of what strikes liberals as conservative obtuseness. And this is that our disagreements about the meaning of religious neutrality are the secularization of what first arose as religious disagreements concerning the relative transcendence or immanence of the divine. The religious neutrality problem is the sedimentation of the theological past in the jurisprudential present, the surreptitious replaying of a conflict between different kinds of religious believers as a conflict about what qualifies as neutrality between believer and non-believer. It is this historical legacy, and not conservative obstinacy, that explains why this conflict has proven so divisive and intractable.

Chapter 10 concludes the work by encapsulating its recurring themes in the proposition that liberals must first *de-intellectualize* their liberalism if they are to understand conservative claims of cultural oppression. If these claims strike liberals as paranoid and outlandish, this is because they cannot recognize their liberalism as a natural phenomenon that impinges on conservatives on a level that precedes ideas and ideals. I elaborate this claim by examining some recent thought in evolutionary psychology, which raises the root causes of conservatives' cultural oppression into relief, revealing that the culture wars represent a conflict within our evolutionary heritage. Liberalism inevitably suppresses a significant portion of this heritage, and conservatives claim cultural oppression in an effort to resist this suppression. Though liberals will dismiss conservatives' cultural grievances as merely "symbolic," what they symbolize is precisely this resistance.

Given that the symbolic realim is invariably intertwined with the biological functioning of a symbolic animal, liberalism's efforts to mark off a sphere of "real" harm-tracking morality from

the realm of airy cultural grievances is necessarily parochial, the product of an ethnocentrism that cannot recognize how liberals and conservatives partake of a shared humanity one side of which liberalism discounts. Overcoming this ethnocentrism means recognizing that the reflexive innerness that liberals believe sets them apart from conservatives is not the transcendence of identity, but an identity in its own right, the product of how one particular culture cultivates one part of our evolutionary heritage to the detriment of another. If liberals cannot recognize these costs, this is because doing so isn't merely a cognitive act, but an expansion of consciousness and broadening of identity. This is what conservative claims of cultural oppression demand and what liberalism taken to its logical conclusion ultimately requires.

PART ONE
THE NARRATIVE

Chapter One
Introduction

1. The Left is the Right and the Right is the Left

The time was a few weeks before the 2008 election and the place was MSNBC's *Morning Joe*. Under discussion was the increasingly unhinged racism and xenophobia that seemed to be gripping McCain-Palin rallies, where some attendees, apparently driven batty by the prospect of an African-American president, reacted with shouts of "terrorist" and "kill him" at the mention of Barack Obama's name. The show's mild-mannered conservative host, former GOP congressman Joe Scarborough, responded that these outbursts were surely beyond the pale. But Scarborough then seized upon these reports as an occasion to remind liberals that that they should also pay attention to their own behaviors and stop pretending as though conservatives were the only ones capable of incivility. When a few misfits behave outrageously at Republican campaign events, this is taken by liberals as evidence for the latent racism and general depravity of conservatives. But no objections are raised, Scarborough noted, when a renown liberal commentator like Thomas Frank writes *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, a book that took aim, not at one man, but at an *entire state*, dismissing its conservative-voting citizens as a bunch of "yahoos." A conservative like Scarborough was willing to turn around and criticize his own when they crossed the line. Yet liberals seem unwilling to engage in similar self-policing, unwilling to acknowledge, let alone denounce, the hatred and bigotry that grows in their own ranks.

In a book that delighted liberals, Frank argued that his fellow Kansans had been duped into voting against their own economic interests—that is, into voting Republican—by cynical politicians of the Right. These operatives have succeeded in transmuting economic frustrations into cultural resentment against a fictional "liberal elite," inciting an irrational cultural class war against these elites to displace the rational economic class war against the powerful business interests that these Kansans should fight and once did fight. Whereas the working Kansans of yesteryear were fiery progressives resisting their exploitation by plutocrats,[1] Kansas had recently

[1] Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2005), pg. 15.

become a place where workers are more conservative than their bosses,[2] driven on by a crusade that suspends material interests in favor of vague, unappeasable cultural grievances.[3] The "in many ways… preeminent question of our time," Frank observed, was how so many voters could get their basic interests so wrong, how so many could forget that "it is the Democrats that are the party of the workers, of the poor, of the weak and the victimized." This was once "part of the ABCs of adulthood."[4] Yet conservatives have now distracted voters from those ABCs by replacing a hard-nosed economic conception of class with an airy cultural one. Class oppression is now understood to be the result, not of the unprecedented concentration of economic power in the hands of business elites, but of the unprecedented concentration of cultural power in a haughty intelligentsia. It is a perennial struggle between the unpretentious, authentic majority and an egg-headed yet all-powerful elite contemptuous of this majority's tastes and values.[5] Kansans' real economic powerless vis-à-vis real plutocratic overlords has been recast and distorted as a vague sense of cultural disenfranchisement by liberalism, which conservatives condemn as an alien, menacing sensibility that any authentic American rejects instinctively.

By thus reconfiguring the meaning of class and class conflict, conservatives have arrogated to themselves the mantle of the outsider and underdog. Frank observed:

> From the mild-mannered David Brooks to the ever-wrathful Ann Coulter, attacks on the personal tastes and pretensions of this [the liberal] stratum of society are the stock-in-trade of conservative writers. They, the conservatives, are the real outsiders, they tell us, gazing with disgust upon the ludicrous manners of the high and mighty. Or, they tell us, they are rough-and-ready proles, laughing along with us at the efforts of our social "betters" to reform and improve us. That they are often, in fact, people of privilege doing their utmost to boost the fortunes of a political party that is the traditional tool of the privileged is a contradiction that does not trouble them.[6]

Conservatives can overlook this contradiction because they have reinterpreted the concept of class in a basic way. No longer defined in traditional terms—as a matter of money, birth, or occupation—class has now been reconceptualized as a matter of authenticity as measured by consumer preferences, recreational predilections, and religious affiliation.[7] Conservatives' "dearest rhetorical maneuver," observed Frank, was the "latté liberal," the idea "that liberals are

[2] Ibd, pg. 106.
[3] Ibid., pg. 121.
[4] Ibid., pg. 1.
[5] Ibid., pg. 13.
[6] Ibid., pg. 116.
[7] Ibid., pg. 113.

identifiable by their tastes and consumer preferences and that these tastes and preferences reveal the essential arrogance and foreignness of liberalism."[8] In contrast to the effete pretentiousness and snobbery of liberalism, the conservative denizens of red-state America are promoted as sincere, down-to-earth, reverent, and "attuned to the rhythms of the universe."[9] Fixating upon the personal tastes and pretensions of liberals, conservatives have cast liberalism, not as a political creed that speaks to the needs of the many, but as a lifestyle choice that appeals to the tastes of the few. Regular Americans are oppressed, not by multinationals polluting their air and water, but by the "earnest young vegans of Washington, D.C., two years out of Brown and already lording over the hardworking people of the vest interior from a desk at the EPA."[10] Conservatives have persuaded Kansans that government regulations should be assessed, not according to the concrete interests they advance, but according to the cultural pretensions they channel. The preference for environmental regulation over pollution is now placed in the same category as the preference for veganism over meat, or café latte over black coffee—just another manifestation of an imperious liberalism tightening its tentacles at every opportunity. This narrative has proven irresistible to many, and is what allowed conservatives to seize the reins of the country.

Scarborough, however, was of the view that Frank's thesis was more akin to racial hostility and xenophobia than to legitimate social commentary. The thesis wasn't just mistaken, but also an act of aggression that was on some level morally equivalent to racist outbursts at Republican rallies. Unwilling to recognize Frank's thesis as disinterested sociological reflection, Scarborough condemned it as one more elitist gesture, yet another slander by a liberal trying to reform his social inferiors. Far from discrediting the cultural grievances it examined, *What's the Matter with Kansas?* provided a further illustration of their justice. Is respecting those with different views not, Scarborough may have been thinking, also among the "ABCs of adulthood"? Heartfelt disagreement notwithstanding, are we not obligated to accept others' opinions at "face values"—rather than dismissing them as epiphenomena of forces that we alone we have the sagacity to discern, as Frank seemed to be doing? The "preeminent question of our time," then, isn't why many in the working class vote against their economic interests, but why conservatives are

[8] Ibid., pg. 16.
[9] Ibid., pg. 28.
[10] Ibid., pg. 116.

routinely held accountable for the slightest hints of real or perceived bigotry while liberals can casually indulge their own bigotry in plain view without fear of reproach.

Scarborough's comparison will strike liberals as strange indeed. How, they will object, could the very thinly veiled racism that overtook Republican rallies possibly be compared with Frank's attempt to make sense of a historically unprecedented shift in voting behavior? However, Scarborough might retort that the perceived unfairness of the comparison only testifies to the dominance of the liberal culture, which has rigged the rules of civility in its own favor. Are hatred and incivility not evenly distributed across the political spectrum, he might have asked. The mechanism of incivility may vary from one milieu to the next. For a certain breed of conservative, it is crude epithets. For a liberal commentator like Frank, it is an eloquent essay. But superior eloquence is no a substitute for the ABCs of adulthood. Whether one calls someone who is plainly not a terrorist a terrorist or attributes his views on abortion to the political manipulation of economic frustration, the upshot is the same, which is to exclude him from the equal respect due our fellow citizens. Is this just another vague cultural grievance, or something which liberals unequivocally condemn in every case but that of conservatives?

Scarborough is hardly alone in suggesting that liberals mistreat conservatives in a way that mirrors how privileged, dominant majorities have mistreated and marginalized minorities, and that liberals therefore occupy a position akin to the one they would impute to conservatives—callous overlords aggrandizing themselves at the expense of the weak and voiceless. The suggestion appears again in *National Review*'s Jonah Goldberg's critique of liberals' morally and intellectually suspect enthusiasm for scientific research into the biological substratum of political ideology. The "always new science of conservative phrenology," writes Goldberg, is a "white-smocked effort to explain away conservatism as a mental defect, genetic abnormality, or curable pathology."[11] Liberals routinely excoriate as beyond the pale all speculation concerning the genetic basis and heritability of intelligence whenever race or gender are in the mix. But then they are astonishingly hypocritical in their "gidd[iness] to entertain the notion that conservatives have broken brains—based solely on the fact that they are conservatives."[12] Whether their analytical framework is sociological, as for Frank, or biological, as for the phrenologists of conservatism, liberals seem united in their determination to denigrate conservatives by any means necessary.

[11] Jonah Goldberg, *The Tyranny of Clichés: How Liberals Cheat in the War of Ideas* (Sentinel 2012), pg. 207.
[12]Ibid., pg. 218.

Goldberg believes this impulse was illustrated in Satoshi Kanazawa's argument in *Psychology Today* that liberalism represents a genetically novel dispensation. Our evolutionary history in close-knit tribal societies disposes us to restrict altruism to kin. But liberalism, in its willingness to devote large proportions of private resources for the benefit of genetically unrelated others, represents the transcendence of this merely natural state, a freedom from the rigorous genetic logic that controls other animals. And this, argues Kanazawa, is the reason why liberals are *smarter* than conservatives, the reason why "apart from a few areas in life (such as business) where countervailing circumstances may prevail, *liberals control all institutions*." Being "on average more intelligent than conservatives," liberals are more likely to attain "the highest status in any area of (evolutionarily novel) modern life."[13]

But the Achilles Heel of this argument, retorts Goldberg, resides in the exceptions it concedes. If conservatives are successful in business, the reason is that business, just like the military, law enforcement, engineering, and the hard sciences, does not create institutional ideological filters to screen out conservatives. The bottom line in business is the bottom line, profit, rather than "an affinity for social engineering, liberal group think, or progressive do-goodery."[14] This is why conservatives can thrive in these fields as they cannot in liberal-dominated milieus. In short, Kanawaza's genetic argument is only plausible if we first discount the obvious cultural, historical, and sociological explanations for discrepancies in liberal and conservative performance in fields like academia, entertainment, and publishing. Anyone who knows how these institutions actually work knows that their gatekeepers "aren't simply keeping stupid conservatives out; they're keeping conservatives out, period."[15]

In an odd sort of way, Goldberg's debate with Kanazawa mirrors the well-known historical debate between white supremacists and egalitarian progressives. After all, the liberal here is defending an unequal status quo as the natural expression of biologically immutable differences. By contrast, the conservative is decrying this explanation as self-serving ideology, issuing claims of pervasive prejudice and discrimination, and highlighting the need for egalitarian change. Whereas Kanazawa suggests that liberals are a "master race" of sorts, Goldberg retorts that this is a social illusion maintained by unequal power relations.

[13] Ibid., pg. 216.
[14] Ibid., pg. 216.
[15] Ibid., pg. 216.

We can imagine this debate continuing along the same tracks already laid down by the debate about race. The gatekeepers of academia, publishing, Hollywood, and other bastions of liberalism believe they are judging merit. But so too have many whites even as they were unconsciously discriminating against blacks. Critical race theorists have long held that prevailing measures of merit operate to reinforce white supremacy. Alex M. Johnson argues that the idea of merit serves white people's "need to believe that their social positions are the result of something more than the brute fact of social power and racial domination."[16] And this is also Goldberg's response to Kanazawa and like-minded liberals. Liberal merit is merely an instrument of liberal domination, an ideal that has been fine-tuned to exclude conservatives and suppress their achievements. If one reason for the shortage of black academics is, as Henry Louis Gates argues, that whites haven't been trained to recognize black intelligence,[17] then perhaps liberals haven't been trained to recognize conservative intelligence or, worse, been trained to not recognize it.

Expounding the tenets of black nationalism, critical race theorist Gary Peller argues that liberal integrationism is premised on the illusion that the "category of merit itself is neutral, impersonal, and somehow developed outside the economy of social power, with its significant currency of race, class, and gender, that marks American social life."[18] However Goldberg is suggesting that liberalism has its own "economy of social power" and that it is only by ignoring this background that liberals can bask in their imagined intellectual superiority. Liberals will argue that conservatives are underrepresented in academia because they their anti-intellectualism draws them to other fields. But this anti-intellectualism could itself be the product of liberal domination. Perhaps conservative students lack proper role models in liberal-dominated universities. Perhaps they were from the outset dismissed by their liberal professors as hopeless cretins, and so were denied the opportunity to develop the talents that would deprive Kanawaza of the evidence for his liberal master race. If racism can generate its own social truth by creating conditions under which oppressed races are forced to conform to racial stereotypes, then perhaps liberalism too produces its own self-fulfilling prophesies, *creating* what it subsequently casts as the natural inequality of liberals and conservatives. Liberals may not recognize their intellectual standards as politically

[16] Alex M. Johnson, *Bid Whist, Tonk and United States v. Fordice: Why Integrationism Fails African-Americans Again*, 81 Cal. L. Rev. 1401, 1424 (1993).
[17] Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), pg. 171.
[18] Gary Peller, *Race Consciousness*, 1990 Duke L.J. 758, 776-77 (1990).

motivated. But Barbara J. Flagg observes that "[b]ecause whites do not conceive of themselves as a distinctive racial group, their 'consciousness' of whiteness is predominantly unconsciousness of whiteness."[19] Perhaps liberals suffer from an analogous blindness when they fail to recognize themselves as a distinct class with distinct values, tastes, and interests, which their anti-conservative prejudices serve to rationalize.

To be sure, some liberals will reject Kanawaza's argument. But as critical race theorists have tirelessly emphasized, whites can be racist without formally embracing the tenets of white supremacy. For every white person who actually does this, there are countless others who unconsciously live out those tenets in their immediate nervous reflexes, in what Charles Lawrence calls racially-based "selective sympathy or indifference."[20] Maybe something similar may hold true of liberals. They may not all subscribe to, or even be acquainted with, the "ever new science of conservative phrenology." But this does not eliminate the possibility that they unconsciously see conservatives as somehow "less." Liberal science may just be there to give intellectual legitimacy to extant liberal sentiments, just as nineteenth-century racial science ratified a different set of settled prejudices with a patina of scientific respectability.

Goldberg does not actually pursue these lines of argument, but what he does argue implicitly sets the stage for them. As African-Americans steadily improve their status in American society, it appears that many conservatives are lining up to occupy their former place. What are we to make of this phenomenon?

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In his book *Culture Wars*, sociologist James Hunter noted what struck him as an astonishing symmetry between the two sides of the ideological barricades. Notwithstanding their formally opposed attitudes toward religion, progressives and traditionalists have alike adopted a stance that must be described as religious in the sense that their rhetoric is "absolute, comprehensive, and ultimate."[21] Both sides have shown themselves unwilling to rely on "positive

[19] Barbara J. Flagg, *Fashioning a Title VII Remedy for Transparently White Subjective Decisionmaking*, 104 Yale L.J. 2009, 2013 (1995).
[20] Charles Lawrence, *The Id, the Ego, and Equal Protection: Reckoning with Unconscious Racism*, 39 Stan. L. Rev. 317, 348 (1987).

[21] James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (Basic Books, 1991), pg. 62.

moral argument"[22] and have instead turned to ad hominem rhetoric. With progressives and traditionalists operating with irreconcilable notions of moral authority, persuasion alone has proven incapable of creating political legitimacy, and so must be supplemented by the systematic ridicule and derision of the other side. This "symmetry in antipathy," Hunter remarks, confirms the old adage that "the Left is the Right and the Right is the Left."[23] Notwithstanding their substantive disagreements, both "ends of the cultural axis claim to speak for the majority, both attempt to monopolize the symbols of legitimacy, both identify their opponents with a program of intolerance and totalitarian suppression." Progressives and traditionalists alike "use the language of extremism and thereby sensationalize the threat represented by their adversaries."[24]

This symmetry in antipathy is undoubtedly there. But the examples of Scarborough and Goldberg suggest a less noticeable, but perhaps more interesting, *asymmetry* operating underneath the surface of that symmetry. The "Left is the Right and the Right is the Left" not only in that equal levels of single-minded vitriol may be discerned in both, but also in that *the Right has become the Left* and has done so *in order to accuse the Left of becoming the Right*. After all, Scarborough and Goldberg are both engaged in what Charles Taylor calls *the politics of recognition*. Both are demanding that conservatives be understood *on their own terms* rather than assimilated to the values, interests, and prejudices of the dominant liberal culture. A demand that was traditionally the purview of the Left, leveled on behalf of women, racial minorities, gays, and the disabled against the injustices of patriarchy, white supremacy, heterosexism, and able-ism, is now being turned against the Left itself by conservatives, who understand themselves to be issuing a parallel set of claims which liberalism's own first principles require liberals to acknowledge.

The Right's tendency to absorb the moral and intellectual reflexes of the Left into itself, retaining their form while inverting their substance, has often been noted. As Frank observed, conservative leaders now strive to appropriate the traditional attributes of the Left, like righteous indignation at the oppression of the weak and defenseless, "swiping leftist ideas and phrases wherever they can."[25] Geoffrey Nunberg notes that the term "people of faith," which originally referred a New-Agey aversion to organized religion, has "caught on among conservative Christians

[22] Ibid., pg. 136.
[23] Ibid., pg. 156.
[24] Ibid., pg. 156.
[25] Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, pg. 159.

who saw the advantages of comparing themselves with other oppressed groups."[26] This appropriation can take many forms. But it is especially pronounced in the speeches of anti-abortion activist Lila Rose, who told supporters:

> Who says we can't have an America completely free, with the complete end of abortion? We can have that America. We overcame many things in our history. We've overcome many things, from slavery to civil rights abuses in the 20th century to child labor. We've overcome many things, even the Revolutionary War to have our independence won. We've overcome many things in this country. The women's rights movement for suffrage. And we can overcome. We can defeat the hopelessness and the lies and the despair that says that we need abortion somehow. And we can overcome it and it's happening.[27]

William F. Buckley famously defined a conservative as "a fellow who is standing athwart history yelling 'Stop!'" But Rose's rhetoric suggests that conservative positions are as easily heralded by "onward," as easily framed as a call to forward-looking progress, the next courageous step in an ongoing struggle for the freedom and dignity of an ever-expanding circle of moral concern. It was the liberals of the civil rights era who first chanted "we shall overcome." But it is now conservatives who ask us to overcome liberalism itself in the name of its own first principles. Thus, Corey Robin observes that Phyllis Schlaffly "railed against the meaninglessness and lack of fulfillment among American women" in the spirit of Betty Friedan, but then "blamed these ills on feminism rather than sexism."[28] The ERA, notes Chip Berlet and Mathew Lyons, was opposed by Schlaffly as a threat to women's most fundamental rights, such as the right to be supported by a husband and to keep one's baby.[29] Though liberal in its connotations, "fundamental rights" is a malleable concept, and conservatives believe it is as easily tethered to conservatism as to liberalism. These inversions are hardly restricted to the feminism context. In a similar spirit, the American Center for Law and Justice or "ACLJ" is, as indicated by the acronym, the ACLU of the Right, and views itself as defending the religious freedoms of Christians against secularist oppression. In all these cases as in many others, conservatism seems informed, not by any

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[26] Geoffrey Nunberg, *Talking Right: How Conservatives Turned Liberalism into a Tax-Raising, Latte-Drinking, Sushi-Eating, Volvo-Driving, New York Times-Reading, Body-Piercing, Hollywood-Loving, Left Wing Freak Show* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007), pg. 163.

[27] http://www.rightwingwatch.org/content/lila-rose-equates-anti-choice-movement-womens-movement-and-revolutionary -war

[28] Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pg. 52.

[29] Chip Berlet and Mathew N. Lyons, *Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2000), pg. 221.

categorical rejection of liberalism, but by the conviction that liberal ideals are essentially indeterminate and can always be reformulated to advance conservative goals.

The conservative appropriation of liberalism is best known to us from the New Right, with its populist struggle against the liberal elite. But Robin argues that this is hardly a new phenomenon, and has in fact been a recurring feature of mainstream conservative argument ever since Edmund Burke. Conservatism holds itself out as a spirit of cautious skepticism before radical social change, a reverence for the wisdom of the ages, and a wariness of abstractions uprooted from real-life complexity. But Robin argues that conservatives' basic impulses are fundamentally reactionary, borne of animus against the agency of the oppressed. Faced with the latter's assertions of agency, conservatism appropriates the vocabularies of revolutionary movements in order to defend regimes that can no longer be defended on their own terms. Conservatives "look to the left for ways to bend new vernaculars, or new media, to their suddenly delegitimated aims."[30] It is of the essence of conservatism that it tries to make "medievalism modern,"[31] to "make privilege popular, to transform a tottering old regime into a dynamic, ideologically coherent movement of the masses."[32] And conservatives have always displayed near-endless creativity in these endeavors. Already in the mid-Eighteenth Century, reactionary theologians in France were, afraid that the philosophers had taken control of popular opinion, abandoning their abstruse disquisitions in order to compose "Catholic agitprop" that could be distributed to the masses through the same networks used by the Church's Enlightenment adversaries. And Burke later recognized that to destroy the enemy—that is, the Jacobins—the "force opposed to it should be made to bear some analogy or resemblance to the force and spirit which that system exerts."[33] This can only mean claiming victimhood in some fashion or other.

Conservative victimology, then, is much older than any backlash against civil rights, feminism, or the other social movements of the 1960s. Far from being a recent novelty, it is intrinsic to conservatism, which by definition emerges under conditions in which old relations of domination can no longer be taken for granted as the natural order, and must instead be defended in the very language that was first wielded against them. Conservatism, argues Robin, is the means by which a ruling class for the first time in history rests its claim to power upon a sense of

[30] Robin, *The Reactionary Mind*, pg. 49.
[31] Ibid. pg. 29.
[32] Ibid. pg. 42-43.
[33] Qt. in Ibid., pg. 49.

victimhood.[34] Conservatives "have asked us not to obey them, but to feel sorry for them—or to obey them because we feel sorry for them."[35]

2. Conservaphobia

Whether or not it is historically novel, the conservative appropriation of liberalism is understood by liberals as a calculated political strategy designed to make conservative prescriptions more palatable, an expedient to advance right-wing causes whose real rationales cannot be disclosed. However, the examples with which we began suggest a rather different, though not unrelated, phenomenon. And this is the emergence of a conservative *identity politics*, a conservative *politics of recognition*. The tropes and ideals of the Left are being marshaled, not simply to advance one or another conservative *cause*, like ending abortion or untrammeled free markets, but moreover in defense of conservatives *themselves* as an unfairly maligned social group. This is what defines a conservative claims of cultural oppression.

Conservatives may have always defended the established order with claims to victimhood, as Robin observes. But conservatives are now claiming victimhood in a very specific sense. They are oppressed, not because they are morally entitled to the economic privileges which the Left would expropriate—as overthrown French aristocrats may have believed—but because they have been slandered, bullied, and denigrated on account of *their conservatism as such*. They are asking not for obedience but for respect, seeking to justify, not some tottering *ancien régime*, but *themselves*. The inherited prerogative which the Left threatens is not landed titles, corporate monopolies, union-busting, or white male privilege, but merely *the social dignity of being conservative*. In claiming cultural oppression, conservatives are demanding that liberal tolerance be at long last extended to them, the one remaining social group that may be maligned and persecuted with a good conscience, the forgotten minority that somehow got overlooked amidst all the celebrations of tolerance, sensitivity, and diversity.

The trope of the persecuted conservative is very familiar in the context of higher education. Putting the point crudely but poignantly, conservative radio host Michael Savage laments that conservative college students are "buried under an avalanche of scorn, both from their professors and peers," treated "as if they're Cro-Magnons with bones in their noses." With only "one or two

[34] Ibid., pg. 98.
[35] Ibid., pg. 98.

rounds in the barrel… conservative-thinking students learn the local custom." And this is "to keep their mouths shut if their viewpoints run contrary to the prevailing winds of liberalism in the classroom."[36] In a similar vein, the Claire Booth Luce Policy Institute, an organization of conservative women, offers college students "conservative safe space" stickers. Appropriating a concept often used to highlight gays' special vulnerability to harassment and abuse, the Institute explains that, with gays being "no longer the group shunned or berated on modern college campuses," campus intolerance "has now turned on conservatives and it is the conservative students and faculty who most need a 'safe space.'"[37]

But a safe space is precisely what they will never be allowed. For conservatives' cultural oppression extends well beyond the college classroom, whose hostile environment is only one dot on a broader social matrix of liberal intolerance. Conservatives have endured "a half century of slander from the news media, academia, and Hollywood," laments Goldberg.[38] These slanders have now filtered into everyday attitudes, fostering a culture of anti-conservative animus that seems to follow conservatives wherever they tread. The animus targets, not just their politics, but their very personhood. "Once alerted to your conservatism," writes James Poulos, "most people do not believe you when you tell them you are interesting. They chalk up your worldly exploits and subtleties of spirit to an unearned luxury—the product of unresolved internal contradictions, laziness, hypocrisy, or subterranean false consciousness." Conservatives, and especially professional conservatives, are deemed "unfit for life off the reservation, unable and unwilling to function in any truly human environment."[39] Conservatives aren't merely mistaken, or even just benighted, but also lacking the full human agency enjoyed by liberals, which is what liberals believe conservative ideas betray.

Conservative claimants of cultural oppression believe they are the targets of a visceral hatred that has no analogue on the Right and that cannot be explained away as ordinary political rough-and-tumble. Ann Coulter observes that left-leaning MSNBC hosts will night after night "maniacally fixate on some conservative they hate," it being a "specialty of the Left" to sneer and

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[36] Michael Savage, *The Enemy Within: Saving America from the Liberal Assault on our Schools, Faith, and Military* (Thomas Nelson, 2003), pg. 211.
[37] http://www.cblpi.org/students/safe_space.cfm
[38] Goldberg, *The Tyranny of Clichés,* pg. 38.
[39] James Poulos, "The Leptogonians: Growing Up Conservative in a Disrupted Decade," in *Proud To Be Right: Voices Of The Next Conservative Generation,* ed. Jonah Goldberg (New York: Harper, 2010), pg. 158-60.

snicker at political opponents.[40] The "liberal bias" of the "mainstream media" and other bastions of liberalism is not a narrowly intellectual partiality toward liberal policies, but also a visceral antipathy toward conservatives as people. Bill O'Reilly concedes that some traditionalists "are captive to the same degree of irrational anger that many in the S-P [secular-progressive] crew are," but on the whole "S-P anger is far more intense and personal."[41] Sean Hannity warns that, with their ruthlessness, dishonesty, and take-no-prisoners approach to politics, "many liberals are capable of singular viciousness."[42] Yet liberals are never held to account for all this. "[T]here's a double standard in this country," laments Savage, because "[i]f you're a liberal, you don't get sent to the thought police no matter what you say or how conservaphobic you may be."[43] Liberals would erect vast regimes of sensitivity training to uproot every last trace of real or imagined homophobia. But they will not take the slightest steps to remedy another, equally pressing problem, which is their own conservaphobia, the fact that liberal virtue and anti-conservative hatred have now become one and the same.

Racism can be expressed, not only in direct assertions of white racial superiority, but also in subtle, and therefore deniable, cues and patterns. And likewise, conservaphobia can be the implicit subtext rather than official text of the conversation. Coulter observes that liberals featured on the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek* are "always bathed in a beatific light, while conservatives are photographed in lighting that casts a menacing glow and always seem to show five o'clock shadows."[44] Brian Anderson notes that television and Hollywood treat "lawyers, teachers, social workers, and others who work in liberal professions" to "mostly sunny portrayals" while frequently casting businessmen in villain roles.[45] If the entertainment industry formerly relegated African-Americans to the roles of pimps, criminals, vagrants, and other outcasts, so now it is conservatives who must play the social pariahs. This denigration is often communicated less through direct assertion than through cumulative impression. O'Reilly concedes that TV political humor targets the whole ideological spectrum. But the total "body count" reveals that it is

[40] Ann Coulter, *Demonic: How the Liberal Mob Is Endangering America* (New York: Crown Forum, 2011), pg. 288.
[41] Bill O'Reilly, *Culture Warrior* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), pg. 162.
[42] Sean Hannity, *Let Freedom Ring: Winning the War of Liberty over Liberalism* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), pg. 232.
[43] Michael Savage, *The Savage Nation: Saving America form the Liberal Assault on Our Borders, Language, and Culture* (Plume, 2002), pg. 35.
[44] Ann Coulter, *Guilty: Liberal "Victims" and Their Assault on America* (New York: Three Rivers, 2009), pg. 230.
[45] Brian C. Anderson, *South Park Conservatives: The Revolt Against Liberal Media Bias* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2005), pg. 14

conservatives who bear the brunt of the mockery. The "cumulative effect of print and TV commentary that largely denigrates conservative thought and traditional values cannot be overestimated,"[46] because the final message is always that "[l]iberals are smart and conservatives are dense."[47]

Conservatives believe this environment threatens their human dignity and life prospects. Just as blacks in the Jim Crow south faced the constant risk of harassment from racist whites, for whom blackness was provocation enough, so Ben Shapiro writes that today's young conservatives "have to face liberal bullying on a daily basis, from the elementary school level though grad school and on into their careers (particularly law, education, and Hollywood)."[48] Conservative commentator Laura Ingraham was bullied at her first media job at CBS when she was prohibited from entering the make-up room until liberal Paula Zahn had exited.[49] Conservative book buyers are bullied by the unionized employees of Barnes & Noble, who David Horowitz alleges "go[] out of their way to make conservative book purchasers, whom they regard as barely literate philistines, feel unwelcome."[50] Jebediah Billa's *Outnumbered*, the "Chronicles of a Manhattan Conservative" is an autobiographical account of the author's life in New York City during the heady days of the 2008 elections. This is a hostile, unforgiving world in which a conservative with a "Palin Power" lapel pin cannot so much as enter a subway car or turn a street corner without being denounced as "racist," "dumb," or an "ignorant bitch" by an anonymous passerby.[51] Billa was flabbergasted when an acquaintance acknowledged that "I just know that I was brought up to know that conservatives aren't good people. And people I've met…conservative people…always just rub me the wrong way."[52] What Jews were a century ago, conservatives are today, as unthinking prejudice is given a free pass in this Mecca of enlightened progressivism where conservatives are concerned.

Liberals will deny their conservaphobia and chalk up the intensity of their anger toward conservatives to conservatives' the own beliefs and conduct. But do opponents of homosexuality not justify their homophobia in a similar way, as principled moral opposition to a socially

[46] O'Reilly, *Culture Warrior*, pg. 26.
[47] Ibid. pg. 57-58.
[48] Ben Shapiro, "Why I'm Glad Liberals Are Bullies," in *Proud To Be Right: Voices Of The Next Conservative Generation*, ed. Jonah Goldberg (New York: Harper, 2010), pg. 208.
[49] Laura Ingraham, *Power to the People* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2007), pg. 236.
[50] Qt. in Anderson, *South Park Conservatives*, pg. 135.
[51] Jedediah Billa, *Outnumbered: Chronicles of a Manhattan Conservative* (2011), pgs. 10, 23.
[52] Ibid., pg. 67.

deleterious practice? If conservatives can be second-guessed in their accounts of their own motivations, then so too can liberals. Liberals hold that "moral opposition" to homosexuality reveals more about the moral opponent than it does about homosexuals. And in the same vein, conservatives believe that conservaphobia is a symptom of liberals' unacknowledged internal conflicts, which have been projected onto conservatives. David Kahane explains that progressives are people "consumed with [a] primal but irrational desire to inflict [their] emotions on you, so that you might share [their] misery and feel [their] pain."[53] Conservatives are the new socially sanctioned scapegoats, foils upon which liberals project every social ill and externalize every psychic conflict, rationalizing their projections with an aura of moral high-mindedness to sugarcoat their visceral animus.

* * *

As this brief snapshot of the terrain reveals, conservatives are insatiable in their drive to document the sins and hypocrisies of the Left. Such is necessary if they are to set the record straight and free their kind from the dark cloud of suspicion which the dominant liberal culture hangs over them wherever they tread. Just as one cannot possibly be expected to recognize the rights and dignity of gays while mired in homophobia, so one will be unable to give conservatives a fair hearing while mired in conservaphobia, in whose light conservatives cannot but appear nefarious, irrational, or otherwise unappealing.

Conservative claims of cultural oppression arise in a multitude of contexts and their ultimate theoretical content is elusive. But they conform to some general patterns, foremost among which is the impulse to place the historic opponents of the Left—conservatives and especially conservative Christians—in roles which the Left has heretofore reserved for the designated oppressed—racial minorities, women, gays, and colonized people. Correlatively, these claims place the Left in roles which have been historically reserved for conservatives, oppressive stalwarts who, dogmatically insensible to competing claims and perspectives, seek to preserve their arbitrary privileges and benighted traditions whatever the cost to others. Conservatives believe they are oppressed by a culture that slanders the real victims as the oppressors and celebrates the real oppressors as the victims, or else as the victims' heroic champions. Their claims of cultural

[53] David Kahane, *Rules for Radical Conservatives: Beating the Left at Its Own Game to Take Back America* (Ballantine Books, 2010), pg. 156.

oppression constitute an effort to expose and overturn this state of affairs. They advance a conservative politics of recognition, demanding that conservatives be understood on their own terms, rather than dismissed as authoritarian, bigoted, benighted, or misologistic. They aren't just venting personal grievances, as they see it, but highlighting the existence of a new cultural dispensation that has supplanted the old rules of public life, where the *modus operandi* is now the slander and intimidation of conservatives. If liberals inveigh against the oppressiveness and hypocrisy of conservatives, then they must be prepared to have their own oppressiveness and hypocrisy unmasked as well. If liberals insist on diversity, tolerance, and equal respect, then conservatives insist that they be afforded the genuine articles rather than the Orwellian inversions that liberalism in fact offers.

What I am designating as conservative claims of cultural oppression is best understood as a subcategory of the more general phenomenon of the Right's appropriation of the Left, and one which has as its locus what is alleged to be a set of *social, cultural, and political inequalities between conservatives and liberals*. These claims are, in a sense, that appropriation taken to its logical conclusion, the displacement of the usual substantive issues by a meta-discourse in which the relationship between those who debate those issues becomes an issue in its own right, a new issue that frames the meaning of the old ones. Conservative claims of cultural oppression are in practice intertwined with the defense of specific conservative causes. But insofar as an argument functions as a conservative claim of cultural oppression, the underlying issue is always the broader culture in which particular causes are argued and advanced, the perennial disadvantage in which that culture places conservatives, and conservatives' heroic resilience in the face of this predicament.

Conservatism has always *prescribed* some form of cultural nationalism on the premise that uprooted moral universalism cannot provide the social cohesion facilitated by narrower circles of identification, in which true ethical feeling must always be rooted. Burke urged that loving "the little platoon we belong to," is "the first link in the series by which we proceed toward a love to our country and to mankind."[54] But conservatism has by now *become* a form of cultural nationalism, for the "little platoon" is now defined by conservatism itself. Conservatives understand themselves as a despised, stigmatized group that, in punishment for its rejection of

[54] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O' Brien (Penguin Books, 1968), pg. 135.

liberalism, has been unofficially banished from full and equal participation in public life. In claiming cultural oppression, they celebrate a new kind of *quasi-ethnic* identity and narrative. Laura Ingraham observes:

> They think we're stupid. They think our patriotism is stupid. They think our churchgoing is stupid. They think our flag-waving is stupid. They think having big families is stupid. They think where we live—anywhere but near or in a few major cities—is stupid. They think our SUVs are stupid. They think owning a gun is stupid. They think our abiding belief in the goodness of America and its founding principles is stupid. They think the choices we make at the ballot box are stupid. They think George W. Bush is stupid. And without a doubt, they will think this book is stupid.[55]

Where liberals see stupidity, conservative claimants of cultural oppression see the silent heroism of a beleaguered and colonized people, who resist the encroachments of a coterie of cloistered elites, uprooted rationalists and cosmopolitans with nothing but contempt for the indigenous culture of the less eloquent but more wholesome ordinary American. This contempt is not the reasoned conclusion of individual deliberation, but the collective, taken-for-granted premise of the liberal culture, which can only thrive at the expense of conservatives. The liberalism which conservatives confront is not only an opposing philosophy of which they remain unpersuaded, but also an opposing culture of which that philosophy is just the formalized expression. It is a set of distinctive sensibilities, mores, and prejudices all anathema to their identities as conservatives.

3. We Are All Liberals Now

Conservative claims of cultural oppression are precisely what could be expected to emerge if Roger Kimball is correct that liberalism now "prescribes not only the terms of debate, but also the rhetorical atmosphere in which any debate must take place." With liberalism having become taken-for-granted common sense, even conservative initiatives must be advanced "in a context saturated by liberal assumptions." We "are all liberals now, by dint of contagion if not conviction," bemoans Scruton.[56] Given liberalism's current rhetorical supremacy, conservatives seek to reinterpret liberal ideals in their own favor rather than categorically rejecting them, and so they argue that the protection of liberalism's own first principles has yet to be extended to them and

[55] Laura Ingraham, *Shut Up & Sing: How Elites from Hollywood, Politics, and the UN Are Subverting America* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2003), pg. 1.
[56] Roger Kimball, "Mill, Stephen, and the Nature of Freedom," in *The Betrayal of Liberalism: How the Disciples of Freedom and Equality Helped Foster The Illiberal Politics of Coercion and Control*, eds. Hilton Kramer and Roger Kimball (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), pg. 44.

that liberals are therefore guilty of the very moral and intellectual vices they would associate with conservatives.

Hunter is quite correct that neither side of the "culture wars" is prepared to take the other one at face value, preferring instead to caricature it as fanatically outside the mainstream. But it is only liberals who stand accused of *betraying* their most cherished values. Liberals may condemn as conservative authoritarianism what conservatives themselves would defend as reasonable moral authority. But the disagreement here concerns only the moral valence to be attached to conservative values, not their basic character. Similarly, liberals may dismiss trickle-down economics as a disingenuous selling point for rich-friendly tax policies. But disingenuous or not, conservatives make no apologies for economic inequality. In neither case is the true nature of their core values itself under dispute. The social conservative acknowledges his willingness to sacrifice social freedom to social order, just as the economic conservative acknowledges his willingness to sacrifice equality to property rights. By contrast, conservatives' attacks on liberals go to the core, and not just the periphery, of liberalism's self-understanding. Conservative claims of cultural oppression seek to expose liberalism's core values—diversity, tolerance, freedom of conscience, and social equality—as empty shams disguising what is an entirely *opposite* set of commitments. These claims criticize liberals, not by conservative standards, but by liberal ones.

In doing so, they place conservative practice into direct conflict with conservative theory. Roger Scruton writes that "the root error of liberalism in all its forms" is its "inability to accept, or even to perceive, the inherited forms of social knowledge."[57] This insensibility, the legacy of Rousseau, is why everywhere "[s]ocial contests and tensions have been conceptualized in a way that favors the liberal cause." These have been conceptualized in "terms of power: who enjoys it and who suffers it—'who? Whom?,' in Lenin's summary," rather than in terms of "[w]hich institutions, which procedures, and which customs preserve and enhance the store of social knowledge"[58]—the conservative approach. But in claiming cultural oppression, conservatives themselves succumb to this very tendency, as they now conceptualize as problems of power what could have been conceptualized as problems of social knowledge. Taking Wal-Mart's critics to task, George Will writes:

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[57] Roger Scruton, "Rousseau and the Origins of Liberalism" in *The Betrayal of Liberalism: How the Disciples of Freedom and Equality Helped Foster The Illiberal Politics of Coercion and Control*, eds. Hilton Kramer and Roger Kimball (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), pg. 27.
[58] Ibid., pg. 41.

> Liberals think their campaign against Wal-Mart is a way of introducing the subject of class into America's political argument, and they are more correct than they understand. Their campaign is liberalism as condescension. It is a *philosophic* repugnance toward markets, because consumer sovereignty results in the masses making messes. Liberals, aghast, see the choices Americans make with their dollars and their ballots and announce—yes, announce—that Americans are surely in need of more supervision by… liberals.[59]

Will could have restricted himself to challenging Wal-Mart's critics for their indifference to the sources of social knowledge, arguing that Wal-Mart's characteristic efficiencies embody a form of collective intelligence that only untrammeled free markets can create. But this does not content him. Though Will accuses liberals of introducing the subject of class into America's political argument, it is clearly *he* who is endorsing class as an interpretive category, so long as the class in question is the liberal elites. It turns out, then, that it is not the category of power as such that favors the liberal cause, but only one particular understanding of how power works. Understand power in another way and the category redounds to the conservative cause. Will has simply inverted Frank's thesis that cultural issues are calculated distractions from a status quo of rampant economic inequality, suggesting instead that bread-and-butter concerns like the wage being paid at Wal-Mart are the pretext through which liberals advance their presumptions to cultural superiority vis-à-vis the unwashed masses, whose all-American disorderliness offends their parochial notions of propriety. Even an old-school, sober-minded conservative like George Will now follows Lenin in asking "who? Whom?"

Frank remarks that conservative polemic now appropriates the motifs of the early twentieth-century Left, as traditional Left critiques "of the legal establishment, the foreign policy establishment, the world of architecture, and government itself are also stood nearly on their heads, with each institution now said to be a slavish servant—not of The Interests but of liberalism."[60] Liberalism is not just a policy toward certain interests, but a set of interests in its own right. Ostensibly, liberalism and conservatism are different standpoints from which to evaluate the desirability of various socio-political trade-offs. But with conservative claims of cultural oppression, they become the *subject matter* of the analysis. That is, the relationship between liberals and conservatives is itself among the socio-political arrangements to be scrutinized. Conservatives are not just individuals defined by their opinions about the nature and scope of our

[59] Qt in S.E. Cupp and Brett Joshpe, *Why You're Wrong About The Right: Behind The Myths—The Surprising Truth About Conservatives* (New York: Thresholds Editions, 2008), pg. 168.
[60] Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, pg. 130.

rights, but also rights-bearers whose rights are being unfairly abrogated by liberals. Correlatively, liberalism isn't just a philosophy for weighing or reconciling opposing interests, but a set of interests in its own right, which disguise themselves in a philosophy just like "The Interests" of old disguised themselves in free-market arguments.

At the same time, there is an important asymmetry here. In condemning conservatism as an ideological rationalization for certain class interests, liberals at least distinguish conservatism as a philosophy from the special interests the philosophy subserves—wealth, patriarchy, and so forth. But for conservative claimants of cultural oppression, liberalism is *both* the philosophy and the special interest, both the currency that liberals strive to accumulate and the ideological rationalization for that accumulation. Liberalism could have taken the place of "The Interests" because liberals aren't just misguided people, but rather a foreign tribe whose way of life requires the subjugation of conservatives.

Kimball writes that notwithstanding some significant center-right electoral victories, conservatives have been the "conspicuous losers" in the culture wars. Their electoral successes have "done almost nothing to challenge the dominance of left-wing, emancipationist attitudes and ideas in our culture."[61] However, it is a defining theme of conservative claims of cultural oppression that conservatives aren't simply the losers in the sense that things have not gone their way, but moreover are also the *victims*. While there is a sense in which everyone has been victimized by liberalism, conservative claims of cultural oppression believe that, as its foremost opponents, they have been burdened with special penalties from which others do not suffer.

The "traditional" conservative understands himself as harmed by liberalism in the same way liberals are harmed by liberalism—that is, in the same way everyone is harmed by wrongheaded policies. But the conservative claimant of cultural oppression carries a more individuated grievance against liberalism and believes he has special standing to complain of unique harms that liberals are privileged to escape. The conservative magazine *Chronicles* explains:

> Once upon a time in America, you could say you loved your country, believed in God, and held your marriage sacred…and not be snickered at as a simple-minded simpleton.
>
> You could believe in honesty, hard work, and self-reliance; you could speak of human *responsibilities* in the same breath as human rights…and not be derided an as an insensitive fool.

[61] Roger Kimball, *The Long March: How the Culture Revolution of the 1960s Changed America* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000), pg. 274.

> You could speak out against profane books, depraved movies, and decadent art; you could express your disapproval of drug-sodden entertainers, America-hating educators, and appeasement-obsessed legislators…and *not* be branded as an ignorant reactionary.
>
> And yes, once upon a time in America, you could actually believe in morality, both public and private, and not be proclaimed a hopeless naïf—more to be pitied than taken seriously.
>
> *But that was before the "censorship of fashion" took control of contemporary American culture.*
>
> This insidious form of censorship is not written into our laws or statutes—but it is *woven* into the very *fabric* of our culture. It reigns supreme in literature and the arts, on television, and in film, in music and on radio, in our churches, our public schools, and our universities. And above all else, it is dedicated to the propagation of one agenda—the *liberal activist* agenda for America.
>
> The "censorship of fashion" is not only sinister and subtle, it's also ruthlessly *effective*. It employs the powerful weapons of *ridicule* and condescension to stifle the voices of millions of Americans, like you, who still cherish our traditional values.[62]

Insofar as a conservative is claiming cultural oppression, the issue is *not* the substantive merits of patriotism, religion, traditional marriage, hard work, and so forth, but *his very ability to defend these values* in the face of liberalism's "censorship of fashion." The grievance is not that liberals impede the implementation of conservative ideas, but that they impede or attempt to impede conservatives in their *authenticity* as conservatives. Liberalism is pernicious not only for its substantive agenda but also for the special social and psychological costs which this agenda imposes on conservatives and ordinary Americans—costs that liberals do not bear and therefore cannot recognize. Here is the deep asymmetry overlooked by Hunter. To the extent liberals believe themselves victimized by conservatives, this is in their capacity as women, gays, racial minorities, union members, creative individualists or perhaps just freedom-loving Americans. They do not, however, see themselves as victimized *as liberals*. By contrast, conservatives see themselves as victimized by liberals, not only as law-abiding Americans, self-reliant entrepreneurs, and honest taxpayers, but also in their capacity *as conservatives*. And so conservative policies are now advanced, not only for their perceived advantages, but as affirmations of conservatives' right to self-determination in the face of liberal hegemony.

The "traditional" conservative seeks to expose liberalism's *limitations as a theory*. He argues that inherited moral sentiment cannot be kept out of law, that socio-economic equality is a dangerously utopian aspiration, and that liberals overestimate our very limited ability to track

[62] Qt. in Hunter, *Culture Wars*, pg. 244.

social causality and anticipate the unintended consequences of the rapid social transformations they would recklessly initiate. Michael Oakeshott, for example, writes that there "is no such thing as an unqualified improvement," because innovating necessarily generates a complex situation of which improvement is at best only one component. And since innovation always entails certain loss and only possible gain, the burden of persuasion lies with the innovator.[63] The conservative claimant of cultural oppression may believe this as well. But beyond criticizing liberalism on this theoretical level, he is centrally concerned to expose liberalism's nature *as a social practice*, to expose liberal prescriptions as the sectarian imposition of a parochial way of life. The problem isn't, as per Oakeshot, that we lack the epistemic wherewithal to accurately set off expected gains against unforeseeable losses, but, on the contrary, that we know all too well that the gains will accrue to liberals at the expense of conservatives.

Conservative claims of cultural oppression articulate liberalism *performatively*, in terms of what liberals *are trying to do*. Ben Shapiro told a Heritage Foundation audience:

> Once you see what they're doing it can't be unseen. You'll see it everywhere now. When you watch the media and you see the questions they're asking you'll see underneath there's a patina of character assassination. Always. There's not a single question that they're asking where underneath it's not character assassination. When David Gregory is brandishing a [assault rifle] magazine on national television, he's saying to [NRA spokesman] Wayne LaPierre "you don't care that kids were killed in Sandy Hook." That's what he's doing. When you see Barack Obama saying you know these Republicans they just don't understand how their economic policy works, what he's really saying is "they stand for rich people, they hate poor people."[64]

The objection is not to liberal ideas per se—e.g., gun control and economic equality—but to *the oppressive social function of liberal ideas*, the fact that they are in their practical implementation deployed to denigrate the moral stature of conservatives under a cloak of plausible deniability. Conservatives, says Hannity, no longer confront the "honest liberalism" of yesteryear's Democratic Party, which is "no longer just about implementing liberal ideas" and instead about "demonizing conservatives and Republicans though distortion and disinformation."[65] The original sin of liberalism isn't the promotion of a foolhardy egalitarianism that ignores timeless truths about the crooked timber of humanity, but the fraudulent concealment of an oppressive disposition. The problem is not that well-intentioned liberals set their sights too high out of misguided idealism,

[63] Micahel Oakeshot, *On Being Conservative*, pg. 2.
[64] http://www.heritage.org/events/2013/01/bullies
[65] Hannity, *Let Freedom Ring*, pg. 275.

but that liberalism's professed commitments are fundamentally disingenuous. Liberalism is no longer defined by ideas, but by the collective defamation of conservatives. And it is to remedy this defamation that conservatives appropriate the ideals of liberalism and claim cultural oppression.

* * *

It might be objected that my thesis—that the Right has become the Left in order to accuse the Left of becoming the Right—is only trivially true. After all, there are certain moral abstractions—freedom, fairness, and tolerance among others—that few will baldly reject and which will be defended in one form or another along most of the political spectrum. Likewise, no political philosophy or ideology proceeds without some implicit moral hierarchy of victims and victimizers, just as none dispenses with some notion of false consciousness. Thus, it will always be possible to discover some convergence between Left and Right. And given that American conservatives understand themselves as liberals in the nineteenth-century, "classical" sense of the term, it is natural that they should accuse "modern liberals" of betraying the core tenets of true liberalism. But this, it will be argued, does not prove that it is useful to think of the Right as becoming the Left in order to accuse the Left of becoming the Right. It is commonplace for political enemies to accuse each other of betraying their own professed principles. And so this timeless feature of political rhetoric does not carry the special significance I am trying to assign it.

However, I hope to show, if I have not already shown, that the ideological convergence apparent in conservative claims of cultural oppression is concrete rather than abstract and is not a function of the inherent abstractness of core political ideals. The conservative claimant of cultural oppression does not stake his claim to the principle of moral equality by avouching that conservatives believe in moral equality before God rather than the ephemeral this-worldly equality that preoccupies liberals. Rather, he insists, with Shapiro, that the ostensible opponents of bullying are the true bullies, that "buried underneath all of the left's supposed hatred for bullying is a passionate love for bullying."[66] Conservatives aren't just drawing upon essentially contested concepts but attempting to give the left "a taste of its own medicine," self-consciously effecting a

[66] Ben Shapiro, *Bullies: How the Left's Culture of Fear and Intimidation Silences America* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2013), pg. 4.

role reversal whose reference point is liberals' *particular interpretations of the essentially contested concepts*.

In striving to expose these interpretations' essential indeterminacy, the claimants hope to demonstrate that they can always be re-deployed in the service of conservative grievances, where liberals' own rhetorical tropes will reveal liberals' own sins. John Hawkins notes that while liberals accuse conservatives of maintaining straight, white, heterosexual male privilege, they have yet to acknowledge their own "liberal privilege," like the privilege of flying in private jets while parading as environmentalists.[67] Some whites may be privileged inasmuch as they grow up in safe suburban neighborhoods with all the educational amenities. But then liberals are privileged, argues Melvin Fein, inasmuch as they are praised by their liberal teachers from elementary school onward for their special compassion and acuity, which fortifies the conceit that they are smarter and more caring than others.[68]

Conservative claims of cultural oppression are not ordinary political discourse but a meta-discourse. They are not an academic argument about the ultimate scope of equality as a political ideal, but a practical attempt to expose how liberals' assessment of that scope has been fine-tuned to serve liberals' class interests. Liberals believe themselves "above the fray" as they issue their moral judgments. But they are in fact *in* the fray, one of the parties about whom such judgments can be formed. Liberals will accuse that conservatives "change the subject" to cultural war issues in order to distract from the "real issues." But conservatives retort that the subject has been defined ahead of time in accordance with liberal interests and that they are therefore under no obligation to respect what liberals unilaterally classify as the real issues. Their claims of cultural oppression are a "hermeneutics of suspicions" that seeks to penetrate beyond the categories that liberalism would impose on our thinking and thereby unearth a layer of subterranean meaning that the "real issues" obscure.

To be sure, the "conservative claimant of cultural oppression" is a theoretical construct of my own devising, an ideal type that is imperfectly instantiated in real flesh-and-blood individuals. It is not a notion that directly corresponds to most conservatives' articulated self-conceptions, as does "traditional values conservative," or "national greatness conservative," or even, as we shall

[67] http://townhall.com/columnists/johnhawkins/2014/04/15/15-examples-of-liberal-privilege-n1824468/page/full
[68] http://mdjonline.com/bookmark/25295667-Liberal-privilege-and-the-lies-of-the-left

later see, "punk conservative." And as the instrument of an impressionistic (armchair) sociology, nor does it lend itself to any direct empirical falsification. Nevertheless, I believe it captures the essence of a certain sensibility, a by now perennial feature of the *zeitgeist* that has been bemoaned more intensively than it has been examined.

Robin is surely correct that the differences between today's "populist conservatism" and the older, ostensibly soberer variety can be exaggerated. The victimization of the ostensible victimizers has been a recurring theme of conservative thought, and can be found in writers like Burke and Russell Kirk, hardly populist rabble-rousers. Burke described Louis XVI as "the most humiliated creature that crawls upon the earth" and sympathized with Marie-Antoinette as a "persecuted woman."[69] Nor is the idea of liberal elitism anything new. Bemoaning the decline of the South's conservative influence on national life after the Civil War, Kirk declared that while "Northern men of conscience had reason to be shocked at much that occurred south of Mason's and Dixon's Line," Southerners "had as good cause to resent the supercilious intolerance of New England…"[70] The sense that liberals are contemptuous of "ordinary people" predates any "backlash" against the 1960s. Long before then, Burke railed against "those democratists who, when they are not on their guard, treat the humbler part of the community with the greatest contempt, whilst, at the same time, they pretend to make them the depositories of all power."[71]

Chronicles treats the "censorship of fashion" as a new phenomenon. But Kirk lamented that late nineteenth-century conservatives became unsettled in their first principles by the march of science and "shrank before the Positivists, the Darwinians, and the astronomers."[72] The intimidation of conservatives by liberals has a distinguished pedigree, it seems, and is not limited to those now fancying themselves "ordinary Americans." Nor is the idea that an intellectual elite conspires behind the scenes to maintain a stranglehold on the means of cultural reproduction. Unable to realize their ends by "any direct or immediate act," the atheists of Burke's day conspired to pursue them "by a longer process through the medium of opinion," to which end the "first step is to establish a dominion over those who direct it." O'Reilly alleges that late-night television comedy paints liberals as smart and conservatives as dense. And in the same spirit, Burke charged that atheists connived "to confine the reputation of sense, learning, and taste to themselves or their

[69] Burke, *Reflections*, pg. 163-4.
[70] Russel Kirk, *The Conservative Mind* (BN Publishing, 2008) pg. 298.
[71] Burke, *Reflections*, pg. 146.
[72] Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, pg. 325.

followers," and sought with "an unremitting industry to blacken and discredit in every way, and by every means, all those who did not hold to their faction."[73] Conservatives have long held that intellectuals are driven by their own self-contained interests, and long warned that centralized planning, unqualified equality, and other utopian dreams are recipes for a leveling and homogenizing tyranny. The language may have changed, but conservative claims of cultural oppression are built atop of these long-held conservative suspicions about liberalism and the Left.

Nevertheless, something important appears to have changed. For these suspicions originally developed against the backdrop of certain attitudes of *reverence* before some larger order, a certain sense of *resignation* before its inheritance. "Each contract of each particular state" wrote Burke, "is but a clause in the great primaeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and the invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place."[74] While American conservatives could never really sign onto Burke's pre-modern sympathies, they have traditionally embraced modernized and democratized variants of the reverence and resignation he prescribed. By contrast, conservative claims of cultural oppression replace the reverence with an irreverence and skepticism that first germinated on the post-modern Left and would have been quite foreign to an Edmund Burke.

Wendy Brown and Janet Halley explain that left-critique seeks "to reveal subterranean structures or aspects of a particular discourse, not necessarily to reveal the truth of or about that discourse." Left critique analyzes "existing discourses of power to understand how subjects are fabricated or positioned by them, what powers they secure (and disguise or veil), what assumptions they naturalize, what privileges they fix, what norms they mobilize, and what or whom these norms exclude."[75] While the critical theory of the Right lacks the methodological self-consciousness enjoyed by its left-wing counterpart, the underlying fascination with the *subterranean* is akin. And this fascination has gradually supplanted traditional Burkean reverence for the timeless order of things. Shapiro's talk to the Heritage Foundation addressed, not the truth about the effectiveness of gun control, but with the unstated social hierarchy being reinforced by liberal calls for gun control, with how (conservative) "subjects are fabricated or positioned" by gun control discourse.

[73] Burke, *Reflections*, pg. 212
[74] Ibid., pg. 195.
[75] Wendy Brown and Janet Halley, "Introduction," in *Left Legalsim/Left Critique*, eds. Wendy Brown and Janet Halley (Duke University Press, 2002), pg. 26.

This is also what drives Goldberg's objections to "the ever new science of conservative phrenology." His concern isn't the truth concerning the biological substratum of political ideology, but the norms "mobilized" by liberal discussions thereof, the fact that liberals permit themselves to discuss conservatives in terms that are strictly off limits where women and minorities are concerned. The conservative hermeneutics of suspicion has yet to be satisfactorily theorized. But the entire gamut of left-analytical concepts—cultural domination, social construction, ideological superstructure, class-bias, the reification of the contingent, etc.—appears to be operating implicitly, providing old conservative arguments with a new twist.

George Nash observes that the history of the American conservative movement from its post-war inception to the New Right of the 1980s and 1990s was marked by a curious combination of continuity and change. On one level, the New Right clearly harkened back to the traditionalism that helped launch post-war American conservativism. However,

> whereas the traditionalists in the 1940s and 1950s had largely been academics in revolt *against* secularized, mass society, the New Right was a revolt *by* the "masses" against the secular virus and its aggressive carriers in the nation's elites. And whereas the conservative intellectual movement since 1945 had heretofore concentrated mostly on national issues and politics, the New Right was essentially the product of traumas experienced by "ordinary" people in their everyday lives. Its anguish was that of parents who discovered that their children were being offered condoms at school, were being taught that homosexual behavior was just another lifestyle, and were being instructed that biblical standards of right and wrong were "relative," "sexist," and "homophobic.""[76]

It isn't obvious that the post-war traditionalists and the New Right were genuinely divided by any strictly *theoretical* disagreements. Even if 1950s conservatives had secularized mass society as their target, they were surely aware that widespread cultural change is usually spearheaded by intellectual elites. And even if they elected to focus their energies on cultural decline writ large rather than the trials and tribulations of "ordinary people," it stands to reason that cultural decline, if genuine, would produce these travails. However, while the differences between these different stages of American conservatism may be minimal on a narrowly theoretical plane, they are substantial on that of basic temperament. And it is this contrast that defines conservative claims of cultural oppression, whose relationship to traditional conservatism is fraught with ambiguity.

The traditional moralist responds to the decline of moral character and aesthetic taste with a combination of contempt and exasperation, lamenting the historical tendencies that brought us

[76] George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006), pg. 558.

to the present day. By contrast, conservative claims of cultural oppression are most prominently characterized by *resentment* against those who promote this decline. The traditional moralist warns that the barbarians are at the gates, or perhaps already inside the city walls. But the conservative claimant of cultural oppression goes a step further and announces that the barbarians have already enslaved the city's denizens. Being now resigned to their own subjugation in a brave new world of hegemonic liberalism, these denizens have lost the very memory of their former freedom and dignity, which is what conservative claims of cultural oppression seek to recover. Conservatives continue to uphold the traditional morality threatened by emancipationist values. But the emphasis is less on the *enforcement* of morality against the assorted depredations of isolated deviants, and more on the *defense* of morality against a coterie of elites bent on eradicating the last vestiges of its prestige. The danger is not that relaxing moralistic legislation will precipitate social disintegration, as traditional conservatives once feared, but that this disintegration is the byway by which liberalism is erecting a new moralistic order atop the ruins of the old. Whereas the traditional conservative is concerned to protect the "moral fiber of society," the conservative claimant of cultural oppression seeks *to protect those individuals and groups who most depend on this fiber*. It is precisely this personalization and subjectivization that transforms what was the somber social commentary of 1950s traditionalists into a critical theory of the Right, which takes as its target the unspoken norms, privileges, and assumptions that now suffuse liberal-conservative relations.

Nomi Stolzenberg explains that the "classic critique" of liberalism (in the "classical," nonpartisan sense of the term) accepts liberalism's self-presentation as tolerant, inclusive, pluralistic, and neutral at face value but objects that these ideals deprive illiberal subcultures of their own self-governance, leading them to wither away.[77] By contrast, the "reverse critique" or "progressive critique" of liberalism refuses to accept liberalism at face value. The problem isn't the atomization of traditional communities or the erosion of traditional authority but, on the contrary, that liberalism allows many forms of collectivist coercion to take shelter in the private sphere, where power is exerted in ways that both liberalism and the classic critique fail to recognize[78] Hence the machinations of capital in the economy or of patriarchy in the home,

[77] Nomi Maya Stolzenberg, *The Return of the Repressed: Illiberal Groups in a Liberal State*, 12 J. Contemp. Legal Issues 897, 898 (2002).
[78] Ibid., pg. 914-15.

subterranean forms of power that the progressive critique alone reveals. Stolzenberg's contraposition is also the difference between traditional conservatism and conservative claims of cultural oppression. Whereas traditional conservatism accepts the "classic critique," arguing that liberalism unfairly discounts traditional communal values that resist its individualistic conventions, conservative claims of cultural oppression appropriate the "progressive critique" for conservatism. The problem isn't an excess of freedom or individualism, but that these ideals are vitiated by the machinations of the liberal elite, whose monopoly over the means of cultural reproduction grants them unacknowledged powers of coercion that are antithetical to the ideals for which they claim to stand.

Conservative claims of cultural oppression can be free-standing, as exemplified by *Chronicles*, or embedded in a broader controversy that does not have the oppression of conservatives as its epicenter. Accordingly, these claims can be more or less explicit. Though the clashes we associate with the "culture wars" will often elicit these claims, they need not do so in every case, as it is entirely possible to debate abortion without reference to the stigmatization of conservatives or the privileges of liberals. Conversely, matters that are not usually classified as "cultural," like foreign policy and economics, can become platforms for the claiming of cultural oppression to the extent liberal policy positions are framed as parochial cultural norms to which conservatives are being unjustly subjected.

Thus, Ralph Peters observes that the Obama administration was blindsided by the outrage provoked by its decision to release five terrorist prisoners in exchange for the return of one Sergeant Bergdahl, who was reported to have deserted his post in Afghanistan before being captured by a Taliban-allied group. The administration's surprise, writes Peters, reflected "a fundamental culture clash" betokening the administration's contempt for Americans "so dumb" as to join the military rather than attending Harvard. Obama's National Security Advisor Susan Rice praised Bergdahl for serving "with honor and distinction." But she failed to appreciate that desertion is among the very worst transgressions a soldier can commit against his comrades, and is not at all like "sleeping in on Monday morning and ducking Gender Studies 101."[79] The problem wasn't just the strategic wisdom of the prisoner exchange, but the cultural values which it ratified, the imposition of liberal norms to the detriment of military virtue.

[79] http://www.nationalreview.com/article/379481/why-team-obama-was-blindsided-bergdahl-backlash-ralph-peters

Economics too can become a cultural issue. Goldberg writes that the liberal vision of an advanced society "is one where it is finally rich enough to liberate the middle class from their comfortable bourgeois life-styles and to subsidize their conversion to bohemian ones." Liberals intend "to win the centuries'-old war on the middle class by subsidizing the bohemian lifestyle to the point where it no longer pays to be bourgeois."[80] Goldberg is claiming cultural oppression because he is describing economic policy as a tool of cultural domination. Liberals' redistributive schemes are not animated by the philosophical abstractions they formally endorse, but by a concrete preference for some cultural groupings over others. In this vein, Shapiro charges that President Obama was behaving as a "class bully" and an "anti-business bully" when he admonished a group of business people that they owed some of their success to others who helped create "this unbelievable American system that we have that allowed you to thrive."[81] Just as the schoolyard bully would deprive children of their lunch money, so the anti-business bully would deprive successful business people of credit for their own achievements. Liberal claims about our social interconnectedness are merely the ideological weapons through which the bullying proceeds.

As these examples demonstrate, conservative claims of cultural oppression can turn *anything* into a cultural issue. Being merely the *mediums* through which these claims are articulated, the "issues" selected will vary according to a range of factors—including electoral politics, economic trends, international developments, and others. Religion and morality are among the claimants' preferred topics. But their claims of cultural oppression are defined, not by their contingent subject matter, but by a set of objectives, a mode of analysis, and above all a spirit of argument. Frank observes that conservatism is no longer concerned to defend "some established order of things." Instead, it "accuses, it rants, it points out hypocrisies and gleefully pounces on contradictions."[82] It is this glee and impish delight, this sense of oneself as the defiant outsider speaking truth to power, that defines the conservative claimant of cultural oppression. Conservative claims of cultural oppression are a form of political and intellectual judo. They seek, not to resist liberalism directly, but to redirect the prestige of liberalism against liberalism itself, to "pull the rug" out from under liberalism in the most brazen of fashions. With impish delight,

[80] Goldberg, *The Tyranny of Clichés*, pg. 203.
[81] Shapiro, *Bullies*, pg. 156.
[82] Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, pg. 119.

the claimants undertake the ultimate *political chutzpah* of stepping without invitation or permission into the shoes of the very people they stand accused of oppressing, at the same instant thrusting liberals into the shoes of the oppressors.

This impulse is not equally strong in all conservatives, to be sure. Kimball, who describes conservatives as merely *losers*, is not a paradigmatic conservative claimant of cultural oppression. And as with any political credo, distinctions must be made between the sophisticated theoreticians and the doctrine's mass vulgarization. On the other hand, the continuities which survive those distinctions cannot be ignored. As we saw, Kimball's diagnosis that "we are all liberals now" is fully consistent with the spirit of conservative claims of cultural oppression, even if Kimball doesn't personally claim cultural oppression. And while high theory must be distinguished from practical end-product, it is a fundamental axiom of conservative high theory that theories be evaluated in terms of their end-product. The Marxism condemned by conservatives is the Marxism of gulags and mass famines, not the Marxism of air-conditioned graduate seminars, and conservatives will not permit leftists to take refuge from the former in the latter. But then it is only fitting that conservatives too be compelled to recognize the facts on the ground, and those facts are conservative claims of cultural oppression. If conservatism is to be defended, it must be defended in the shape which it has now assumed and indeed *had* to assume given what conservatives of all stripes agree is the cultural and rhetorical triumph of the Left.

4. Preliminary Questions

What are we to make of this dislocation in ideological space? One common liberal refrain is that whatever vitriol and demonization may be discerned on the Left can likewise be discovered on the Right, where they originated and are most egregious. If the old rules of civility have gone by the wayside, then conservatives have only themselves to blame. "Who started it?" is a question about which liberals and conservatives will naturally disagree.

The symmetry in antipathy ends there, however, because liberals and conservatives do not react to each other's antipathy in the same manner. Liberals may condemn conservatives' caricatures of them as offensive and pernicious. But they are also disposed to dismiss these attacks as "politics," or else as the usual conservative stupidity, or perhaps as sad commentary on conservatism's state of intellectual disrepair. By contrast, conservative claims of cultural oppression involve a personalized resentment that is not dissolved by such sociological

explanations. Liberals and conservatives may alike be given to political incivility, but liberal incivility and conservative incivility seem to be very different animals. Whereas conservative incivility elicits liberal contempt, liberal incivility elicits conservative resentment.

Disclosing his motivations for writing *Liberal Fascism*, which argues that modern liberalism and fascism grew out of the same intellectual roots in early twentieth-century Progressivism, Goldberg recounts that "[e]ver since I joined the public conversation as a conservative writer, I've been called a fascist and a Nazi by smug, liberal know-nothings, sublimely confident of their ill-informed prejudices."[83] Liberals will dismiss the ad hominem attacks of conservatives as too contrived and ridiculous to warrant serious, protracted offense. By contrast, liberals' ad hominems strike conservatives as eminently sincere—"sublimely confident" as Goldberg says. Not being shrugged off as easily, they instead provoke formal, book-length rebuttals.

In a similar vein, Anderson notes that it is an "ugly habit of left-liberal political argument to dismiss conservative ideas as if they don't deserve a hearing, and to redefine mainstream conservative views as extremism and bigotry." This is an "annihilating gesture," Anderson says.[84] But it is difficult to imagine liberals responding in the same way to conservatives who would portray them as extremists—e.g., by impugning their patriotism. Racial epithets may indeed qualify as annihilating gestures. But the complaint will strike liberals as a tad melodramatic in the context of ideological disagreement, however heated it has become. If conservatives dismiss certain left-liberal ideas as unworthy of a hearing, then this is as liberals see it testimony to conservatives' dogmatism and anti-intellectualism, and not an "annihilating gesture." To the extent liberals become outraged by conservatives, they are outraged more at what they judge to be conservative obtuseness than by whatever offense is being given. Theirs is an outrage, not of resentment and embitterment, but of contempt, exasperation, and indignation at the moral and intellectual irresponsibility of conservatives. Rhetorical dishonesty can be found on all sides. But whereas the rhetorical dishonesty of conservatives is an offense against effective democratic deliberation and other generally esteemed principles, the rhetorical dishonesty of liberals is an offense against, well, *conservatives*.

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[83] Jonah Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), pg. 392.
[84] Anderson, *South Park Conservatives*, pgs. 17-18.

It is also difficult to imagine two young liberals setting out to write a book whose aim was to refute the false stereotypes which conservatives perpetuate against liberals. Yet young conservatives Brent Joshpe and S.E. Cupp judged it fitting and timely to author *Why You're Wrong About The Right*, a "book about the trials and tribulations of being young, conservative, and misunderstood."[85] As a young Republican living in New York City, Cupp was made to feel like a pariah, like the "the ex-con who just moved across the street from the elementary school, or the punk rocker who rented the place above yours, or the weird old lady who throws rocks off her porch and has long conversations with a broom handle."[86] Having borne this cross over the years, she and Joshpe finally set out to set the record straight and systematically rebut the popular prejudice that Republicans are "racist, misogynistic, homophobic, closed-minded, fanatical, stupid, redneck, elitist, uncaring, uncharitable, prudish, and most offensively, unfunny."[87] Popular culture celebrates liberals as cosmopolitan, debonair, and edgy[88] while stereotyping conservatives as humorless, uptight, and stiff.[89] And the authors hoped that their barbs and witticisms would give the lie to these stereotypes.

Liberals do not appear to be similarly oppressed by conservative stereotypes of them, however. Those residing in conservative regions of the country are more likely to bask in their outsider status than to resent it, and to see themselves more as visitors to a zoo than as stigmatized ex-cons. Liberal linguistics professor Geoffrey Nunberg did write a book titled *Talking Right: How Conservatives Turned Liberalism into a Tax-Raising, Latte-Drinking, Sushi-Eating, Volvo-Driving, New York Times-Reading, Body-Piercing, Hollywood-Loving, Left-Wing Freak Show.* But the goal here was not to *refute* the stereotypes and thereby vindicate liberals. On the contrary, the absurdity of the stereotypes was taken as a given, and the point was rather to explain how our political vocabulary has been manipulated by conservatives to create the stereotypes. The conservative denigration of liberals is treated as a political obstacle, not a moral or intellectual sin for which conservatives must be made to answer. In short, liberals appear to enjoy a significant measure of theoretical detachment vis-à-vis their deprecation by conservatives that conservatives do *not* enjoy vis-à-vis their deprecation by liberals. Where conservatives may respond to their

[85] Cupp and Joshpe, *Why You're Wrong about the Right*, pg. 242.
[86] Ibid., pg. xiv.
[87] Ibid., pg. xvi.
[88] Ibid., pg. 89.
[89] Ibid., pg. 22.

deprecation with personal resentment, liberals respond only with bemusement or at most exasperation. Nunberg in fact notes that conservatives are statistically more likely to say "you liberals" than liberals are to say "you conservatives."[90] And this pattern confirms that conservatives are more disposed to personalize the political stakes.

What are we to make of this asymmetry? The received wisdom of liberals is that conservatives are more easily offended because they are more narcissistic and histrionic, inhabiting a self-enclosed, self-reinforcing hallucinatory world built on selective attention and confirmation bias. Whatever personal resentment is incited by liberal rhetoric, then, reveals that this rhetoric is largely accurate. It stings because it's true. Correlatively, the comparative detachment of liberals in the face of conservative ad hominems confirms these ad hominems' absurdity. Liberals do not take them seriously because they are not as a matter of fact serious.

The other explanation, however, is that conservatives are indeed culturally oppressed, whatever this turns out to mean exactly. If the ad hominems of liberals sting as the ad hominems of conservatives do not, this might be because the former draw power from cultural orthodoxy while the latter run counter to that orthodoxy. This would explain why liberals enjoy a "sublime confidence" unattainable by conservatives. The asymmetry is akin to the difference between being called a "honky" and being called a "nigger." Both are derogatory racial epithets. But history and the culture in which history is now sedimented endow the anti-black epithet with a special force that the dominant white group never confronts. Perhaps it is likewise with liberals and conservatives. If liberals are blind to the savage incivility they routinely mete out to conservatives, this is only to be expected of the dominant dispensation, which has naturalized its own prerogatives as the invisible, taken-for-granted background of things. What liberals dismiss as conservative histrionics would then bespeak conservatives' outsider insight into the "subterranean" of liberalism, the subtle, largely unconscious conservaphobic micro-aggressions that liberals have the privilege of not seeing.

Conservative claims of cultural oppression have been noticed many times before. Hardly a passing political fad, they have been with us for decades and will surely endure in one form or another into the foreseeable future. The response from the Left has always been to dismiss them as politically expedient rabble-rousing or, to the extent they are sincere, as immature identity politics betokening the contemporary decadence of conservative thought. And indeed, liberals

[90] Nunberg, *Talking Right*, pg. 4.

can scarcely be faulted for relishing the irony that those who have accused so many of "playing the victim" should then find themselves powerfully attracted to that role. But all irony aside, there remains an intellectually serious question about whether there is a wheat to be separated from the chaff, about whether there is some philosophical coherence, or even profundity, underneath what liberals attack as conservatives' intellectual dishonesty. Perhaps conservatives intuit something they simply cannot articulate, not because they are dimwitted, but because whatever they sense is intrinsically recalcitrant to cogent exposition. As the adage goes, just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you.

If conservative claims of cultural oppression strike liberals as fundamentally disingenuous, one reason is that they seem to improperly discount the *intellectual* nature of liberals' anti-conservative hostility. Conservative commentator Mike Gallagher complains that even if ideologically slanted left-wing curriculums occasionally deign to include conservative thinkers, those thinkers will invariably be taught by liberals who detest their ideas. This does conservatives no good because "[l]etting Paul Krugman teach Milton Friedman is like having David Duke teach African-American studies."[91] But it seems like an obvious category error to transpose norms that properly apply to morally neutral and intellectually meaningless traits like skin pigmentation onto the context of political ideology. It may be conceded to Gallagher that there is a difference between being taught Milton Friedman by a Paul Krugman and by a more sympathetic libertarian would teach him in another way. Perhaps the latter can provide a perspective that the former cannot. But whatever "bias" a Krugman might have against a Friedman is an *intellectual* bias and cannot be compared to a former Klansman's animus against African-Americans.

It is this intellectual dimension of liberal "conservaphobia" that conservatives seem to willfully ignore in their efforts to portray liberalism as the last socially acceptable form of intolerance and bigotry. Lamenting the discrimination conservatives face in Hollywood, conservative novelist and screenwriter Andrew Klaven complains "it's as if you were a woman trying to sell a screenplay and you walked into a room and the guy started making sexist, filthy remarks."[92] But clearly, hostility to conservatism is not morally or intellectually equivalent to a visceral misogyny. Misogynists do not "disagree" with womanhood in the way liberals disagree with conservatism. Conservatives would admonish liberals to disagree without being disagreeable.

[91] Mike Gallagher, *50 Things Liberals Love to Hate* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2012), pg. 141.
[92] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpE4YdhdNE0

But whatever disagreeableness liberals may exhibit originates in legitimate political disagreement, as "sexist, filthy remarks" do not.

Hannity was outraged that a nationally syndicated columnist should have devoted an entire column to arguing "Why Conservatives Don't Deserve Respect." "[N]o matter how smart or literate or successful they are," they "do not deserve cultural affirmation" argued the columnist[93] But what precisely is this "cultural affirmation" to which Hannity feels entitled? Surely, the problem cannot be that liberals have the temerity to *disagree* with conservatives. The intelligence, literacy, or success of conservatives can provide no immunity on this front. Is the problem then that liberals refuse to "take seriously" conservative ideas? But why exactly are they obligated to do so? Frank wouldn't provide his fellow Kansans with "cultural affirmation" because he assessed that their political priorities were so unreasonable when taken at face value that they had to be taken otherwise. Liberals are not alone in concluding so much about their political enemies. And contra Scarborough, it should be possible to do so without being compared to hooligans calling for Barack Obama's death. Political pundits have no duty to take their subject matter at "face value," and this is scarcely a duty that conservatives would be prepared to impose on themselves.

However, these contradictions only establish that conservative claims of cultural oppression as ordinarily formulated can be facile. They do not eliminate the possibility of a more sophisticated framework that recognizes the obvious differences between a liberal conservaphobia and the traditional bigotries while also identifying morally and psychologically relevant parallels. Liberal disdain for conservatism can be cast in purely intellectual terms, as disdain for conservative opinions and only derivatively for those who see fit to hold them. But liberal attitudes might also involve something more visceral, something that can assume the form of intellectual judgment but is ultimately irreducible to it. If conservatives may be accused of racism for suggesting that African-Americans are drawn to black nationalism or cultural relativism as sour-grapes emotional compensation for socio-economic underachievement, then liberals can be scrutinized in analogous terms when they level an analogous charge at working-class Kansans. Nunberg observes that Democratic criticism of Republican ideas will now be dismissed as "hate speech,"[94] which strikes him as a disingenuous characterization of liberal *criticism*. But if liberals are prepared to medicalize as homophobia what traditionalists hold out as their principled moral opposition to

[93] Hannity, *Let Freedom Ring*, pg. 231.
[94] Nunberg, *Talking Right*, pg. 151.

homosexuality, then conservatives can follow suit and respond with the same skepticism to liberals' own averments of principled disagreement.

Scarborough's comparison of *What's the Matter with Kansas?* with calls for the assassination of Barack Obama does seem like a stretch. But few dispute that racial prejudice can, and indeed has, assumed more genteel and intellectualized forms than the cross-burning, black-lynching Klansman. And so we cannot dismiss the possibility that "conservaphobia" is an *inherently* sophisticated and intellectualized bigotry, for which reason it cannot readily be recognized as such. Conservative claimants of cultural oppression believe they see through the sophistication and intellectualization and seek a vocabulary through which their insight might be broadcast to the world. Just as critical race theorists hold that "not being black" is intrinsic to the social definition of whiteness and radical feminists hold that "not being female" is integral to that of maleness, so the claimants insist that liberalism is now defined by anti-conservative animus. Perhaps liberalism must no less than the racism, sexism, and homophobia it denounces define itself in opposition to an *Other*, a role now assumed by conservatives. A liberal conservaphobia, if it exists, would be an exponentially more complex creature than the traditional bigotries, something that blurs the line between the intellectual and the visceral, a complicated amalgam of rational and irrational elements, and so a phenomenon fraught with profound moral ambiguity in a way that racism, sexism, and homophobia are not. *This*, and not their inherent irrationality, may be the reason why conservative claims of cultural oppression have thus far resisted rational exposition.

Chapter Two

The Anatomy of a Worldview

This exposition is our goal. But we are not yet in a position to execute it. For the charge of conservaphobia is intimately bound up with an elaborate narrative about the state of American culture and can only be assessed in this context. In this chapter, I will examine the basic contours of this narrative, conservatives' general sense of the forces confronting them—how they emerged, what they seek, and how they persevere in being. Whether conservative claims of cultural oppression are the cheapest form of identity politics or instead harbor some hidden profundity very much depends on what we make of this narrative. Though the themes I shall now outline may not speak to every conservative in equal measure, they are recurring features of our cultural landscape and draw upon the same webs of resonance. These must be properly understood before we can translate conservatives' visceral sense of oppression into clear philosophical questions. As in the preceding chapter, I will proceed in a spirit of fascinated agnosticism. While this investigation will eventually move beyond agnosticism, such is initially required to gain a grip on a discourse whose nuances and complexities are overlooked by proponents and detractors alike.

1. The Vision of the Anointed

Conservatives understand themselves to be culturally oppressed, not merely by virtue of their conservative philosophy, but more importantly because of their concrete resistance to a set of profound cultural transformations of which liberals are the champions and beneficiaries. If these transformations go overlooked by many, this is because we suffer from a certain historical amnesia and false consciousness that function to conceal the true nature of liberalism. Conservative claims of cultural oppression seek to overturn this state of affairs and thereby liberate conservatives and the wider society from this oblivion.

Different conservatives will characterize these cultural transformations in different ways. But most agree that they originated in the social, political, and cultural upheavals of the 1960s and the subsequent mainstreaming of what were formerly fringe tendencies in American society. Roger Kimball's rendition of the argument is illustrative. Many would define the 1960s in terms

of its major conflicts, like the Vietnam War and civil rights. But Kimball argues that the ostensible political issues of the 1960s "were mere rallying points for a revolution in sensibility."[1] The bone of contention wasn't specific rights and wrongs but an entire way of life, the American way of life, "with its social and political institutions, its moral assumptions, its unspoken confidences about what mattered."[2] The Left promised to replace these unspoken confidences with grander emancipatory ideals. But this emancipation proved to be fraudulent, just the symptom of a generation's emotional adolescence. Oblivious to the social foundations of its own privilege and prosperity, this generation was driven by narcissistic self-infatuation to attack these foundations, all the while cloaking its egoism and alienation in the mantle of leftist ideology. While the 1960s were lauded for the idealism of its youth, that idealism was merely the surrender of the intellect to undiscerning, unrestrained passion. The decade promised freedom, but it ended by leaving America in a moral void, as "[d]istinctions between high and low, good and bad, noble and base, were suddenly rendered otiose, besides the point."[3] What purported to be idealism was in fact narcissism, an "insatiable greed for the *emotion* of virtue which makes the actual practice of virtue seem superfluous and elevates self-infatuation into a prime spiritual imperative."[4]

The Age of Aquarius is officially over. But it continues to live on more insidiously than ever "in our values and habits, in our tastes, pleasures, and aspirations," and especially so "in our educational and cultural institutions, and in the degraded pop culture that permeates our lives like a corrosive fog."[5] The political revolution envisioned by the radicals could never truly succeed in a democratic society with free elections. So the revolutionary spirit had to become channeled into our cultural life, where it now achieves its ends in institutions rather than on the streets, by eroding values rather than toppling regimes, by incremental infiltration rather than direct confrontation. The long hair and bell-bottoms may have gone out of fashion. But these were mere props, mere symbols heralding what would eventually become the "ultimate institutionalization of immoralist radicalism," the institutionalization of "drugs, pseudo-spirituality, promiscuous sex, virulent anti-

[1] Roger Kimball, *The Long March: How the Culture Revolution of the 1960s Changed America* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000), pg. 102.
[2] Ibid., pg. 129.
[3] Ibid., pg. 82.
[4] Ibid., pg. 250.
[5] Ibid., pg. 5.

Americanism, naïve anti-capitalism, and the precipitous decline of artistic and intellectual standards."[6]

That many Americans cannot see this revolution only testifies to its success. "[H]aving changed ourselves," writes Kimball, "we no longer perceive the extent of our transformation."[7] The radicals fretted endlessly about the perils of co-optation by the establishment. But it was ultimately the establishment that was co-opted by them. Though the radicalism seems passé, this is only because its precepts have become unconscious reflexes, incorporated into "the realm of habit, taste, and feeling, becoming along the way not only ideas that are espoused but also a way of life."[8] Here is where the legacy of 1060s radicalism becomes truly insidious, not as an explicit ideology, but as a set of attitudes that are most keenly felt after their more radical ideological formulations have been disavowed. Having become subterranean, the ideology can no longer be confronted as such, thus enabling liberalism's "censorship of fashion."

Liberalism accrued its present prestige through its opposition to what we now recognize as indisputable evils, like Jim Crow. But conservatives believe that liberalism's historic moral victories obscure the true nature of its contemporary agenda. For in capitulating to the radicals, the weak-kneed liberalism of the 1960s incorporated their radicalism into itself. And so liberalism now advances a vision very different from the true spirit of the civil rights movement—whose rectitude ordinary Americans have come to appreciate. While the liberal elites present themselves as defending uncontroversial democratic norms, they are in fact exploiting the prestige of these norms to advance their parochial cultural predilections as taken-for-granted common sense. And this new common sense consists in the systematic inversion of all the values held dear by the largely powerless and often voiceless ordinary American: the replacing of competition and "standards" by bureaucratic intervention and social engineering, of patriotism by multiculturalism or anti-Americanism, of capitalism by environmentalism or socialism, and of traditional morality by sexual libertinism or feminism. The elites may present themselves as public-minded pragmatists, but they are in fact driven by a perverse will to effectuate these inversions.

[6] Ibid., pg. 41.
[7] Ibid., pg. 7.
[8] Ibid., pg. 222.

Contemporary liberalism is therefore defined by an ethos that is culturally and morally "thicker" than liberals' avowed principles indicate.

Hence what some conservatives condemn as the "mass bohemianization" of society. Today's cultural liberalism, writes Dinesh D'Souza, is "the final product of a progressive, century-long effort by a small minority of discontented bohemians to impose their values upon the wider society."[9] In seeking to impose and entrench their emancipatory ethos, liberals are asking others to bear the costs of liberal alienation, which is what they attempt to resolve through their agenda of systematic inversion. Gertrude Himmelfarb notes that the original bohemians regarded their way of life as "appropriate for only a select few, those superior souls capable of throwing off the shackles of bourgeois convention."[10] Far from attempting to proselytize the world to their free-spiritedness, they viewed themselves as exceptional people whose singular spiritual independence was beyond the reach of the many.[11] But with the democratization of bohemia, what was once a subculture and curiosity has become the dominant culture and orthodoxy. The immoralism that was previously a hobby of academicians and bohemians has mutated into a corrosive social nihilism that attacks the very foundations of the American spirit.

Liberals understand the evolution of their creed as a progressive overcoming of the prejudices and blind spots that formerly impeded the fullest realization of liberalism's highest ideals. But conservative claimants of cultural oppression see only the replacement of some prejudices by others, not the purification of liberalism but its colonization by a parochial sensibility and interest group. "Modern" liberalism—sometimes called "ultra-liberalism"—is not the final fulfillment of some original promise laying at the core of the American project, but an ideologized perversion of the authentic, classical liberalism bequeathed to us by the founding generation. It is the cancerous overreaching of certain liberal tendencies, which, though laudable when shaped and constrained by traditional values, become pernicious and corrosive once unhinged from these. Michael McConnell observes that contemporary liberalism undermines the classical liberal virtues of individualism, independence, and rationality by perverting them into selfishness, pride, skepticism, and nihilism.[12] These are what individualism, independence, and rationality must

[9] Dinesh D'Souza, *The Enemy at Home: The Cultural Left and its Responsibility for 9/11* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), pg. 167.
[10] Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), pg. 206.
[11] Ibid., pgs. 217-18.
[12]

devolve into once uprooted from their moorings in religious piety and moral discipline, the historical context in which they first developed.

If modern liberalism can appear like the ineluctable outgrowth of "progress," this is only because it has beguiled us into seeing the past through a certain lens. It is only as a consequence of liberalism's recent perversion, argues McConnell, that traditional religion is now condemned as per se authoritarian, irrational, and divisive.[13] Modern liberals' misunderstanding of traditional religion is a symptom of their own *self*-misunderstanding, the delusion that their virtues are the genuine articles when they are actually degraded editions—mere pride, selfishness, and nihilism. It is this false consciousness that propels liberals to dismiss the better part of American history as a kind of Dark Ages that is now being superseded by a liberal Enlightenment and Renaissance. But this is pure ideology, insist conservatives. If the "unspoken confidences" overturned by the 60s now seem outrageously repressive and illiberal, this is only because the new dispensation has *trained* us to so view them. Here as elsewhere, history is written by the victors and for the victors, who refuse to acknowledge their victory as indeed *their* victory and instead claim it on behalf of humanity as such.

If conservatives are not only the losers but moreover the victims, this is because the new dispensation represents a new social identity that is not fully captured by the traditional Left-Right spectrum. Lee Harris writes that the "cultural clash between the populist conservatives and the cognitive elite that is hell-bent on enlightening them" is a "division that is rapidly replacing the old distinctions of liberal and conservative, left and right, Republican and Democrat."[14] Whereas these older political categories presupposed that intelligent people could disagree politically, the new "cognitive elites" of liberalism display "a disdainful contempt for those who disagree with them," the "crude intellectual snobbery of the schoolboy with the high IQ, who loves to torment his inferiors by scoffing at their dullness."[15] In the same vein, David Gelernter explains that "[o]ld-time left-wingers and right-wingers despised each other but recognized that they were comparable species, two points on a spectrum, with 'the center' in between." They were "old troopers who used to compete for the same Vaudeville booking." By contrast, the "Airhead leftists" of today

[13] Michael McConnell, *"God is Dead and We Have Killed Him!": Freedom of Religion in the Post-modern Age*, 1993 B.Y.U.L. Rev. 163, 172-73 (1993).
[14] Lee Harris, *The Next American Civil War: The Populist Revolt Against the Liberal Elite* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), pg. 86.
[15] Ibid. pgs. 86-87.

"know nothing of any political spectrum." Not content to defend their beliefs as true and critique those of conservatives as false, they rather "classify themselves as rational and their opponents as irrational—buffoons like George Bush, Sarah Palin and Michele Bachmann, or thugs like Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld," defining themselves as "the center, the responsible mainstream, the only sane place to be." This asymmetry—the liberal elites' reflexive dismissiveness toward opposing views that finds no counterpart on the Right—is now "the fundamental fact of political life."[16]

Gelernter views this asymmetry as one more legacy of the decadent 1960s. The now overthrown WASP establishment "saw itself as the nation's high end, the top of a vertical spectrum." But the new ruling class of "PORGIs"—post-religious, globalist intellectuals—see themselves "as separated by a cultural Grand Canyon from the nation at large, with Harvard and the New York Times and the Boston Symphony and science and technology and iPhones and organic truffled latte on their side—and guns, churches and NASCAR on the other." Though defended as emancipatory, the new dispensation has spawned a new repressiveness and intolerance unheard of in the old WASP regime. The WASP establishment "saw the future as a long process of nudging uncivilized Americans upward gently, gently through the WASPness spectrum." This was smug and patronizing, to be sure. But it was benign by comparison with the ruthlessness of the PORGI establishment. Having abandoned the last vestiges of WASP gentility, that establishment now "sees a future of hoisting people aloft and swinging them—via the great crane of the PORGIfied schools and universities—from Reactionary Ridge on the far side of the canyon all the way to PORGI Paradise." Being Manichean in outlook, the liberal elites prosecute a ruthless culture war and will not be appeased until every last reactionary has been exposed and reeducated.[17]

As a defender of upward mobility, this new elite is superficially democratic. But underneath this facade is a new hierarchy more insidious than any before. The old WASP establishment accepted that not everyone was going to live up to its standards, which permitted a measure of tolerance. But no such tolerance is extended to those who resist induction into liberalism. They are seen are as resisting reason itself and are treated accordingly. The 1960s

[16] David Gelernter, *America-Lite: How Imperial Academia Dismantled Our Culture (and Ushered In the Obamacrats)* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012), pgs. 128-29.
[17] Ibid., pg. 27.

revolution did not initiate some generic liberation from which all benefited, but merely supplanted one culturally parochial dispensation with another. Far from eliminating hierarchy, it merely *intellectualized* it through PORGI ideals. An aristocratic regime of smugness and patronization was replaced by a Jacobin one of intolerance and demonization—and with conservatives as the new target.

If the classic WASP social hierarchy revolved around perceived differences in things like moral cleanliness, social refinement, ethnic bona fides, and religious affiliation, the new hierarchy of ultra-liberalism distinguishes between those who possess "awareness" and those who lack it. It is the ultimate fulfillment of what Thomas Sowell calls "the vision of the anointed":

> …those who disagree with the prevailing vision are seen as being not merely in error, but in sin. For those who have this vision of the world, the anointed and the benighted do not argue on the same moral plane or play by the same cold rules of logic and evidence. The benighted are to be made 'aware,' to have their 'consciousness raised,' and the wistful hope is held out that they will 'grow.' Should the benighted prove recalcitrant, however, then their 'mean-spiritedness' must be fought and the 'real reasons' behind their arguments and actions exposed. While verbal fashions change, this basic picture of the differential rectitude of the anointed and the benighted has not changed fundamentally in at least two hundred years.[18]

The class struggle for conservatives isn't between the haves and the have-nots, but between the anointed and the benighted, between the would-be know-it-alls and the alleged know-nothings. The vision of the anointed never announces itself officially. But it informs liberals' conviction that they have a special role in the world, which is to discern truths that less evolved souls cannot. Theirs is a vision of "differential rectitude" which has "become inextricably intertwined with the egos of those who believe it." It is not "simply a vision of the world and its functioning in a causal sense, but also a vision of themselves and of their moral role in that world."[19]

Whatever the controversy at hand, the anointed's very identities are invested in the notion that conservatives are unthinking, servile to custom, driven by unconscious prejudices and hostilities, and simply lacking in the intellectual and emotional maturity to arrive at liberal conclusions. The "cognitive elites," argues Harris, cannot entertain opposing arguments because "they do not see them as arguments in the first place." Instead, they dismiss the fears and grievances of conservatives as "prejudices that have been programmed into them, requiring not

[18] Thomas Sowell, *The Vision of the Anointed: Self-Congratulation as a Basis for Social Policy* (Basic Books 1995), pg. 3.
[19] Ibid., pag. 5.

logical rebuttal but open derision."[20] Angelo Codevilla observes that "the notion that the common people's words are, like grunts, mere signs of pain, pleasure, and frustration, is now axiomatic among our Ruling Class."[21] However the point is put, conservatives believe that the liberal identity is now inextricably bound up with an ingrained social reflex to dismiss conservative ideas as epiphenomena of forces that liberals alone can recognize. The speech of conservatives is not to be argued with, but only conditioned and disciplined away. This is not a conclusion of liberal reason but the premise of liberal identity, which can only thrive at the expense of conservatives.

Liberals may not see themselves in this nefarious light. But the vision of the anointed has all the same been built into their basic sense of self. Proudly proclaiming his liberalism, radio talk show host Garrison Keiller explains:

> I am a liberal, and liberalism is the politics of kindness. Liberals stand for tolerance, magnanimity, community spirit, the defense of the weak against the powerful, love of learning, freedom of belief, art and poetry, city life, the very things that make America worth dying for.[22]

The traditional Left-Right spectrum has collapsed because liberalism can no longer see itself as just a point of view, symmetrical with conservatism, on how to make trade-offs between certain competing values and instead conceives of itself as something much more exalted. With liberalism having been defined in Keiller's grandiose terms, anyone who would oppose it *must* be pathologized as obtusely hostile to all that is good, true, and beautiful, and so as someone whose arguments cannot be accepted at face value.

Young conservative Robin Denbroff recalls her experience casually debating public school sex education with a group of liberals she met at a party. The discussion "had been whirling along, each of us weighing the alternative view and responding (for the most part) with sensitivity and respect." But then she revealed that she had been home-schooled, at which point her credibility instantly dissipated. The liberals concluded that if she had been homeschooled, then she likely had conservative parents, and so grew up indoctrinated with Republican propaganda. Her opinion was reduced to the "incurably biased but inevitable result of my upbringing." And so her arguments instantly became irrelevant, "dismissed as if they were the unthinking repetitions of a

[20] Harris, *Next American Civil War*, pg. 86-87.
[21] Angelo M. Codevilla, *The Ruling Class: How They Corrupted America and What We Can Do About It* (Beauford Books, 2010), pgs. 20-21.
[22] Qt. in Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), pg. 296.

child."[23] Liberals who will avoid the genetic fallacy in other contexts will indulge it in their dealings with conservatives, epistemic second-class citizens who cannot escape the accidents of their socialization. Whereas liberals operate in the space of reasons, conservatives operate in the space of causes, driven on by forces that only liberals properly understand. This is what Keiller's "love of learning" means in *concrete practice*.

While the vision of the anointed requires the reflexive dismissal of the benighted, it is also parasitic on what it dismisses. Liberals' antipathy to conservatism and conservatives is not merely the logical corollary of certain strongly held convictions, but rather the psychological wellspring of those convictions. And this means that the hostility must always be cultivated and fed, adapted to whatever targets are currently available as more and more human normalcy becomes pathologized as reactionary, the unfortunate relic of a benighted past. Hence the agenda of systematic inversion described above, which culminates in an unintelligible bizarro world where up is down and down is up, where what was normal is now deviant and what was deviant is now normal. The "kind of family that has been regarded for centuries as natural and normal," complains Himmelfarb, is "now seen as pathological, concealing behind the façade of respectability the new 'original sin' of child abuse." In the same spirit of systematic inversion, "smoking has been elevated to the rank of vice and sin, while sexual promiscuity is tolerated as a matter of individual right and choice." At the same time, rape has ironically been "defined up" to include "date rape"—sexual activity "which participants themselves at the time might not have perceived as rape."[24]

The anointed reject the common sense of the benighted because its very commonness is an affront to their identity, which requires them to systematically invert every inherited norm and understanding. Their identity presupposes a world that *resists* their prescriptions, a world too benighted to recognize their superior wisdom and morality—and thus all the more in need of these. Whether the issue is the rights of criminals or the merits of avant-garde art, there is, writes Sowell, always a "pattern of seeking differentiation at virtually all costs."[25] Amorphous abstractions like the "politics of kindness," "community spirit," and "love of learning" permit just this, because they

[23] Robin A. Dembroff, "The Conservative Gene," in *Proud To Be Right: Voices Of The Next Conservative Generation*, ed. Jonah Goldberg, (New York: Harper, 2010), pg. 23.
[24] Gertrude Himmelfarb, *One Nation, Two Cultures: A Searching Examination of American Society in the Aftermath of Our Cultural Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), pg. 28.
[25] Sowell, *The Vision of the Anointed*, pg. 248.

can always be reconfigured so as to generate a new chasm between the anointed and the benighted. Liberals are always "moving the goal post," say conservatives, and this is because their political vision is also a vision of themselves.

Since the vision of the anointed can at most enjoy the passive acquiescence, and never the lucid assent, of the great majority, it must be promoted and defended by an unaccountable intellectual class. Having captured America's most influential institutions, including the media, Hollywood, the universities, public education, foundations, government bureaucracies, and, perhaps most importantly, the courts, the liberal elites employ their privileged position to foist their parochial values upon a silent and largely powerless majority of ordinary Americans. Even where democracy has not been legally disabled by the courts and the administrative state, this residue of freedom comes too late when informal coercion can achieve unofficially whatever cannot be achieved officially.

Conservatives understand this agenda to be greater than the sum of its parts. Where liberals see discrete policy problems with discrete solutions, conservatives see localized manifestations of the vision of the anointed, mere "rallying points for a revolution in sensibilities" as Kimball says. Nunberg observes:

> Since the late 1960s, the right's appeals have rested on a collection of overlapping stories about the currents of contemporary American life—stories that illustrate declining patriotism and moral standards, the out-of-touch media and the self-righteous liberal elite, the feminization of public life, minorities demanding special privileges and unwilling to assimilate to American culture and language, growing crime and lenient judges, ludicrous restrictions on permissible speech, disrespect for religious faith, a swollen government that intrudes officiously in private life, and arching over all of them, an America divided into two nations by differences in values, culture, and lifestyle.[26]

Conservative claimants of cultural oppression see these various issues, not as clearly delineated controversies governed by their own internal norms, but as different arenas for the playing out of the same basic struggle between the anointed and the benighted. The elites may hold themselves out as post-ideological technocrats. But conservatives see this as is a disingenuous gambit to distract from the broader cultural landscape that is being incrementally transformed through what purport to be isolated acts of problem-solving and conflict-resolution. For the ultimate effect of liberal "solutions" is always to reinforce the symbolic prestige of liberalism itself, which

[26] Geoffrey Nunberg, *Talking Right: How Conservatives Turned Liberalism into a Tax-Raising, Latte-Drinking, Sushi-Eating, Volvo-Driving, New York Times-Reading, Body-Piercing, Hollywood-Loving, Left Wing Freak Show* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007), pg. 35.

conservatives must at every step resist. Given that every controversy is defined by the same basic divisions, victory in any one arena provides the victor with a momentum and confidence that can be carried forth into the next battle. And so conservatives cannot restrict their attention to the direct outcomes of particular policy decisions, because each such decision must also be assessed in terms of its incremental effect on the broader struggle, on the general balance of power between the anointed and the benighted. To concede anything to liberals is also to concede a portion of their power to resist further concessions, which is what liberals are always trying to extract.

The vision of the anointed is the reason why conservative claims of cultural oppression refuse do recognize a genuine distinction between "liberalism" and movements further to the Left whose self-professed adherents would insistently distinguish themselves from liberals. Offering the perspective of "the left," Brown and Halley explain that liberalism (in the broad non-partisan sense that encompasses both "liberals" and "conservatives" but excludes monarchists) begins by presuming "the legitimacy of a state in which we are guaranteed equality before the law and in which individual liberty is paramount" and then seeks "an order in which this equality and this freedom are maximized to the point where they would begin to cancel one another." Free-market conservatives are most concerned with maximizing economic freedom whilst "liberals" attach greater importance to equality and will "wield the state on behalf of those on the lower end of various social hierarchies or at the losing end of various maldistributions." Nevertheless, the difference between contemporary liberals and conservatives is only one of degree and emphasis. Both accept the framework of classical liberalism. By contrast, the Left does not accept the legitimacy of the liberal state as a given and instead takes up its analysis at the level of "the *social powers* producing and stratifying subjects that liberalism largely ignores." These social powers include "capital, male dominance, racial formations, and regimes of sexuality." And so unlike liberalism, the Left will critique "norms regulating a great variety of social relations, including but not limited to class, gender, sexuality, and race."[27]

But where leftists draw a sharp line between themselves and liberalism writ large, dismissing the differences between "liberals" and "conservatives" as trifling ones of degree, conservatives draw the sharp line between themselves and *both* "liberals" and "leftists," dismissing *their* differences as trifling ones of degree. Liberals and leftists may proceed from different

[27] Wendy Brown and Janet Halley, "Introduction," *in Left Legalsim/Left Critique*, eds. Wendy Brown and Janet Halley (Duke University Press, 2002), pgs. 5-7.

philosophical starting points. But they end up in the same place. For liberals' concern with "substantive" equality inevitably draws them into the ambit of leftism, at which point they become no less willing to deploy state power to meddle with a wide array of social practices. Given that the "various maldistributions" which concern liberals are only another name for what leftists call "social powers," what get sold as limited correctives to isolated "kinks in the system" always harbor the seeds of leftist totalitarianism. Liberals claim to demand only a "level playing field." But since there will always be another hitherto undetected "maldistribution" waiting to be "discovered" by the anointed, liberalism must inevitably devolve into leftism, which is why conservatives often speak of "left-liberalism" or employ "liberalism" and "the left" interchangeably.

Richard Hofstadter writes that the fundamentalist mind "looks upon the world as an arena of conflict between absolute good and absolute evil," and "cannot find serious importance in what it believes to be trifling degrees of difference: liberals support measures that are for all practical purposes socialistic, and socialism is nothing more than a variant of Communism, which as everyone knows, is atheism."[28] But what liberals condemn as unthinking Manicheanism follows logically from conservatives' understanding of modern American history. Given the erosion of liberalism's traditional foundations in the "unspoken confidences" of a God-fearing and freedom-loving people, contemporary liberalism has become fused with various alien influences, including Marxism, anti-bourgeois romanticism, anti-clericalism, Nietzschean immoralism, and postmodernism. This fusion is never officially announced. But it is what permits the anointed to maintain a continuous chasm between themselves and the benighted. It is what explains liberals' actual conduct and priorities, which are always to intervene against the "social powers" first identified by self-professed "leftists." These alien influences may not have seduced every liberal in equal measure. But like the weak-kneed academic administrators of the 1960s who quickly capitulated to the student radicals occupying their offices, what few "sensible" or "old-fashioned" liberals remain lack the fortitude to forcefully oppose these currents—which are now challenged by conservatives alone.

[28] Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), pg. 135.

2. The Dissident Culture

Conservative claimants of cultural oppression will be accused of playing the victim card. But they are more than willing to acknowledge that their own passivity and guilelessness are no less to blame for their predicament than is liberals' own ruthlessness. Codevilla notes that the "Country Class" of ordinary Americans was blinded by its egalitarian impulses to the fact that "a class of people was being carefully taught the contrary."[29] Kahane laments that conservatives, unlike progressives, "tend to fight only when roused by intolerable provocation." Most of the time, they prefer to "roll over and play dead."[30] In the same vein, Shapiro observes that conservatives "tend to shy away from the fight"[31] and "typically back down" in the face of liberal bullying.[32] Likewise, David Horowitz bemoans that conservative students have accepted left-wing classroom demagoguery as their lot. Being conservatives, "their disposition is to suffer" and so they must be pushed "to see the injustice done them as injustice—and do something about it."[33] If conservatives' claims to victimhood appear in tension with their professed opposition to the victim card, this is as they see it testimony to the depth of liberal encroachment, which has finally compelled them to draw a line in the sand and say "no more." Given what Kirk called conservatives' "congenital lethargy,"[34] the mere fact that they are finally being roused to action is understood as in itself strong evidence of the severity of the provocations and hence the justice of their cause. Conservative understand their claims of cultural oppression as long overdue exercises in assertiveness training. If liberals condemn this new assertiveness as belligerence, this is because it has been their liberal privilege to take conservative quiescence for granted.

This sense of beleaguerment serves as its own consolation, however, because it invites a heroic posture with a powerful existential appeal for those who seek to embody it. Richard Ford observes that some multiculturalists of the Left set themselves in opposition to a white cultural monolith with hegemonic aspirations and so "fancy themselves a heroic *resistance*, keeping the

[29] Codevilla, *The Ruling Class*, pg. 57.
[30] David Kahane, *Rules for Radical Conservatives: Beating the Left at Its Own Game to Take Back America* (Ballantine Books, 2010), pg. 268.
[31] Ben Shapiro, *Bullies: How the Left's Culture of Fear and Intimidation Silences America* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2013), pg. 9.
[32] Ibid., pg. 36.
[33] Qt. in Brian C. Anderson, *South Park Conservatives: The Revolt Against Liberal Media Bias* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2005), pg. 152.
[34] Russel Kirk, *The Conservative Mind* (BN Publishing, 2008), pg.228.

flame of liberty alive against all odds."[35] Conservatives have now adopted just this posture toward the cultural monolith of liberalism. The trope of resistance to hegemony, historically the property of the Left, has now been appropriated by the Right. Having been ousted from their lofty perch as guardians of the old order and finding themselves in retreat, conservatives position themselves as dissenters, holdouts refusing to capitulate to the dominant paradigm and its armies of well-programmed liberal automatons.

Conservatives believe that the prestige of traditional American values is badly damaged, perhaps irreparably so. Since liberal incursions against these values cannot be positively repulsed in the foreseeable future, conservatives must simply hunker down and resign themselves to mere self-preservation. Robert Bork thus suggests that conservative talk radio and evangelical organizations may be the modern equivalents of the isolated Irish monasteries that safeguarded classical learning during the Dark Ages.[36] In the same vein, Himmelfarb observes that a morally conservative "dissident culture" now stands in stubborn opposition to the morally libertarian "dominant culture." Whereas the dominant culture is the heir to the counter-culture of the 1960s, the dissident culture represents a "counter-counterculture."[37]

As a dissident culture, conservatism is by definition in a position of weakness. The elites of the dissident culture "cannot begin to match, in numbers or influence, those who occupy the commanding heights of the dominant culture, such as professors, journalists, television and movie producers, and various cultural entrepreneurs."[38] Even religion has fallen under the dominant culture's sway. One might have expected it to be at the forefront of the resistance. But "priding themselves on being cosmopolitan and sophisticated, undogmatic and uncensorious," the mainline churches have offered "little or no resistance" to the "prevailing culture."[39]

Despite this hegemony, conservatives can and do engage in various forms of "passive resistance," as when parents home-school their children or send them to private religious schools, or when conservative foundations establish special campus centers, institutes, and programs as oases of moral traditionalism in a desert of liberalism. Students "seeking something other than an aggressively secular education" have "avail[ed] themselves of an ever-expanding number of

[35] Richard Ford, *Racial Culture: A Critique* (Princeton University Press, 2005), pg. 31.
[36] Robert H. Bork, *Slouching toward Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (Regan, 1996), pgs. 334-38.
[37] HImmelfarb, *One Nation, Two Cultures,* pg. 124.
[38] Ibid., pg. 125.
[39] Ibid., pg. 98.

religious colleges." And "despairing of the increasingly offensive fare on television," some parents have begun to act "as their own regulators and censors," encouraging "TV abstinence" just as their children commit themselves to "sexual abstinence."[40] These practices will not repel the onslaught of liberalism, but they do hold a candle to it, exploding its veneer of inevitability and offering conservatives a sign of hope.

Himmelfarb's examples suggest that the enclaves of the dissident culture offer localized recreations of the "unspoken confidences" overturned by the 1960s and their mass bohemianization. However, the counter-culture of conservatism has itself become bohemianized in some ways, aspiring to a role once securely held by liberals. Cupp and Joshpe write that "[t]hanks to indelible countercultural mileposts like Haight-Ashbury and Woodstock, conservatives have inaccurately been labeled 'the establishment' by liberals who cling to the romanticism of rebellion and revolution that they can no longer inspire."[41] Far from condemning 1960s-style rebelliousness, conservatives may now embrace it at the expense of traditional conservative virtues. Susan Jacoby observes that "[t]o some degree, a vote for Nixon represented a vote for the silent majority's concept of desirable family values and manners—for Pat Nixon's good Republican cloth coat, for two dutiful daughters that dressed, looked, and spoke like the elder daughter in *Father Knows Best*."[42] As heirs of the silent majority, conservative claimants of cultural oppression embrace traditional family values. However, their absorption of the Left also leaves them ambivalent about the imagery evoked by Jacoby, and they are inclined to dismiss it as yet another false stereotype that flatters liberals as their expense, undeservedly arrogating to liberals the reputation for individualism and free-spiritedness that are in truth more greatly embodied by conservatives.

As conservatives, they must condemn the left for its irreverence. But as conservative claimants of cultural oppression, they must condemn it for *its undeserved reputation for irreverence*, which they believe stands the truth on its head. It is the "peculiarity of our time," writes Justin Katz, that "one must, in essential philosophy, be conservative to be contrarian."[43]

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[40] Gertrude Himmelfarb, "The Other Culture War," in *Is There A Culture War?: A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life*, eds. E.J. Dionne Jr. and Michael Cromartie (Washington D.C.: Brooking Institution Press, 2006), pg. 81.
[41] S.E. Cupp and Brett Joshpe, *Why You're Wrong About The Right: Behind The Myths—The Surprising Truth About Conservatives* (New York: Thresholds Editions, 2008), pg. 98.
[42] Susan Jacoby, *The Age of American Unreason* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), pg. 150
[43] Justin Katz, "A Nonconforming Reconstruction," in *Proud To Be Right: Voices Of The Next Conservative Generation*, ed. Jonah Goldberg (New York: Harper, 2010), pg.73-75

Caitrin Nicol describes her homeschooling as part of a "Revolution" and observes that "the sort of people to whom revolutionariness is theoretically appealing are more likely to find it disturbing," as "there's no telling what the social conservatives are up to out of sight!"[44] In a similar vein, Nathan Harden recalls that as a religious conservative, he "attended Yale as one of a minority of moral outsiders" and that "[i]n the context of Yale's 'liberated' sexual culture, we prudes were deviants."[45] Conservatives' long-held *theoretical* moralism has become synthesized with a new *temperamental* anti-moralism. While liberalism lies outside the mainstream of traditional American values, it is conservatives who proudly lie outside the mainstream of American culture as presently constituted, and thus the "traditional morality" of liberalism. Conservativism now stands, not only for its substantive principles, but also for the broader ideal of dissent, upon which liberalism only trades rhetorically. The deception has been effective, however. And so conservatives now find themselves culturally oppressed by the fact that liberals, the consummate insiders, sycophants, and apparatchiks, can portray themselves as fearless rebels while depicting those who actually bear the costs of rebellion as mindless reactionaries cringing before a world they do not understand.

But this is just cultural propaganda as conservatives see it, because the supposed reactionaries are really the awoken ones, those rare individuals who somehow escaped the usual effects of liberalism's control over the means of cultural reproduction. Just as the New Left worried that mass media and entertainment promoted a "one-dimensional" quietism before an alienating and dehumanizing industrial order, so Kahane now explains that progressives' worst nightmare is that "an aroused citizenry casts off its TV-induced torpor and begins to reengage with its own culture."[46] Similarly, Christopher Gawley writes that conservative Coloradans resisting pro-gay anti-discrimination laws were "given the opportunity to wake their fellow citizens" from "the nihilistic slumber they confront all around them daily."[47] Traditionally an aspiration of the Left, consciousness-raising is now exhorted by the Right as the precondition of cultural resistance. To resist the liberalism that lies without, they must first overcome the liberalism that lies within,

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[44] Caitrin Nicol, "Immersion Experience," in *Proud To Be Right: Voices Of The Next Conservative Generation*, ed. Jonah Goldberg (New York: Harper, 2010), pg. 124.
[45] Nathan Harden, "The Girls I Knew at Yale," in *Proud To Be Right: Voices Of The Next Conservative Generation*, ed. Jonah Goldberg (New York: Harper, 2010), pg. 60.
[46] Kahane, *Rules for Radical Conservatives*, pg. 85.
[47] Christopher J. Gawley, *A Requiem for Morality: A Response to Peter M. Cicchino*, 30 Cap. U. L. Rev. 711, 753 (2002).

must "reengage" with their own culture in order to recover the suppressed historical memory of another way of life.

This suppression is seen as testimony to the depth of a liberal encroachment that leaves no one untouched. Conservatives, bewails Himmelfarb, were at one time "convinced that 'the people,' as distinct from the 'elites,' were still 'sound,' still devoted to traditional values, and that only superficially and intermittently were they (or more often their children) seduced by the blandishments of the counterculture." But this "confidence has eroded, as surely as the values themselves have."[48] Conservative claimants of cultural oppression understand themselves as representing, not the numerical majority, but *what the numerical majority would be but for the mass indoctrination of ultra-liberalism.*, but for the "blandishments of the counterculture." If Americans are more liberal than is consistent with what conservatives maintain is America's essentially conservative heritage, this is because Americans have been *seduced*—not persuaded—to turn their backs on this heritage. Conservative claims of cultural oppression are a *constructive* populism. They speak for the American people, not as they presently are, but as they should be and would be but for the encroachments of liberalism. The "ordinary American" they celebrate is a Platonic form for whose corrupted empirical manifestations liberalism is responsible, a symbol of America's lost soul that remains buried deep within us all.

This is why there remains hope. Their deep pessimism notwithstanding, some conservatives believe they are beginning to make serious inroads in their struggle to tear away liberalism's veil of illusion and restore freedom and dignity to the ordinary American. While acknowledging that liberals continue to dominate popular culture, Anderson detects the emergence of a "new post-liberal counterculture" that ruthlessly takes aims at established liberal pieties.[49] The new conservative blogosphere "explodes…[the] 'trust us' paternalism" of the liberal old-media.[50] A new wave of conservative comedians targets "the orthodoxies of the modern Left" in the same way earlier comedians like Lenny Bruce "directed their fire at bourgeois conventions," thereby offering "a liberating release for students whose left-wing professors seek to impose on them the 'right' thoughts about race and sex."[51] The new conservative media, writes Anderson,

[48] Himmelfarb, *One Nation, Two Cultures*, pg. 118.
[49] Brian C. Anderson, *South Park Conservatives: The Revolt Against Liberal Media Bias* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2005), pg. xv.
[50] Ibid., pg. 111.
[51] Ibid., pg. 92.

have "nourished a fiercely anti-liberal comedic spirit, whose anarchic, vulgar archetype is Comedy Central's brilliant cartoon series, *South Park*."[52] Its creators "have made their show not only the most obscenity-laced but also the most hostile to liberalism in television history,"[53] ridiculing liberal pieties about the dignity of the disabled, the environment, sexual harassment, and their "multiculti sentimentality about holistic medicine and the 'wisdom' of native cultures."[54] Partisan, raucous, and overheated though it may be, conservative talk-radio "has given the Right in all its varieties a chance to break through the liberal monoculture and be heard"[55]—offering a welcome alternative to liberal commentary that is "sanctimonious and deadly, deadly earnest."[56]

Liberalism remains the dominant dispensation, of course. But given the extent of that dominance, the resistance mustered by conservatives is no mean feat. As with George Washington holding off the militarily superior British, mere survival can count as victory, for mere survival is a symbol of a resilience that might someday, under happier circumstances, secure its ultimate ends. If the claimants retain their faith in a brighter future despite what they insist is liberalism's overwhelming ascendancy, this is because they believe that ascendancy has been built atop of a great lie that is destined to crumble one day, as all lies finally must. "Once you see it, it can't be unseen," as Shapiro says.

3. Stealth and Subterfuge

What *Chronicles* denounces as the subtlety and insidiousness of the liberal activist agenda cannot be overemphasized. If conservatives need to raise their consciousness, this is because liberalism has like every dominant dispensation created social conditions under which its contingency will not be recognized and alternatives will not be perceived. Liberalism, says Kimball, has "take[n] on an aura of inevitability." It presents itself "not so much [as] a way of looking at the world as the world itself." Disagreement with it now "appears as dissent from the simple reality of the way things are: less a challenge than a perversion."[57] Recalling his student

[52] Ibid., pg. xiv.
[53] Ibid., pg. 88.
[54] Ibid., pg. 76.
[55] Ibid., pg. 50.
[56] Ibid., pg. 41.
[57] Roger Kimball, "Mill, Stephen, and the Nature of Freedom," in *The Betrayal of Liberalism: How the Disciples of Freedom and Equality Helped Foster The Illiberal Politics of Coercion and Control*, eds. Hilton Kramer and Roger Kimball Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), pg. 43.

days at Berkeley in the 1970s, Andrew Klaven explains his encounter with this "aura of inevitability" and the challenges of reaching conservative consciousness in the face of it:

> [Leftism] was the atmosphere, was the water. I was always a disgruntled liberal… I always knew something was wrong and I can pick out things along the way that just drove me crazy. I mean I remember affirmative action, just thinking this is a dead end in terms of thought, in terms of the ability to think. But it never occurred to me that the air I was breathing was wrong… It was like being in the Matrix—remember the movie the Matrix? It was like a complete imitation of reality that you really had to start to hook your finger through and start to see outside that there was another reality that you could have.[58]

If Frank is correct that conservatism now accuses, rants, points out hypocrisies, and gleefully pounces on contradictions, this is because liberal hegemony permits of no other response. Ultra-liberalism is never straightforwardly presented to the public as a clearly delineated philosophy susceptible to rational debate. Being embedded in the very fabric of our culture, as *Chronicles* says, it has become invisible, absorbed into take-for-granted common sense as just the air we breathe. And so conservatives can do no more than try to "hook" their fingers through the liberal Matrix, as Klaven says. The foremost task of conservative claims of cultural oppression, then, is less to issue principled disagreements with liberalism than the logically prior task of establishing that such disagreement *is possible*. And this means exposing the manipulations that now lead us to mistake one perspective on reality for reality itself. Only then does genuine debate become possible. Inasmuch as a conservative argument functions as a claim of cultural oppression, the goal is not to establish the substantive truth of any position but to "level the playing field" between Left and Right, not to win the debate but to insist on fair terms of debate, to compel the Left to "come clean" about "where it is coming from."

Ultra-liberalism seeks to elude such transparency at all costs, however. O'Reilly argues that, with the "secular-progressive movement" being antithetical to the American character, it must resort to "stealth and subterfuge" in order to achieve its ends.[59] In denying the existence of a culture war, secular-progressives employ a "denial strategy" for "public consumption."[60] Rather than boldly proclaiming their ultimate ends, they offer up "small doses of secular-progressive philosophy" under the guise of "mainstream liberal politics until the nation is gradually inured to its agenda."[61] On their face, the ideals of liberalism should appeal to all reasonable minds. But

[58] http://www.hoover.org/publications/uncommon-knowledge
[59] Bill O'Reilly, *Culture Warrior* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), pg. 35.
[60] Ibid., pg. 168.
[61] Ibid. pg. 43.

close inspection reveals a special code for priorities that liberals will not acknowledge openly and instead disguise in uncontroversial democratic aspirations. The problem, explains Ingraham, is that the elites invoke the same ideals embraced by ordinary Americans, but then use them "in very different ways" in order "to establish elite rule over us."[62] Speaking satirically on behalf of the Left, David Kahane writes that "we never use a word with a uniform meaning that's clear to both sides when we can use one with a double meaning, one of which is invisible and inaudible to you."[63]

Conservatives detect this policy of studied ambiguity, and hence plausible deniability, along a wide range of fronts. Sowell observes that while the anointed extol "public service," this is public service as defined, not by the demands of the public itself as revealed by the free market, but by the preferences of third-parties "enforced through government and paid for by the power of taxation."[64] In a similar sleight-of-hand, "public health" also serves liberalism as an ideological weapon. While sex education is sold to the public as a prophylactic against tangible social problems like teenage pregnancy and venereal disease, the movement's leaders have a more insidious agenda, which is to reshape the attitudes of a captive audience and supplant traditional values with avant-garde ones. Why else, asks Sowell, would anyone advocate that sex education begin in kindergarten and continue through college, when "it could not possibly take that much time to teach basic biological or medical information about sex."[65] And then there are the ceaseless calls for "diversity." Like public service and public health, diversity is unobjectionable on its face. But diversity, writes D'Souza, has "los[t] its procedural meaning and assume[d] substantive content," referring, not "to a range of views on a disputed question," but to a set of ideological causes agreement with which is being "for diversity" and opposition to which is being "against diversity."[66] In a similar vein, David Horowitz observes that the "critical thinking" now promoted by universities is "a common political code among academic radicals" designating the Marxist

[62] Laura Ingraham, *Shut Up & Sing: How Elites from Hollywood, Politics, and the UN Are Subverting America* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2003), pg. 48.
[63] Kahane, *Rules for Radical Conservatives*, pg. 123.
[64] Sowell, *The Vision of the Anointed*, pg. 184.
[65] Ibid., pg. 20.
[66] Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), pg. 214.

critique of capitalism, and not some general commitment to "scientific skepticism and intellectual pluralism."[67]

In all these cases as in many others, there is a concrete ideological meaning laying concealed underneath an ideal that is broadly palatable when presented in the abstract. In all these cases, liberals are disingenuously seeking to give what is a disputable interpretation of the broad ideal the common sense flavor that should properly attach only to the abstraction. They thus treat their narrow interpretations as though they were the ideals themselves, foreclosing debate by settling the meaning of essentially contested concepts in advance. The liberal bait-and-switch presents proposals in hard-nosed, non-sectarian terms while implementing them in a narrowly ideological fashion. Conservatives oppose only the sectarian implementations, not the ideals as such. But liberals can caricature them as opposing the latter, and hence as reactionaries who are hostile to all that is good, true, and beautiful. Conservaphobia is in this way built into the very language in which liberals frame the issues, one fraught with traps for any conservative so naïve as to imagine that liberals will ever engage him in good-faith democratic deliberation. If conservatives now gleefully pounce on contradictions, as Frank observes, this is because liberalism is now defined by an ever-recurring contradiction between appearance and reality, between a universalistic façade and a parochial subtext concealed beneath it.

Sowell charges that the anointed employ "preemptive rhetoric" to prevent fair, reasoned, and non-coercive debate with their political opponents. And this rhetoric may take the form of a seemingly innocent refrain. When a progressive tells a conservative "You can't possibly mean that," the point, charges Kahane, "is to stop the argument in its tracks," to assert the progressive's "higher reality." "Everyone knows that" is likewise "[a]nother all-purpose put-down," intended to broadcast that the conservative is a "complete idiot," just as "You're not really…" is meant to suggest that the conservative interlocutor "is little better than a cave-dweller, a superstitious moron whose walnut-size brain is probably stuffed with religious 'dogma.'"[68] Here is the censorship of fashion in all its insidiousness. A liberal asking a conservative "You can't possibly mean…" is like a man admonishing a woman to "calm down"—something which may not be terribly offensive in the abstract but assumes a more nefarious meaning in the context of a long history of negative

[67] David Horowitz and Jacob Laskin, *One-Party Classroom: How Radical Professors at America's Top Colleges Indoctrinate Students and Undermine Our Democracy* (New York: Crown Forum, 2009), pg. 97.
[68] Kahane, *Rules for Radical Conservatives*, pg. 166.

stereotypes functioning to reinforce the position of the dominant class. In the one case, the class is men. In the other, it is liberals. They need not directly assert their claims to moral and intellectual superiority because these are being asserted *for them* by the unspoken mores of the ambient culture, which they tacitly invoke through these facially innocuous expressions of bemusement. For this bemusement is merely another weapon in the arsenal of liberalism. What the progressive tries to pass off as an innocent request for clarification is in its unacknowledged undertones a direct assault on the conservatives' character and intellect, the insinuation that no thinking person could possibly believe what the conservative claims to believe. Pretending to extend the conservative the benefit of the doubt, the liberal assaults him with his very magnanimity. Though feigning that he is engaged in a thoughtful exchange between inquiring minds, the liberal quietly invokes a presumed social consensus before which the conservative is expected to cower in fear.

Liberals can thus engage in conservaphobic bullying behind the cloak of plausible deniability. This plausible deniability moreover allows them to chalk up the ensuing conservative resentment to unhinged irascibility or paranoia. Employing a façade of rationalism to disguise the performative dimension of their dialectic, liberals reinforce a subtle social hierarchy that is just as pervasive as it is deniable. Liberals can thus drown conservatives in an ever-expanding accretion of insinuations and intimations, a Kafkaesque world each layer of which is recognizable only by reference to the rest, leaving conservatives unable to expose the bigotry of liberals even as they are submerged by it.

The cumulative result of all the subterfuge, double-talk, and mystification is that ultra-liberalism is now regarded, not merely as the superior public philosophy, but also as a special vantage point that is somehow post-ideological and "pragmatic." Goldberg's *Liberal Fascism* warns:

> The unique threat of today's left-wing political religions is precisely that they claim to be free of dogma. Instead, they profess to be champions of liberty and pragmatism, which in their view are self-evident goods. They eschew 'ideological' concerns. Therefore they make it impossible to argue with their most basic ideas and exceedingly difficult to expose the totalitarian temptations residing in their hearts.[69]

[69] Jonah Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), pgs. 404-5.

Liberals are naturally entitled to their ideological convictions, and Goldberg believes that ideologies are indispensable epistemic heuristics. But whereas conservatives and libertarians openly defend their ideologies, progressives "lie to themselves and the world" about their ideological agendas, disguising these in "Trojan Horse clichés and smug assertions that they are simply pragmatists, fact finders, and empiricists who are clearheaded as to 'what works.'"[70] Liberals vaunted pragmatism and empiricism are in reality forms of mystification and obscurantism. While liberals would prefer to associate these qualities of mind with traditional religion, they are what now define liberalism as a concrete social practice.

Goldberg reports that in 2000 the National Council for Accreditation for Teacher Education introduced yet another addition to the latest trend of "disposition evaluation" designed to identify successful teaching candidates. The dispositions to be measured were, according to the Council, those that are "guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and social justice."[71] None would object to caring, fairness, honesty, and responsibility, and adding "social justice" to the mix suggests to the casual observer that it is similarly uncontroversial. But Goldberg disagrees. Unlike these basic boy scout precepts, "[s]ocial justice is not a nonideological concept that simply draws on ethics or morality or the overall need for goodness in society" but rather a "deeply ideological set of assumptions that most practitioners of social justice refuse to openly and sincerely acknowledge."[72] The "social justice disposition" does not measure pedagogical competence or anything related to actual academic subjects, and is rather a subterfuge by which to weed out non-leftists without acknowledging discrimination.[73]

In what precisely does this ideology of social justice consist? The problem is that no one who does not already subscribe to it really knows, because they will not be told. The "closer to the mainstream an organization gets," writes Goldberg, "the less it will *explain* what social justice *is*, and the more they'll just let those in the know interpret the code for themselves."[74] If others cannot access the code, this is because

> [social justice] becomes like The Force in *Star Wars*. Who are the Jedis? They are good people who are strong with The Force. What is The Force? It is what Jedis are strong

[70] Jonah Goldberg, *The Tyranny of Clichés: How Liberals Cheat in the War of Ideas* (Sentinel 2012), pgs. 13-14.
[71] Ibid., pg. 136.
[72] Ibid., pg. 143.
[73] Ibid., pg. 137.
[74] Ibid., pg. 136.

> with. The social justice syllogism goes something like this: 1) We are liberals. 2) Liberals believe it is imperative that social justice be advanced wherever we find it. 3) Therefore, whatever we believe to be imperative *is* social justice. And there's the corollary: If you oppose liberals in advancing what they want, you are against not just liberals but social justice itself.[75]

Social justice purports to be a secular concept amenable to rational adjudication. But in practice, it functions as a kind of iridescent, quasi-divine glow akin to the halos that surrounded saints and angels in medieval painting. It is a special dispensation too sublime to be explained to those lacking first-hand experience of it, a form of knowledge that, arising directly out of liberal virtue, cannot be grasped by those in whom that virtue has yet to be inculcated. As for the medieval theologians, understanding follows from faith. And if liberals have arrogated the status of Jedis, then, correlatively, conservatives are now greeted as Darth Vader figures, villains whose actual words and arguments are always preceded by vague intimations of the diabolical. *Star Wars* viewers did not bother to consider whether the Empire would better serve the Galaxy under prevailing conditions. For the atmospherics of the film had already settled that question in advance. And likewise, conservative ideas can no longer be approached with any modicum of openness, because they have been caricatured, tarnished, and undermined by the atmospherics of liberalism. Liberals present themselves as post-ideological rationalists. But their commitment to social justice betrays that their rationalism is vitiated by something more primordial than their self-conceptions allow them to acknowledge.

Conservative claims of cultural oppression will be classified as a form of "right-wing populism." And this is not inaccurate. But the label radically under-describes the phenomenon—which is why I have been compelled to coin a neologism. The archetypal right-wing populist simply condemns the elites for their subversive attacks on morality, religious faith, or the prerogatives of privileged ethnic insiders. But conservative claims of cultural oppression are systematically inflected by a respect for many quintessentially liberal virtues—equal dignity, intellectual pluralism, transparency, free debate—to which the classic right-wing populist feels no need to appeal. Genuine or not, these values are integral to the claimants' self-understanding.

Like traditional right-wing populism, conservative claims of cultural oppression are concerned to defend traditional morality, religion, patriotism and other inherited folkways against

[75] Ibid., pg. 134.

the subversive influence of alienated elites. But the elites' principal sin is less their personal rejection of these values than their refusal to criticize them on a "level playing field" that would give conservatives a fair opportunity to advance their side of the argument. The liberal elites do indeed represent an alien sensibility insinuating itself into the indigenous culture of the ordinary American, and in a manner akin to how the Eastern European Jewish communist intellectual was once unwelcome as an unwholesome foreign presence amidst the native culture of homegrown white Protestants. But by contrast with the archetypal know-nothing who feels only rancor and vitriol, the conservative claimant of cultural oppression sees it as testimony to his own tolerance that he could forgive this foreignness if only it would fight fair, if only it would stop being so "sublimely confident" in its convictions and accede to ordinary intellectual give-and-take. The conservative of yesteryear objected to the Marxist professor's corrupting influence on youth. But for conservative claims of cultural oppression, the problem is not the mere presence of Marxists in the classroom, but that Marxist opinion is now identified with critical thinking as such. The objection is not to the "what" of liberalism but to its "how." Conservative claims of cultural oppression are right-wing populism turned post-modern. They protest liberalism, not as a public philosophy but *as a meta-narrative*—a way of thinking that, being no longer recognizable as such, has as Kimball says seeped into "the realm of habit, taste, and feeling."

Conservatives will frame the precise nature of liberals' duplicity in a variety of ways. But they are united by the conviction that liberalism is sustained in existence by some all-pervasive social distortion, and that this distortion must be exposed if rhetorical parity between Left and Right is to be restored. Goldberg condemns the liberal denial of ideology as "offensive to logic, culturally pernicious, and, yes, infuriating." And his exasperation is that of all conservatives, who find themselves perennially accused of moral and intellectual failure by those who lack any standing to condemn them. With acrobatic dexterity, liberals have eluded every attempt to hold them accountable, and have now been taken in by their own performances as dispassionate rationalists and pragmatists. With conservatives being the only remaining threat to those performances, to the liberal identity, they cannot but become an *Other*. The conservaphobia that oppresses them is neither a gratuitous free-floating vice nor a calculated political strategy, but the logical corollary of liberalism's basic self-understanding as somehow above the fray of sect and ideology.

4. Specious Asymmetries, Unacknowledged Symmetries

Liberals have often taken note of the seeming inconsistency with which conservatives casually oscillate between accusing them first of nihilistic relativism and then of puritanical moralism and political correctness. Frank observes that conservatives condemn liberals for being "relativists to whom nothing is sacred and yet, at the same time, omnipotent inquisitors able to call down instant censure on the heads of innocent Americans."[76] John Wilson notes the same contradiction in D'Souza's attack on multiculturalism in higher education. D'Souza criticized Stanford's "Culture, Ideas, and Values" core curriculum on the grounds that "values suggested a certain relativism, in which various systems of thought would be considered on a roughly equal plane." But in the next breath, D'Souza compares minority campus activists to Rigoberta Menchu, a left-wing Guatemalan Indian activist whose autobiography was the most controversial element of the new Stanford curriculum, lamenting that, just like her, the campus activists "tend to see their lives collectively as a historical melodrama involving the forces of good and evil, in which they are cast as secular saints and martyrs."[77] Conservatives thus place liberals in an impossible Catch-22 where they cannot rebut the change of relativism without becoming guilty of melodramatic moralism. And this suggests to liberals that both conservative accusations are meritless, rhetorical tactics without intellectual substance.

But the conservative contradiction lies in the eye of the liberal beholder. The conservative grievance is that liberals wield the jargon of neutrality, tolerance, and diversity selectively in order to discredit conservative morality and make way for an alternative liberal counter-morality, which is where the inquisitorial censoriousness is to be found. What strikes liberals as a glaring contradiction is just the difference between appearance and reality, as well as between expedient and ultimate aim. The relativism first disarms conservatives of their convictions, at which point liberals' own convictions can be imposed. "Tolerance," observes John O'Sullivan, has become a device to silence debate and thereby "elevate certain liberal ideas and constituencies above public criticism."[78]

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[76] Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2005), pg. 122.
[77] John K. Wilson, *The Myth of Political Correctness: The Conservative Attack on Higher Education* (Duke University Press, 1995), pg. 71.
[78] John O'Sullivan, "The Moral Consequence of Impatience," in *The Betrayal of Liberalism: How the Disciples of Freedom and Equality Helped Foster The Illiberal Politics of Coercion and Control*, eds. Hilton Kramer and Roger Kimball (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), pg. 222.

Conservative claimants of cultural oppression accuse liberals of disingenuously denying what they insist is the fundamental *symmetry* between conservatism and liberalism. And this is that both are just alternative visions of the good, alternative faiths. Liberals are no less than conservatives "imposing" a local morality upon others who do not share it. As McConnell puts it, modern liberalism "proclaims its neutrality toward competing ideas of virtue and the good life, but is committed in practice to the promotion of particular ideals and--even more--to the eradication of others."[79] If this hypocrisy escapes notice, this is only because liberals' undeserved rhetorical advantages allow them to dismiss conservatives as narrow-minded and parochial and thereby bask in a posture of ecumenical cosmopolitanism standing above the fray. Again and again and in a wide range of spheres, conservative claimants of cultural oppression seek to explode this perception of asymmetry in order to reveal fundamental parallels between what purports to be liberal neutralism and the conservative parochialism to which it is speciously opposed. Thus do they hope to demonstrate that they and liberals are "in the same business" and, with this recognized, that the moralistic excesses of liberalism have been much more egregious than their own.

D'Souza writes that, far from repudiating morality as such, those who "champion pornography and cultural depravity are expressing a new morality."[80] Though some conservatives mistakenly criticize liberals as relativistic and non-judgmental, liberal morality is in fact "extremely judgmental in condemning traditional morality." Such is betrayed by liberals' "crusading zeal."[81] What they cast as universal emancipation from tyranny and superstition is in reality the entrenching of a new ideology and social hierarchy. D'Souza explains:

> Behind the innumerable examples of excess, immodesty, and immorality there is an ideology. Here are some of the ingredients of that ideology, which constitutes Hollywood's understanding of how the world is, or should be. Children are usually wiser than their parents and teachers, who are often portrayed as fools and bunglers. Homosexuals are typically presented as good-looking and charming, and unappealing features of the gay lifestyle are either ignored or presented in an amusing light. As countless movie plots confirm, the white businessman in the suit is usually the villain. Prostitutes are always portrayed more favorably and decently than anyone who criticizes them. Small towns are the preferred venue for evil and scary occurrences, and country pastors are usually portrayed as vicious, hypocritical, sexually repressed, and corrupt. Notwithstanding the occasional appearance of the stereotypical Elmer Gantry, nobody goes to church. Religion is simply not a feature in the lives of movie and television characters. Lots of film and TV

[79] Michael McConnell, *"God is Dead and We Have Killed Him!": Freedom of Religion in the Post-modern Age*, 1993 B.Y.U.L. Rev. 163, 176 (1993).
[80] D'Souza, *The Enemy at Home*, pg. 140.
[81] Ibid., pg. 145.

> characters have pre-marital sex, but very rarely does anyone contract a sexually transmitted disease. "Prudes" are always the subject of jokes and ridicule. One of the central themes of American movies and television is the glamorization of adultery. Adultery is almost always portrayed sympathetically, so that if a woman cheats on her husband, the husband is generally shown to be vicious, unscrupulous, abusive, impotent, or in some way deserving of the fate that befalls him.[82]

Liberals have not eliminated moralistic censoriousness as such, but only replaced one version of it with another, a new moral ideology that obscures its true nature by employing traditional morality as a foil onto which to project liberals own judgmentalism, which is now associated exclusively with traditionalism in the public mind. Liberals are not in fact more tolerant or cosmopolitan than traditionalists. But they have been culturally credentialed as such by the dominant dispensation. And so they need only display ritual contempt for certain traditional objects of social veneration in order to be celebrated as "sophisticated" notwithstanding that their judgments are just as reflexive and unthinking as traditional morality. What liberals hold out as their cosmopolitan sophistication is merely an ideological weapon through which to otherize traditionalists with plausible deniability.

The liberal will retort that he is moralistic only inasmuch as he opposes the moralism of conservatives, and that his own second-order moralism is therefore asymmetrical with that to which it is being speciously compared. But conservatives see this response as rationalization and ideology. The *conceit* is that Hollywood is just knocking the country pastor off his pedestal, acting as a check against the unthinking reverence he normally enjoys, and so performing a critical intellectual function that only the truly benighted could oppose. But the truth is that the country pastor was long ago stripped of the social prestige that is being disingenuously imputed to him. Hollywood's pretense to the contrary is merely an expedient through which to disguise its ideological narrowness as some kind of courageous critical enterprise. Liberals disguise their moralistic hostility toward conservatives as their vigilance before the perennial specter of fascism, which won't quite die and so must be continually exposed and preempted. Here as elsewhere, liberals' very identities rest on the slander of conservatives.

Liberals may be less judgmental than conservatives when it comes to sexual orientation or abortion. But conservative claimants of cultural oppression believe that the censoriousness of the Left is merely of another kind, and one that is on the whole much more intrusive than their own

[82] Ibid., pg. 130.

could ever be. Conservativism, writes Goldberg, "describes a very specific and very limited sphere of life." By contrast, liberalism "tells you how to be, what to buy," dictating that you "wear progressive clothes, drive progressive cars, have progressive attitudes about what kind of toilets you use."[83] The dictates of liberalism will be enforced in different ways in different spheres, either formally or informally as the situation requires. But the need to in one way or another preempt the individual choices of the benighted is a constant of liberalism. While liberals will mock conservatives as the inheritors of priggish Victorian moralism, conservatives believe this stands the truth on its head and projects liberals' own sins onto them. It is "those who profess to be in the vanguard of enlightened thought," writes Himmelfarb, who most resemble the Victorians' Mrs. Grundy, a figure of mockery who "was immortalized in the language as a symbol of the narrow-minded, self-righteous, self-appointed social censor."[84]

This pedigree was confirmed in the childhood traumas of conservative commentator Tucker Carlson, whose conservatism was sparked early in life in reaction to his first-grade teacher, Mrs. Raymond. Mrs. Raymond was a preening progressive who spent class time railing against the evils of the class system and white bread, making nasty remarks about conservative politicians while teaching little. The straw that broke the camel's back arrived when she was invited to the Carlson home to provide extra tutoring to him and his brother. Rather than just doing her job, she instead took his father to task for allowing the brothers to eat Cap'n Crunch cereal, confronting the spectacle with "a look of shock and horror on her face, the look of a priest who has stumbled into a black Mass." She was promptly ejected from the home. Mrs. Raymond was Carlson's personal encounter with the Victorians' Mrs. Grundy. And it was this encounter that first taught him the meaning of conservatism. A conservative, writes Carlson, is someone who "instinctively sides with the individual over the group," who "understands that not every choice is a moral issue, that sometimes people just prefer plastic to paper, a Suburban to a Prius, and that's okay."[85]

The liberal will quickly retort that this argument overlooks a basic asymmetry, which is that Suburbans impose environmental costs that Priuses do not. So liberals' alleged aversion to the former is hardly the self-satisfied moralism of a Mrs. Grundy, for this aversion is rooted in tangible human welfare that everyone can value irrespective of their sectarian allegiances. But

[83] Qt. in Cupp and Joshpe, *Why You're Wrong about the Right*, pg. 77.
[84] HImmelfarb, *The De-Moralization of Society*, pg. 260.
[85] Qt. in Cupp and Joshpe, *Why You're Wrong about the Right*, pgs. ix-xii.

here as elsewhere, conservative claimants of cultural oppression refuse to accept liberals at face value and suspect that liberals' ostensibly "tangible" priorities are post-hoc rationalizations for the Mrs. Grundy-type impulses they would prefer to associate with conservatives. Liberal moralism enjoys plausible deniability, and this is what makes it so dangerous. Being surreptitious and unrecognized, the moralistic vehemence of liberals cannot be tempered or restrained, and so must far surpass that of conservatives.

Nor can liberals recognize their own special brand of sectarianism. Alan Kors writes that "[d]espite the talk of 'celebrating' diversity, colleges and universities do not, in fact, mean the celebration, deep study, and appreciation of evangelical, fundamentalist, Protestant culture; nor of traditionalist Catholic culture; nor of the gender roles of Orthodox Jewish or of Shiite Islamic culture; nor of black American Pentacostal culture; nor of assimilation; nor of the white, rural South. These are not 'multicultural.'"[86] Just like diversity, "sensitivity" is a facially universalistic ideal that is unobjectionable in the abstract. But Kors observes that universities' solicitude for diverse group identities does not extend to those who reject the dominant dispensation. Campus speech codes protect the sensibilities of left-wing students, but they allow these same students to label conservative blacks "Uncle Toms" and label anti-feminist women "mall chicks."[87] Students who believe homosexuality is sinful can be charged with harassing their gay and lesbian cohorts. But pro-choice students who surround a silent pro-life vigil and chant "Racist, sexist, antigay born-again bigots go away" are seen as engaged in protected speech.[88]

Liberals ask us to put ourselves in the shoes of the less fortunate, so Kors proposes the following thought-experiment:

> Imagine secular, skeptical, or leftist faculty and students confronted by a religious harassment code that prohibited "denigration" of evangelical or Catholic beliefs, or that made the classroom or campus a space where evangelical or Catholic students must be protected against feeling "intimidated," offended," or, by their own subjective experience, victims of a "hostile environment. Imagine a university of patriotic "loyalty oaths" where leftists were deemed responsible for the tens of millions of victims of communism, and where free minds were prohibited from creating a hostile environment for patriots, or from offending that "minority" of individuals who are descended from Korean or Vietnam War veterans. Imagine, as well, that for every "case" that became public, there were scores or hundreds of cases in which the "offender" or "victimizer," desperate to preserve a job or gain a degree, accepted a confidential plea bargain that included a semester's or a year's

[86] Alan Charles Kors and Harvey A. Silvergate, *The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's Campuses* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1999), pg. 192.
[87] Alan Charles Kors, "Bad Faith: The Politicization of the University In Loco Parentis," in *The Imperiled Academy*, ed. Howard Dickman (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1993), pg. 165.
[88] Kors and Silvergate, *The Shadow University*, pg. 249.

> reeducation in "religious sensitivity" or "patriotic sensitivity" seminars run by the university's "Evangelical Center, "Patriotic Center," or "Office of Religious and Patriotic Compliance.[89]

As a free speech advocate, Kors is not actually endorsing such an agenda. He is, however, claiming cultural oppression, because these proposed role reversals are intended to reveal symmetry where liberals see asymmetry. If an "Office of Religious and Patriotic Compliance" sounds sinister and totalitarian, we might instead envision a new regime of diversity training that encourages incoming college freshmen to examine their conservaphobic prejudices and overcome these to the extent possible in a conservaphobic culture. The goal would not be political indoctrination. This conservative-friendly diversity training wouldn't call on liberal students to become conservative any more than standard diversity training calls on straight students to become gay. They need only explore their latent fears and biases in order to create a more tolerant atmosphere for all students. But liberals will not accept even this moderate solution. And this demonstrates to conservatives that they are unwilling to play by the same rules to which they hold others.

The liberal will object that what conservatives caricature as arbitrary favoritism in fact bespeaks the sociological sophistication with which liberals discern background power inequalities, which cannot be discounted when formulating the concrete meaning of "diversity" and "sensitivity." If the Left *seems* indefensibly partial toward certain interests, this is only because this background has not been factored into the equation. Evangelicals and descendants of war veterans are not historically disenfranchised groups, and so do not require the special protections that liberals offer others. These protections exist to compensate, not to elevate, which is what conservatives disingenuously refuse to recognize.

However, conservatives insist that this sociological sophistication is a social illusion and that liberals' solicitude for their favored groups partakes of the very same parochialism that is self-evident when the cause is religious or nationalistic—that is, conservative. Offices of diversity and inclusion seem self-evidently enlightened while offices of religious and patriotic compliance seem self-evidently authoritarian. But conservatives agree with Roger Scruton that what liberals would present as a clash "between dark intolerance and enlightened reason" is "nothing more than a clash of prejudices." The difference is that whereas "one side frankly admits that the feelings it brings

[89] Kors and Silvergate, *The Shadow University*, pg. 101-2.

into this dispute are moral, the other hides its bigotry behind a mask of reason, serenely expecting to carry the day."[90]

This mask of reason disguises impulses that are in their essentials *symmetrical* with what liberals condemn as conservative parochialism and sectarianism. This symmetry is well concealed by the Left's stranglehold over the means of cultural reproduction. But it becomes salient whenever that stranglehold is threatened. Responding to the University of Pennsylvania's suggestion that ACLU concerns about its speech codes constituted warrantless outside interference with an internal university matter, Kors calls this "reminiscent of those Southern sheriffs in the early '60s talking about 'outside agitators' stirring up trouble in their counties, where justice is fine, thank you."[91] The bigoted, small-minded Southern sheriff—a stereotypical symbol of conservative authoritarianism—thus has a counterpart among the left-leaning administrators of an Ivy League university. Though surely more eloquent and erudite than a Bull Connor, they are given over to some of the same basic impulses, which are being disguised by the eloquence and erudition, the sources of their serene expectations.

* * *

The drive to discover symmetry underneath ostensible asymmetry is perhaps most pronounced in the religion context. Conservative claimants of cultural oppression will sometimes defend religion in traditionalist terms, as society's indispensable moral scaffolding. But as often, they turn to the language of the Left and demand equal treatment for religious believers, expressing their stupefaction that liberals' "diversity" just happens to exclude religion. "[R]eligion, somehow, is different. Religion must be kept under wraps," observes McConnell.[92] The exclusion is the predictable consequence of liberals' ingrained contempt for religious traditionalists, the new pariahs and scapegoats. David Limbaugh explains in his *Persecution* that "societies—and particularly societal elites—typically need opponents to denigrate, so they can define themselves by what they are not." Jews and blacks will no longer fill the role of the "designated denigrated." But since "prejudice abhors a vacuum," Biblical Christians, poorly represented in elite circles, are

[90] Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), pg. 72.
[91] Kors and Silvergate, *The Shadow University*, pg. 33.
[92] Michael McConnell, *"God is Dead and We Have Killed Him!": Freedom of Religion in the Post-modern Age*, 1993 B.Y.U.L. Rev. 163, 166 (1993).

now conscripted as "easy targets for the hatred that would otherwise have been aimed at others."[93] Tolerance "is touted as the highest virtue in our popular culture."[94] But that tolerance is not extended to Christians, who are denied "equal dignity, respect, and treatment."[95] If blacks were once maligned as the natural inferiors of whites, it is now, says Codevilla, the "Ruling Class" of liberal elites who "can no more believe that a Christian might be their intellectual and moral equal than white Southerners of the Jim Crow era could think the same of Negroes."[96] In the same vein, Cal Thomas charges that in their refusal to recognize Christian writing as "serious literature or scholarship," many publishers are "treating the Christian market as a kind of 'Negro league' of publishing."[97] Liberalism "hides its bigotry behind the mask of reason" because it merely redirects without actually reducing the sum total of bigotry in the world, concealing its bigotry in what purports to be a fair-minded assessment of Christian intellectual limitations.

Liberals will avouch that whatever animus they bear toward some religious believers is a direct reflection of the latter's attempts to impose their creed on others, and not some generic need for a "designated denigrated." But conservatives refuse to accept this high-mindedness at face value. Liberals claim to promote church-state separation as a prophylactic against the destructive social conflicts that politicized religious passions have been known to spawn. But conservatives insist this is a hollow pretext which seizes upon a now irrelevant and bygone history in order to make the denigration of religion socially acceptable. "No sooner does someone mention school prayer, for example, than religious wars and even the Spanish Inquisition get trotted out as warnings," notes Elshtain.[98] The real goal is not to hold fanaticism in check but to stigmatize religious faith as such. The specter of fanaticism is merely an ideological tool by which to normalize this stigma. Herbert London explains:

> [T]here is a powerful campaign underway to suppress religious expression. Individuals may pray and sing hymns in private, so as not to give offense to nonbelievers, but such limitations transform religious observance into something shameful. Religion cannot long endure if it is seen as such—a fact of which the secularists cannot possibly be unaware.[99]

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[93] David Limbaugh, *Persecution: How Liberals Are Waging War Against Christianity* (HarperCollins, 2004), pg. 333.
[94] Ibid., pg. ix.
[95] Ibid., pg. 117.
[96] Qt. in, Codevilla, *The Ruling Class*, pg. 22.
[97] Qt. in James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (Basic Books 1991), pg. 244.
[98] Jean Bethke Elshtain, "The Bright Line: Liberalism and Religion," in *The Betrayal of Liberalism: How the Disciples of Freedom and Equality Helped Foster The Illiberal Politics of Coercion and Control*, eds. Hilton Kramer and Roger Kimball (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), pg. 139.
[99] Herbert London, *America's Secular Challenge: The Rise of a New National Religion* (New York: Encounter Books, 2008), pg. 13.

What liberals push as religious neutrality or strict church-state separation is actually a push to relegate religious believers to the margins of social respectability. For separationist rhetoric is merely another way for the liberal elites to insinuate what they may not wish to state. And this is that strong religious conviction is primitive and benighted, the product of intellectual deficiencies that are hidden from believers themselves but are glaring to liberals. This has always been a mainstay of Left ideology. But liberals have now managed to insert elite prejudice into mainstream common sense. The "Ruling Class," says Codevilla, "cannot prevent Americans from worshipping God." But "they can make it as socially disabling as smoking—to be done furtively and with a bad conscience."[100]

Liberals understand "secularism" as a commitment to maintaining the religious and the political in separate spheres, and so as nothing that is intrinsically hostile to religion as such. By contrast, conservatives see secularism as a positive orthodoxy that threatens to supplant religion. It is not merely a position about the proper place of religion in relation to other institutions and practices, but something which, in taking that position, is itself akin to religion. D'Souza writes that traditional Muslims and Christians alike are perplexed by secularists who condemn them for trying to "occupy the public square all by themselves, using the law as their instrument, and pushing everyone else into the background" while doing precisely this themselves.[101] The hypocrisy gets overlooked because liberalism's cultural dominance creates the illusion of liberal neutrality, the illusion that liberals stand above the fray of sectarian conflict when they are actually a party to it. McConnell observes that while secular liberals castigate religious believers for trying to "interject" their beliefs into school curriculums, they will refuse to acknowledge that they too are interjecting, and "no matter how offensive and unfounded their choice of curriculum might seem to persons of a different mindset."[102] Liberals have simply accepted their own hegemony as the baseline from which to gauge interjection, masking their culturally contingent arrogation of power as an assertion of principle.

McConnell notes that "[o]n the left, a postmodern intellectual current has cast doubt on the idea that secular liberalism should enjoy a privileged position and has opened the possibility for

[100] Codevilla, *The Ruling Class*, pg. 51.
[101] D'Souza, *The Enemy at Home*, pg. 188.
[102] Michael McConnell, *"God is Dead and We Have Killed Him!": Freedom of Religion in the Post-modern Age*, 1993 B.Y.U.L. Rev. 163, 174-75 (1993).

treating religion as one of many competing conceptions of reality."[103] The problem is that this post-modern relativism gets applied only very selectively. Post-modernists are eager to expose the parochial, ideological nature of liberalism insofar as it privileges "patriarchal, white, male, European, and bourgeois interests and values." But they ignore that parochialism insofar as it privileges secular interests and values over religious ones.[104] Post-modern relativism might have served as a useful corrective to the excesses of modern liberalism. But it has instead been co-opted by that liberalism, aggravating its worst tendencies and providing intellectual cover for its "selective multi-culturalism," its "boundless tolerance and respect for some voices, and ruthless suppression of others."[105]

Here again, the Right has become the Left in order to accuse the Left of becoming the Right. McConnell's argument is a quintessential conservative claim of cultural oppression. Post-modern relativism, originally marshaled on behalf of racial and ethnic minorities, is now marshaled by those for whom liberals have much less sympathy. If liberals' disingenuousness is their most powerful weapon, it is also their key vulnerability, because the disingenuousness always provides an opening through which their own ideals may be wielded against them. This is what McConnell does. He is not himself a post-modern relativist. But he has acceded to the rhetorical supremacy of the Left as the framework in which conservative argument must now be advanced.

The same basic pattern appears in the gay rights context. Some conservatives continue to warn of the "homosexual lifestyle" as a grave threat to the moral foundations of society. But many others prefer to criticize the gay rights movement on liberal rather than conservative grounds, in the language of freedom, equality, tolerance, and diversity rather than on the basis of some highly contestable notion of moral order. They can do so because they identify the "gay agenda," not with any universalistic commitment to freedom or equality, but with a parochial understanding of the good life that pro-gay liberals attempt to impose on them. Gay rights are not free-standing demands for equal dignity but rather one particular manifestation of the broader cultural transformation that oppresses conservatives at every turn. And so the question is not whether a

[103] Michael, McConnell, *Religious Freedom at a Crossroads*, 59 U Chi. L. Rev. 115, 134 (1992).
[104] Michael McConnell, *"God is Dead and We Have Killed Him!": Freedom of Religion in the Post-modern Age,* 1993 B.Y.U.L. Rev. 163, 182 (1993).
[105] Michael McConnell, *"God is Dead and We Have Killed Him!": Freedom of Religion in the Post-modern Age,* 1993 B.Y.U.L. Rev. 163, 187 (1993).

majority is entitled to impose its tastes and values on a minority, but which of two cultures will prevail in what is a zero-sum game.

Conservative believe that gay rights activists seek, not to uproot prejudices but to mold sensibilities. They promote, not freedom for the many, but control by the few. They seek, charges Limbaugh, "to systematically normalize the homosexual culture and demonize any who obstruct such efforts."[106] Such is illustrated by the popularity of plays like *The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told* and *Corpus Christi*, which retell Biblical stories from a gay perspective. This appropriation, argues Limbaugh, brings "into focus the virulent bigotry, hostility, and hypocrisy of the anti-Christian forces in modern life."[107] These plays may seem innocuous to liberals. But where liberals see a refreshing diversity of perspectives, Limbaugh and other conservatives see a systematic strategy of cultural denigration for which diversity and artistic license are the convenient pretexts. This broad strategy was why Disney World decided to discontinue its "twenty-eight-year tradition of making on-site religious services available to Christian guests" at the same time as it "went out of its way to solicit the homosexual community, even having an annual 'Gay Day' event every year."[108] Where liberals see the arbitrary juxtaposition of two unrelated developments each of which can be assessed independently of the other, conservatives see varied manifestations of the same basic phenomenon, the supplanting of their moral traditionalism by ultra-liberalism, whose support for gays is inextricably bound up with its antipathy toward traditional Christians.

Whatever the ostensible issue, the critical theory of the Right seeks to expose and understand the subterranean norms being mobilized *through* the issues, the broader symbolic environment which the issues are used to maintain. Whether or not homosexuality is a "natural" phenomenon, it is also a social phenomenon, and therefore derives its social meaning from out of a broader matrix of social understandings. This is not captured by liberal mantras about freedom and equality. For these ideals are always promoted in conjunction with the often subtle denigration of conservative identities. This is precisely what Limbaugh, and earlier D'Souza, are attempting to highlight. And it is consistent with most leftist epistemologies. Yet the sophisticated social holism upon which the Left would insist whenever race or gender are in the mix will be dismissed

[106] Limbaugh, *Persecution*, pg. 95.
[107] Ibid., pgs. 261-62.
[108] Ibid., pgs 226-27.

as a pattern of arbitrary, unhinged association once adopted by conservatives. The left's post-modernism is, just like its multiculturalism, highly selective.

Christopher Gawley writes that the "constitutional moral relativists" who oppose enacting moral opposition of homosexuality into law are "fundamentally contradictory." If "they save individuals from the hordes of moral inquisitors" this is only "by being their own variety of moral inquisitors, namely amoral inquisitors" who "protect individuals from intolerance by being intolerant."[109] Liberals will dismiss this contradiction as contrived because it presumes that the second-order intolerance of liberals is morally symmetrical with the first-order intolerance to which it stands opposed, when the truth is that conservative Christians incur whatever animus they do solely by virtue of their anti-gay stances, not their Christianity as such.

But here as elsewhere, *conservative claimants of cultural oppression see symmetry where liberals see asymmetry and asymmetry where liberals see symmetry*. Given that their anti-gay stances cannot be disentangled from their religion and that their religion cannot be disentangled from their identities, the claimants believe that both homosexuality and opposition to homosexuality are entitled to equal respect. Opposition to Christianity is just as intrinsic to homosexuality as opposition to homosexuality is intrinsic to Christianity. Both *can* devolve into unalloyed hatred and should be condemned in those instances. But neither is as such intrinsically more hateful than the other. Since the heartfelt defense of *any* worldview always risks devolving into personalized animus toward the opponents of that worldview, the charge of widespread homophobia is itself a form of animus, a kind of conservaphobia, because it seeks to specifically associate religious conservatives with what is a regrettable human universal, thereby denigrating their social stature in relation to liberals. The cause of gay rights is ultimately just another arena on which the anointed prosecute their long war of attrition against the benighted.

Dissenting in *Romer v. Evans*—invalidating on equal protection grounds an amendment to Colorado's state constitution ("Amendment 2") that would have barred municipalities from enacting pro-gay anti-discrimination ordinances—Justice Scalia observed:

> When the Court takes sides in the culture wars, it tends to be with the knights rather than the villeins - and more specifically with the Templars, reflecting the views and values of the lawyer class from which the Court's Members are drawn. How that class feels about homosexuality will be evident to anyone who wishes to interview job applicants at virtually any of the Nation's law schools. The interviewer may refuse to offer a job because the

[109] Christopher J. Gawley, *A Requiem for Morality: A Response to Peter M. Cicchino*, 30 Cap. U. L. Rev. 711, 750 (2002).

> applicant is a Republican; because he is an adulterer; because he went to the wrong prep school or belongs to the wrong country club; because he eats snails; because he is a womanizer; because she wears real-animal fur; or even because he hates the Chicago Cubs. But if the interviewer should wish not to be an associate or partner of an applicant because he disapproves of the applicant's homosexuality, then he will have violated the pledge which the Association of American Law Schools requires all its member-schools to exact from job interviewers: "assurance of the employer's willingness" to hire homosexuals…..This law-school view of what "prejudices" must be stamped out may be contrasted with the more plebeian attitudes that apparently still prevail in the United States Congress, which has been unresponsive to repeated attempts to extend to homosexuals the protections of federal civil rights laws…[110]

Seen in this light, the real "equal protection" question raised by *Romer* was not whether gays are to enjoy equality with heterosexuals notwithstanding the prejudices of Coloradans, but whether the prejudices of the villeins, or ordinary Americans, are to enjoy equality with the prejudices of the Templars, the liberal elites. And the Court answered this question in the negative. The elites purport to stand for equality, but they stand for the opposite inasmuch as they are privileged to shield their own prejudices from the scrutiny they routinely mete out to traditionalists. The Templars regularly avail themselves of the right to base their employment decisions on "irrational" factors like appearance, demeanor, or personality. These are not directly germane to job performance narrowly construed, but they may be crucial to maintaining a workplace environment that reflects the Templars' sensibilities and self-image. Yet this is a privilege they will not extend to the conservative ordinary American, who would exclude gays and other non-conformists for the very same reason. The gay rights movement is thus just an easy outlet for liberals' moral preening, because their supposed cosmopolitanism disappears whenever it might conflict with their own brand of prejudice.

Where liberals see a standoff between Enlightenment and dark intolerance, conservative claimants of cultural oppression see only a clash of prejudices. Where liberals argue that Amendment 2 placed a unique burden on homosexuals that was not suffered by heterosexuals, the claimants retort that the *invalidation* of Amendment 2 placed a unique burden on the villein culture that was not suffered by the Templar culture. Since "we are all liberals now," the issue is not whether equality is preferable to inequality but how equality is to be applied. And for conservatives, equality is an indeterminate abstraction whose concrete implementation will always engender new forms of inequality. Inequality will thus always be conserved in some shape or

[110] *Romer v. Evans*, 517 U.S. 620, 652 (1996) (Scalia, J., dissenting).

form. Liberals have merely elected to conserve it in their own favor and then labeled this preference "progress."

This drive to discover symmetry underneath ostensible asymmetry helps explain the mysterious alliance between conservatives and libertarians. Libertarian Randy Barnett writes that, by contrast with the "comprehensive moralists of the Right or Left," libertarians "contend that we must place conceptual and institutional limits or constraints on the exercise of power, including the power to do good or to demand moral or virtuous conduct."[111] And so one might conclude, as per the conventional wisdom, that libertarianism stands equidistantly between liberalism and conservatism, both of which are in their own ways more reluctant to impose these limits and constraints—the liberal in the economic sphere and the conservative in the social one. Yet the reality is that many self-professed libertarians are more greatly threatened by the "comprehensive moralists" of the Left than by those of the Right. Correlatively, many conservatives harbor greater animus toward liberals than toward libertarians even though both reject traditional values.

The reason is that libertarians *help* conservatives unearth symmetry where liberals would have us see asymmetry. Appropriating the common law nuisance rule according to which an abnormally sensitive plaintiff cannot shut down a church bell which has always been there and never bothered anyone else, Richard Epstein suggests the same principle is applicable to those who complain about the words "under God" in public school recitations of the Pledge of Allegiance.[112] Epstein thus denies the idealistic content of what liberals uphold as their principled fealty to church-state separation, dismissing it as a merely personal aversion whose costs secularists may not transfer onto others. Epstein challenges anti-discrimination laws in a similar way, chalking them up to "the principle of *contra bones mores*—namely, that 'I don't want to live in a society in which individuals can discriminate on the basis of race or pay below some minimum wage, and so on.'"[113] What the liberal holds out as the lofty principle of equal dignity—perhaps derived from John Rawls's Original Position—the libertarian reduces to a parochial custom or folkway, a mere social habit like removing one's hat in church. Conservatives find themselves endeared to libertarians because *libertarianism represents a secular perspective through which to*

[111] Randy E. Barnett, "The Moral Foundations of Modern Libertarianism," in *Varieties of Conservatism in America*, ed. Peter Berkowitz (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2004), pg. 74.
[112] Richard A. Epstein, "Libertarianism and Character," in *Varieties of Conservatism in America*, ed. Peter Berkowitz (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2004), pgs., 82-83.
[113] Ibid., pg. 99.

conceptualize liberalism in the same terms that liberals would conceptualize conservatism—that is, as a set of purely subjective values that liberals would impose in disregard Barnett's institutional and conceptual constraints. What liberals hold out as their conceptual constraints—public reason, the Original Position, and so forth—have been reduced to cheap rationalization for self-indulgent moralism, the same cheap rationalization that liberals always detect in conservatives.

5. Indelible Psychological Differences

Michael Savage recounts an experience at an Indian lunch buffet in "liberal Sausalito," just across the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco. Having "let [his] guard down" for an instant, he discovered that a "liberal-looking college girl" had cut in front of him in line. His instinct was to take her to task, but he decided to let it go, and she took full advantage:

> Immediately I felt as though I was behind an old lady at the supermarket. Know what I'm saying? This liberal girl with a pierced lip is taking her sweet time at the buffet. I glance over my shoulder and watch the line backing up in the restaurant. She's clueless. She's personally examining every piece of food. Every grain of Basmanti rice.
>
> The whole time she has that smile, that coy smile liberals get in ethnic restaurants. I could see her pea brain trying to pinpoint the origins of each spice used by the Indian chef. I'm standing there boiling. I'm tempted to ask, "Have you ever eaten at a buffet?" I can see this great liberal education she received going to good use. She doesn't even know the basic etiquette of a lunch line.
>
> But I was being patient as the line moved at snail speed. The people behind me are wondering if she's even past the rice yet. I began to fume. The canned background music with the Indian sitar was getting on my nerves and the tempura was building up inside me. All I wanted was that chicken jalfrezi, the prawn bhuna, and the rice. Maybe a piece of garlic naan.
>
> But she, of course, positioned her fat behind so I couldn't even maneuver around her in the narrow hallway. At this point I know she is doing it on purpose. I know liberals in general do these things on purpose. Why do they do it? Just because they can. Just because they seem to enjoy jerking our chain and pushing our limits.
>
> Whether it's in a buffet line, or a court of law, the liberals by their nature go to great extremes to work us over. Or, as you'll see, to work the system. In the end, our ability to maintain law and order is emasculated.[114]

Lionel Trilling famously observed that the conservatism of his day expressed itself, not in ideas, but "only in action or in irritable mental gestures which seek to resemble ideas."[115] Whether or not this held true in the 1950s, the observation seems to have achieved an uncannily literal illustration in Michael Savage, who appears to be politicizing his personal irascibility in this

[114] Michael Savage, *The Enemy Within: Saving America from the Liberal Assault on our Schools, Faith, and Military* (Thomas Nelson, 2003), pg. 37.
[115] Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2008), pg. xv

assortment of seemingly unhinged associations. Notwithstanding their demonstrable creativity, conservative claimants of cultural oppression would be hard pressed to discover a left-analogue for a Michael Savage. Most conservatives do not share Savage's peculiar grievances, but these grievances betray a broader conviction which most conservatives accept in some shape or form. And this is their sense that liberalism is no mere political credo, but rather a general ethos that shapes personalities and permeates the superficially apolitical minutiae of social life. Savage's tirade is only a particularly crude illustration of this general belief.

Nunberg observes that whereas the "culture wars" formerly denoted a conflict within high culture, referring to controversies about the National Endowment for the Arts and the cannon, they now invoke culture in the anthropological sense, referring to a conflict between competing ways of life.[116] The suggestion is now that "conservatives and liberals are divided by indelible psychological differences, so that political disagreements are like bedside squabbles that can never be resolved rationally."[117] Conservatives see liberal ideals as just outward expressions of a particular social identity.[118] Liberalism is not a set of universal principles speaking to humanity as such, but a decadent lifestyle associated with certain geographic regions, as in "Hollywood liberalism" or "Upper West Side liberalism,"[119] or else with certain consumer preferences, like Volvos, brie, and café latte.

As we saw, Goldberg accuses that, by contrast with conservatism, liberalism dictates "how to be, what to buy." The irony, however, is that this belief propels conservatives into the very left-wing conclusion that "[e]verything….is 'in the last analysis' political"[120] as Frederic Jameson famously declared. Taken to its logical conclusion, conservatives' ceaseless struggle against a covertly totalitarian liberalism leads them to approach every sphere of social life as just another arena on which the encroachments of liberalism must be resisted, a continuous contest between the live-and-let-live, all-American individualism of conservatives and the preening censoriousness of their liberal overlords. No sphere of life is impervious to conservaphobia, and Savage's buffet experience merely takes this logic to its final conclusion.

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[116] Nunberg, *Talking Right*, pg. 73.
[117] Ibid., pg. 96.
[118] Ibid., pg. 70.
[119] Ibid., pg. 44.
[120] Qt. in Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998), pg. 2.

This *weltanschauung* is also illustrated in Mike Gallagher's *50 Things Liberals Love to Hate*, a chronicle of the author's 30 years of experience observing liberals. Gallagher explains that he has studied liberals "like Jane Goodall studies her chimps"—"In their natural habitats, and without judgment. In silence mostly, because we barely speak the same language."[121] From this vast experience, Gallagher concludes that "[l]iberals love to hate things most Americans love, and spend the rest of their lives endlessly trying to take those things away from us," convinced that "they do it all because they love us."[122]

Thus, liberals hate McDonald's because it stands as a monument to some of America's best qualities, "our entrepreneurial zeal, our ability to deliver high quality in a uniform way, our love of convenience and speed."[123] Liberals will rationalize their hostility to McDonald's as a public health concern. But this is stealth and subterfuge once again. That they would exempt fancy, high-calorie coffee drinks from the regulations they would place on fast food betrays that they are simply imposing their own lifestyle preferences on ordinary Americans, whose perceived vulgarity is a perennial irritant to them.[124] NASCAR upsets liberals for similar reasons, because "everyone there is having a good time," eating fatty food and listening to country music in utter indifference to liberal disapproval. Liberals despise NASCAR fans because they are symbols of the American renegade, the cultural descendants of those who conquered the West, didn't wait for permission, and didn't follow the rules.[125] Liberals' contempt for the natural liberty of the ordinary American also explains their contempt for the great American steakhouse, where the food is always made to order. By contrast, "liberal restaurants" will "assault" guests "with all sorts of rules and information," forbidding substitutions, dictating how dishes may be served.[126] Where conservatives celebrate the individual, liberals worship the expert, who has colonized the culinary sphere no less than the legal, administrative, and educational ones. In every case, liberalism's ultimate aim is the enervation of the ordinary American and his way of life. Hence liberals' preference for environmentally friendly electric cars, their preference for a "sad little mound of plastic" with "zero-pick up" that is lacking the "power and thrust" of all-American gas guzzler.

[121] Mike Gallagher, *50 Things Liberals Love to Hate* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2012), pg. 2.
[122] Ibid., pg. 3.
[123] Ibid., pg. 8.
[124] Ibid., pg. 10.
[125] Ibid., pg. 22.
[126] Ibid., pg. 27.

Liberals "want us to stop hitting the accelerator—on our cars, on our ambitions, on our appetites, on everything," concludes Gallagher.[127]

Some conservatives will criticize this belief in "indelible psychological differences" as a populist perversion of true conservatism. But the belief is in fact consistent with some classic conservative tenets. Conservatives have long held that social and political life is sustained, not only by ideas, but more powerfully by the pre-reflective habits and mores that structure our lives in ways that resist formal codification, or even articulation. Hence what Burke called "wisdom without reflection."[128] Amy Wax explains:

> For Burke and Oakeshott, conceptual relationships have little to do with how customs and traditions function in the real world. Because the powers of human reason are severely limited, all but the most intellectually gifted are incapable of engaging in sustained, rigorous analysis or of thinking through problems without falling into error. The dilemmas of human existence are particularly resistant to rational analysis because social practices and traditions are not derived from first principles, but evolve over time by trial and error. Human action in society and politics operates not primarily through reasoning, but through adherence to prescriptive roles, customs, and habits continuously adjusted to the messy demands of day-to-day living. The test of behavioral rules is thus whether they work well in the real world as guides for human interaction rather than whether they conform precisely to syllogistic demands.[129]

The rhetoric of conservative claims of cultural oppression is congruous with these premises. For liberals' rationalistic devotion to first principles can itself be seen as originating in certain largely unconscious prescriptive roles and habits, in forms of "day-to-day living" whose normative content resists rigorous conceptual exposition. And so it is unsurprising that the culture wars should have taken the anthropological turn described by Nunberg. Volvos, brie, and café latte may be poor starting points for unearthing the pre-reflective, pre-articulated mores of liberalism, but they are powerful symbols of conservatives' conviction that these mores do indeed exist, and that liberalism in general, just like social justice in particular, operates according to some undisclosed code that is only very partially revealed by its articulated principles.

Kimball's juxtaposition of the "unspoken confidences" of old with the countercultural precepts that have by now seeped into "the realm of habit, taste, and feeling" suggests that ideas must be understood in the context of their pre-theoretical psycho-cultural embodiments, in forms

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[127] Ibid., pg. 236.
[128] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O' Brien (Penguin Books, 1968), pg. 119.
[129] Amy L. Wax, *The Conservative's Dilemma: Traditional Institutions, Social Change, and Same-Sex Marriage*, 42 San Diego L. Rev. 1059, 1068-69 (2005)

of lived experience of which political ideas are merely one expression. David Gelernter captures this thought in proposing that ideology "is a projection of your personality." It is "*you* cast like a spotlight onto the cultural landscape in which you live."[130] Liberalism and conservatism are not just opposing ideas, but also opposing ways of being, different "spotlights," each giving resonance to certain ideas and not others. Political ideology is not just a cluster of principles through which events in the world are self-consciously conceptualized, but, like personality generally, the lens through which the world first appears to us prior to explicit belief-formation. The conviction that liberals and conservatives are divided by "indelible psychological differences" originates in just this epistemology. It is a manifestation of the conservative worldview, not a contrivance of culture wars activists.

Gay conservative James Kirchick writes that while he has encountered some anti-gay bigotry among his fellow right-wingers, the greatest vitriol has always come from those who believe that it is "the duty of each and every homosexual to sign up with the checklist of liberal policies."[131] Anti-conservative prejudice is no less pernicious than anti-gay prejudice because

> being gay is not unlike being conservative, in that both, I believe, are an expression of an individual's most basic humanity. To be sure, one's political viewpoints can and almost always do evolve, in a way that one's sexuality does not… But for those of us right-of-center gay people who take politics seriously and see it as the expression of deeply felt values, arguing on behalf of causes in which we genuinely don't believe would be like trying to make love to someone of the opposite gender. In this sense, politics is very much about human nature."[132]

Kirchick does not suggest that political disagreements cannot be resolved rationally. Yet the comparison with sexual attraction, which clearly cannot be, reveals his sense that political conviction runs deeper than dialectic. This is why conservatives can charge conservaphobia. Their conservatism may not qualify as an "immutable trait" like race or sexual orientation. But it is nevertheless irreducible to mere theory, and this is why it provokes the savage incivility of liberals, which is ultimately directed at something more primordial than ideas. It is because conservatives see liberalism and conservatism as pre-theoretical ways of being that they can trace political disagreement to cultural class conflict between a quasi-ethnic community of ordinary Americans

[130] Gelernter, *America-Lite*, pgs. 130-31.
[131] James Kirchick, "The Consistency of Gay Conservatives," in *Proud To Be Right: Voices Of The Next Conservative Generation*, ed. Jonah Goldberg, (New York: Harper, 2010), pg. 83.
[132] Ibid., pg. 81.

and condescending foreigners who "just don't get it." This is what it means to say that "politics is very much about human nature."

Borrowing from John Podhoretz, *National Review*'s Jay Nordlinger explains that conservatives are "bilingual." Unlike liberals, conservatives can speak "both conservative and liberal." Liberals need not be bilingual because they "can go a long time without brushing up against someone who's conservative." By contrast, conservatives "are more used to being around liberals, because liberals have dominated everything in our lives, especially our schools."[133] The conservative is thus akin to the proverbial Latino immigrant or first-generation American, who is immersed in white/Anglo ways at work or school while also being anchored in a foreign language and culture that affords him a special perspective unavailable to monocultural natives. In a similar ethnicization of political difference, Goldberg compares conservatives to Blacks, Canadians, and Jews. These groups make for some of the best comedians because they are "each in their own way, insider-outsiders" who "share both a fascination with and alienation from mainstream American culture." Conservatives are in much the same position because they must master their own culture while also learning to live in an alienating majority culture dominated by liberals.[134] These formulations are no accident. Though some conservatives will dismiss talk of "latté liberals" as a distraction from more serious issues, conservatives are united in the conviction that liberals hide behind a façade of disingenuous rationalism that conceals their ethnocentric hostility toward ordinary Americans and their rude and crude folkways. "Latté liberals" is just a very glib articulation of this conviction.

However stridently conservatives may insist that conservatism is about ideas and winning a war of ideas, their own conceptualizations betray their sense that something more primordial is at stake. If conservatives understand liberals better than liberals understand conservatives, the reason is not that conservatives are better acquainted with Rawls's *Theory of Justice* than are liberals with Kirk's *The Conservative Mind* but that conservatives cannot help "being around" and "brushing up against" liberals, as Nordlinger says. Merely brushing up against liberals can yield insight because their articulated liberalism is continuous with a pre-political ethos that can be grasped intuitively in everyday encounter without the need for political theorization.

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[133] Qt. in Cupp and Joshpe, *Why You're Wrong about the Right*, pg. 80.
[134] Jonah Goldberg, "Introduction," in *Proud To Be Right: Voices Of The Next Conservative Generation*, ed. Jonah Goldberg, (New York: Harper, 2010), pgs x–xi.

Seen in this light, even the outrageousness of a Michael Savage admits of an intellectually charitable interpretation. It follows from the "spotlight theory" of political ideology that the impulses of liberalism have become refracted, not only in normative arguments, but in everyday attitudes, including perhaps attitudes toward ethnic grains and the like. Savage's reaction to his liberal-looking girl's body language was rather irascible. But this irascibility may in turn bespeak conservatives' greater sensitivity to liberalism's status as a physiologically embodied ethos, to what Pierre Bourdieu calls the "imperceptible cues of bodily *hexis*."[135] Bodily *hexis*, Bourdieu explains, is "political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of *feeling* and *thinking*."[136] That disposition constitutes a "pattern of postures that is both individual and systematic" and which, "charged with a host of social meanings and values," permits these "to pass from practice to practice without going through discourse or consciousness."[137] Our pre-verbal comportment can carry political significance because it is the physiological and instinctual embodiment of what is only later reflected upon as ideas. This liberal-looking girl's "coy smile," then, may be but the temperamental and physiological embodiment of her overall worldview. Her self-absorbed preoccupation with the texture of ethnic grains may be just one expression of a permanent bodily disposition that pre-reflectively embodies what is later theorized as multiculturalism. It is the pre-political manifestation of a "political mythology." This Counter-Enlightenment anti-rationalism is implicit in conservative claims of cultural oppression. And it places what liberals see as conservatives' unhinged paranoia in a new, more intelligible light. If liberals cannot fathom why conservatives feel continuously "worked over" by them, as Savage says, this may be because their rationalism insures them to the bodily *hexis* to which conservatives are better attuned. What Trilling dismissed as "irritable mental gestures" could be conservatives' *reaction* to the imposition of an embodied ethos, to which liberals in their rationalism are insensible.

Writing in *Proud to be Right*—Goldberg's anthology of introspective essays by a new generation of emerging young conservatives—Hellen Rittelmeyer explains that her cohort at Yale "smoked on principle" and were bothered by smoking bans, which undeservedly "gave the modern cult of health the force of law." Reacting to this, she and her friends chose to embody conservative

[135] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge 1977), pg. 82.
[136] Ibid., pg. 93.
[137] Ibid., pg. 87.

values rather than articulate them, which is what smoking enabled them to do. For reasons they never quite understood, "smoking felt like rebellion against Yale's moral consensus that the two most important things in life are for everyone to be happy and for everyone to get along."[138]

These sentiments are entirely unintelligible to liberals, who cannot fathom any relationship between nicotine addiction and either liberalism or conservatism. Yet Rittelmeyer is hardly the first conservative to have attacked liberalism for its allegedly puritanical hostility to smoking. Indeed, this alleged puritanism is a recurring theme of conservative claims of cultural oppression. Christopher Lasch explains the intuition:

> Upper-middle-class liberals, with their inability to grasp the importance of class differences in shaping attitudes toward life, fail to reckon with the class dimension of their obsession with health and moral uplift. They find it hard to understand why their hygienic conception of life fails to command universal enthusiasm. They have mounted a crusade to sanitize American society: to create a "smoke-free environment," to censor everything from pornography to "hate speech," and at the same time, incongruously, to extend the range of personal choice in matters where most people feel the need of solid moral guidelines. When confronted with resistance to these initiatives, they betray the venomous hatred that lies not far beneath the smiling face of upper-middle-class benevolence.[139]

Conservatives can see themselves as generally more tolerant than liberals because they equate liberalism with a "hygienic conception of life" that variously manifests itself in a wide range of spheres. Smoking can qualify as a political act because it is a rebellion against this conception, which liberals seek to impose on the rest of us. The conservative ordinary American and his all-American tolerance for risk and disorder resist this imposition, however, and this is what makes him the target of the "venomous hatred that lies not far beneath the smiling face of upper-middle-class benevolence." Conservative claimants of cultural oppression understand liberalism in much the same way that feminists understand patriarchy or post-colonial multiculturalists understand Eurocentrism: It is not just a just a set of political aims but an overarching ethos and narrative of which the explicitly political aims are only one expression, and not always the most important one. Liberalism inheres, not only in its principles and policies, but in the pre-reflective mores of the ambient culture, which are what prepare the population for those principles and policies.

Elite institutions first inculcate "progressive attitudes" through various mechanisms of cultural propaganda, thereby creating fertile terrain for the onslaught of state regulation, which

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[138] Helen Rittelmeyer, "The Smoker's Code," in *Proud To Be Right: Voices Of The Next Conservative Generation*, ed. Jonah Goldberg, (New York: Harper, 2010), pgs. 173-77.
[139]Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), pg. 28.

then formalizes the informal web of coercions to which these institutions first accustom people. While liberals will never shy away from judicial and bureaucratic interventions, their liberalism is also enforced in more mundane ways, through everyday pressures and stigmas serving to steadily wear down conservatives in their resistance to a "hygienic conception of life." This being the nature of the beast, resistance to liberalism need not be confined to electioneering, and can be undertaken in everyday life. In flouting the unspoken mores of liberalism, conservative claims of cultural oppression provoke and thereby expose the "the venomous hatred that lies not far underneath the smiling face of upper middle-class benevolence." It is in pursuit of this end that conservatives engage in "politically incorrect" speech. Liberals may dismiss Rittelmeyer's smoking as just plain stupid. But smoking at Yale is to the conservative claimant of cultural oppression what burning a bra was to the 1970s feminist, nothing that was ever intended to constitute an eloquent statement of philosophical principle, but rather a go-for-the-gut challenge to taken-for-granted social understandings. Smoking at Yale was not a substitute for ideas, but an attempt to raise consciousness, without which conservative ideas cannot be seriously entertained.

6. The Half-Savage Relic of Past Times

Will Kymlicka observes that while contemporary liberals urge an attitude of neutrality toward culture, casting cultural membership as a private matter which the state should neither encourage nor obstruct, nineteenth-century liberals approached culture very differently. Some liberals wanted cultural homogeneity while others defended the multinational state. But none dismissed culture as a purely private affair. Those who refused to recognize the rights of minority cultures did so, not because they rejected the notion of an official culture, but because they wanted only one such culture. Moreover, "the call for a common national identity was often tied to an ethnocentric denigration of small national groups." It was common to distinguish "great nations" like France, Italy, Poland, Germany, Hungary, Spain, England, and Russia, from smaller, mere "nationalities" like the Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Basques, Welsh, Scots, Serbians, Bulgarians, Romanians, and Slovenes. Whereas the former were upheld as the civilized carriers of historical progress, the latter were denigrated as "primitive and stagnant, and incapable of social or cultural development." And so some nineteenth-century liberals endorsed national independence for great nations but coercive assimilation for smaller nationalities. No less than John Stuart Mill opined that "it was undeniably better for a Scottish Highlander to be part of Great Britain, or for a Basque

to be part of France, than to sulk on his own rocks, the half-savage relic of past times, revolving in his own little mental orbit, without participation or interest in the general movement of the world."[140]

Liberals now shudder at such ethnocentrism. But conservative claimants of cultural oppression suspect that an analogous ethnocentrism persists in the attitudes of metropolitan elites toward America's conservative heartland. By contrast with places like New York, Boston, or San Francisco, conservative regions of America are denigrated as revolving in their "own little mental orbit," as "primitive and stagnant." Laura Ingraham writes that Middle America reminds the elites "of those maps of Africa used by nineteenth-century explorers that were blank in the middle—to signify "Terra Incognita," the Unknown Land. The explorers thought cannibals lived there; the elites, on the other hand, believe a mysterious tribe known as *Redneckus Americanus* occupies these strange lands."[141] The liberal elites will denounce real or imagined racism and xenophobia at every turn. But Ingraham observes that these are the same people "who don't hesitate to slip into (bad) southern drawls to ridicule Southerners." Indeed, "[m]ocking the pickup truck-driving, tobacco-chewing, shotgun-owning South is one of the elite rites of passage.[142]

Ingraham's accusations are fully consistent with the assumptions of nineteenth-century liberalism. The liberal elites will chalk up complaints of conservaphobia to conservative self-pity. But the alternative hypothesis is that conservaphobia is a contemporary variant of an ethnocentrism that was once considered fully compatible with liberalism. The ethnocentrism is no longer acknowledged, to be sure. But this may be because what previously transpired on the level of avowed ideals has been transposed onto the realm of feeling and sensibility, where it can be felt by the target but denied by the perpetrator. Wherever they turn, the message to conservatives is that they are "half-savage relics of past times" who must be reformed by liberals. If they believe they are separated from the liberal elites by "indelible psychological differences," this is because this message has already been insinuated to them by the elites themselves. The latter will dismiss "identity politics" as an unfortunate obsession of emotionally immature right-wingers. But conservatives insist that liberals are just as concerned to assert their own identities and cultural

[140] Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford University Press, 1995), pg. 53.
[141] Laura Ingraham, *Shut Up & Sing: How Elites from Hollywood, Politics, and the UN Are Subverting America* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2003), pg. 19.
[142] Ibid., pg. 30.

preeminence, and merely do so through stealth and subterfuge, under the cover of plausible deniability.

Victor Davis Hanson argues that this aspiration was personified in the figure of Obama and his contempt for the conservative ordinary American:

> Obama represents their utopian dreams where an anointed technocracy, exempt from the messy ramifications of its own ideology, directs from on high a socially just society — diverse, green, non-judgmental, neutral abroad, tribal at home — in which an equality of result is ensured, albeit with proper exemptions for the better educated and more sophisticated, whose perks are necessary to give them proper downtime for their exhausting work on our behalf.
>
> Whom does the liberal elite detest? Not the very poor. Not the middle class. Not the conservative wealthy of like class. Mostly it is the Sarah-Palin-type grasping want-to-be's (thus the vicious David Letterman jokes or Katie Couric animus or Bill Maher venom).
>
> Those of the entrepreneurial class who own small businesses ('you didn't build that'), who send their kids to San Diego State rather than Stanford, who waste their ill-gotten gains on jet skis rather than skis and on Winnebagos rather than mountain climbing equipment, who employ 10 rather than 10,000, and who vacation at Pismo Beach rather than Carmel. The cool of Obama says to the very wealthy, "I'm one of you. See you again next summer on the Vineyard."
>
> Obama signals to the elite that he too is bothered by those non-arugula-eating greedy losers who are xenophobic and angry that the world left them behind, who are without tastes and culture, who are materialistic to the core, and who are greedy in their emphases on the individual — the tea-baggers, the clingers, the Cliven Bundy Neanderthals, the Palins in their Alaska haunts, and the *Duck Dynasty* freaks. These are not the sort of successful people that we want the world to associate with America, not when we have suitably green, suitably diverse zillionaires who know where to eat in Paris.[143]

If it is important that those representing America to the world know where to eat in Paris, this is because the culture wars are less a struggle between two opposed visions of America than between those who actually retain a distinctive vision of America and the liberal elites, colonial overseers who look to Europe for a model of true civilization and judge their fellow Americans accordingly. The Cliven Bundys and Palins are despised precisely because they embody what is distinctively American. Their very authenticity is an affront to liberal sensibilities.

While conservative claimants of cultural oppression endorse "Eurocentrism" insofar as it is opposed to the native traditions of various Third World peoples, they oppose it insofar as it is opposed to the native traditions of the ordinary American, a "half-savage relic of past times" and the new target of colonialist condescension. O'Reilly writes that the culture wars are a battlefield

[143] http://pjmedia.com/victordavishanson/lord-obama/

on which "the armies of the traditionalists," who "believe the United States was well founded and has done enormous good for the world," confront "the committed forces of the secular-progressive movement" who would "transform America in the image of Western Europe."[144] With Europe having more fully embraced things like secularism, the welfare state, gun control, and ending the death penalty, it serves the liberal elites as a shining counter-example to America's traditionalistic backwardness, the model of urbane sophistication against which to judge all of America's "non-arugula-eating greedy losers," as Hanson says. The elites, says Ingraham, believe they have "outgrown America."[145] Embarrassed by America's perceived backwardness and parochialism, they continually "apologize for our brutish attitudes and policies to their elitist comrades around the world."[146] With their unabashed patriotism, religiosity, and individualism, ordinary Americans are seen by liberals as badly brought-up children whose poor manners shame their parents before their peers. They are not part of the conversation but the subjects of the conversation, which the elites would prefer to undertake with their fellow elites around the world.

Liberals will retort that European social policies just happen to accord with their own political worldviews and that this is hardly anti-American elitism. But conservative claimants of cultural oppression believe that liberal antipathy toward the patriotism of the ordinary American is visceral rather than principled. "Among [leftist] Airheads," writes Gelernter, "patriotism is simply vulgar, like trailer parks or Christianity."[147] Ingraham notes that the elites are driven to a frenzy, growing "angry, bitter, and belligerent" at the spectacle of Americans holding their hands over their hearts as the Star Spangled Banner is played.[148]

That it is indeed the perceived *vulgarity* of American patriotism which offends can, Ingraham suggests, be inferred from liberals' admiration for former French foreign minister Dominique de Villepin, whom they looked to as the kind of intelligent, responsible statesman that America sorely lacked during the George W. Bush years. But Ingraham observes that this was the same de Villepin who avouched that "[t]here is not a day that goes by without me feeling the imperious need to… advance further in the name of French ambition." De Villepin also wrote a biography of Napoleon, endorsing his philosophy of "Victory or death, but glory whatever

[144] O'Reilly, *Culture Warrior*, pg. 2.
[145] Ibid., pgs. 2-3.
[146] Ibid., pg. 3.
[147] Gelernter, *America-Lite*, pg. 151.
[148] Ingraham, *Shut Up & Sing*, pg. 2.

happens." President Bush never uttered anything as jingoistic or bellicose. And yet the elites dismissed him as "arrogant, stupid, greedy, corrupt, and a unilateralist."[149] Why? The double-standard proves that the elites place cultural credentials above moral substance. De Villepin was a debonair Parisian sophisticate who wrote books while Bush was a rude and crude want-to-be cowboy from Texas. Those who bear the appropriate markers of cultural distinction and validate the elites Europhilic pretensions are given a free moral pass while those who patriotically embrace American interests are condemned as the half-savage relics of past times—not because these interests are illegitimate, but because the crass earnestness of their patriotism is viscerally repugnant to liberal sensibilities.

Insulated from the world in their privileged enclaves, the liberal elites cannot see the subtle parochialism of what they pass off as their sophisticated cosmopolitanism. Ingraham writes:

> If you're an elitist who's spent his entire career working for the Ford Foundation, the *New York Times*, or a Hollywood studio, concepts like valor, bravery, and sacrifice are probably alien to you. You don't take them seriously, you don't know anyone who does, and you naturally think that anyone who does profess to live by them must be mentally defective, even evil.[150]

Valor, bravery, and sacrifice are suspect because they are inevitably antagonistic to the elites' "hygienic conception of life." And so these virtues must be discredited as raw anger or aggression, the dangerous seeds of fanatical nationalism or religious zealotry. But conservatives believe that these apprehensions only betray the elites' corrupting gentility, which blinds them to the virtues that they themselves lack. The elites will always frame their concerns in moral terms. But this framing is just a post-hoc rationalizations for their visceral antipathy to the sensibilities of the ordinary American, who will not accede to the liberal model of a properly civilized personality. Mistaking the halls of the Ford Foundation for the entire world, liberals cannot see that their high ideals come hand in hand with a primordial hatred for this outsider and what he represents. t

Dissenting in *United States v. Virginia*, which held unconstitutional the Virginia Military Institute's policy of excluding women, Justice Scalia wrote that "[i]n an odd sort of way, it is precisely VMI's attachment to such old-fashioned concepts as manly 'honor' that has made it, and the system it represents, the target of those who today succeed in abolishing public single-sex education."[151] Writing for the Court, Justice Ginsburg had assumed the posture of the hard-nosed

[149] Ibid., pg. 329.
[150] Ibid., pg. 150.
[151] *United States v. Virginia*, 518 U.S. 515, 601 (U.S. 1996) (Scalia J., dissenting)..

technocrat painstakingly scrutinizing the facts before her, asking how much evidence is required to prove that women cannot adapt to a VMI education. But Justice Scalia's suggestion is that the narrow terms of Equal Protection review conceal the true stakes. Those who pushed to overturn VMI's historical traditions were concerned, not to uproot irrational preconceptions about women's capabilities, but to advance an agenda of social engineering, to discredit an ideal that they despise as archaic and benighted. Manly honor is simply incompatible with a hygienic conception of life.

Liberals will chalk up their reservations about "manly honor" to concerns about sexism and gender inequality. But conservative claimants of cultural oppression trace this high-mindedness to a specific cultural ethos. "It is male individuality, exuberance, and aggressiveness," writes F. Carolyn Graglia, "that must be most stringently curbed and disciplined to meet the requirements of bureaucratic success." Bureaucracies are "more hospitable to the effete, androgynous male who fits the feminist mold of manhood."[152] Liberals oppose manly honor, not to promote gender equality, but by virtue of their primordial attraction to the disciplined conformism of an institutional ethos. A hygienic conception of life cannot tolerate male individuality, exuberance, and aggressiveness, which are now condemned as dangerous atavisms that threaten our rational social order. Equal protection review is merely the ideological façade behind which liberalism targets these atavisms. Here as elsewhere, conservative claimants of cultural oppression see the political as emerging out of the ostensibly apolitical. Where the elites contrapose equality to inequality, conservatives see a contest between the elites' supposedly higher civilization and the half-savage relics of past times, themselves.

This deeper layer of social meaning explains the selectivity with which feminist principles are actually applied. Ingraham notes that while a global rap superstar can "get away with carrying out a simulated rape of a young woman on the stage," such shenanigans would have provoked a deafening outcry from elites had they been performed by American soldiers stationed in Iraq or Afghanistan. Inevitably, the performance would be cited as incontrovertible evidence of the military's misogynistic culture.[153] Why the double-standard? Liberals' assessments of social ills are never formulated in a Platonic heaven, but always against the backdrop of their parochial tastes and sensibilities. Where these tastes and sensibilities are rejected, as in the military, the violence

[152] F. Carolyn Graglia, *Domestic Tranquility: A Brief Against Feminism* (Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 1998), pg. 280.
[153] Laura Ingraham, *Power to the People* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2007), pg. 239-40.

and sexism will be moralistically condemned as uniquely nefarious and brutishly animal. Where their tastes and sensibilities are affirmed, as they are by multicultural black rappers, the criticism will be much more "nuanced" and "sophisticated," with concessions granted to the requirements of artistic license and multilayered irony. The liberal agenda cloaks itself in moral abstractions, but as applied these abstractions' function to discredit the ethos of the ordinary American, which is an affront to the liberal identity.

Conservative claims of cultural oppression offer a vulgarized and politicized recapitulation of what Norbert Elias famously characterized as the antithesis between *Kultur* and *Civilization*. Reacting to the prestige of French ideas and styles and the general perception of German backwardness and parochialism, German thinkers from the mid-Eighteenth Century onward asserted that France offered mere *Civilization*, an uprooted, artificial cosmopolitanism void of inner spiritual substance, just "the external and superficial manners to be found in the courts."[154] Germany, on the other hand, offered *Kultur*, the fount of authentic spirituality and true feeling. In opposing their own "natural" way of life to the "unnatural" life of court society, German youths embracing Romanticism celebrated "an overwhelming delight in their own exuberance of feeling," the "surrender to the excitement of one's own heart, unhindered by 'cold reason.'"[155]

Where today's liberal elites have *Civilization*, so conservatives have *Kultur*. For conservative claims of cultural oppression promote the same basic contraposition of human characteristics that has always defined the *Kultur/Civilization* dichotomy, the contrasts between "depth" and "superficiality," "honesty" and "falsity," "true virtue" and "outward politeness."[156] Hence O'Reilly's contraposition of the secular-progressives of Los Angeles who say "Let's do lunch, babe" with no intention of fulfilling the promise with the instinctive sincerity of the conservative "Tradition-Warrior." Not every "T-Warrior" can be a full-time activist, but he already contributes to the cause by just being a "standup guy" who rejects the "phony jargon."[157] The Ford Foundation, the *New York Times*, and Hollywood are just the latest iterations of the "unnatural" life of court society, of the unhealthy self-consciousness and other-directedness that stands in sharp contrast to those who pour their hearts out singing the Star-Spangled Banner, surrendering to the excitement of their hearts "unhindered by 'cold reason.'"

[154] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), pg. 8
[155] Ibid., pg. 15-16.
[156] Ibid., pg. 24.
[157] O'Reilly, *Culture Warrior*, pg. 197.

It follows that what purport to be disinterested moral and aesthetic judgments will be systematically inflected by liberals' preference for their own *Civilization* over conservative *Kultur*. And this is indeed what conservatives suspect. Anderson notes that the liberal press condemned Comedy Central's *Tough Crowd with Colin Quinn*—which "regularly upbraided the Left for its anti-Americanism and its stifling PC piety"—as boorish, offensive, and racist. But liberals' offense was the direct reflection of their own parochialism, the fact that this brand of comedy is "far removed from the traditional New York-style (i.e., liberal, guilt-ridden, psychoanalysis-saturated) comedy of Woody Allen."[158] Here as elsewhere, liberalism is not just a narrowly political creed but an overarching ethos, a debilitating introspectiveness that is instinctively hostile to the healthy, all-American exuberance of the conservative ordinary American, who must therefore be discredited at all costs.

This parochialism is manifested in liberals' moral hypocrisy. Michelle Malkin describes a Democratic Fundraiser in Chelsea where one comic attacked President Bush as "this piece of living, breathing shit" and others "took to savaging Vice President Dick Cheney's family," calling his lesbian daughter "a big lezzie."[159] Yet the media gave this outrage a free pass. Why? "It's like an Upper West Side Manhattan left-wing Ku Klux Klan mentality," explains Republican Congressman Peter King of New York: "[I]f some Southern redneck talked like this about a liberal, everyone would denounce it. But because it's Upper West Side humor, somehow it's supposed to be chic."[160] Enjoying this Upper West Side privilege, liberal comedians can issue mock death threats against prominent conservatives and expect everyone to take this in stride. Malkin observes that liberals fantasized about the assassination of George W. Bush and then pleaded that this was an "ironic" joke.[161] But conservatives who would turn the tables and wish the same upon prominent liberals cannot expect the same understanding, as they are not members of the culture of irony.

These conservaphobic double-standards are at work in Hollywood too. D'Souza notes that liberals celebrate violence "when it appears in movies that promote liberal or avant-garde values, such as *Pulp Fiction, Natural Born Killers,* or *Kill Bill*" but deplore it "when it appears in a movie

[158] Anderson, *South Park Conservatives*, pgs. 88, 91.
[159] Michelle Malkin, *Unhinged: Exposing Liberals Gone Wild* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2005), pg. 138.
[160] Qt. in Ibid., pg. 138.
[161] Ibid., pg. 160-61.

that promotes traditional religious faith, such as Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*."[162] As with nationalism, the issue is never violence as such, but the cultural sensibilities it serves to validate. Where those sensibilities are traditionalist, the violence is deplored as prurient sadomasochism. Where they are avant-garde, it is exalted as philosophical insight into the darkest corners of human nature or the anomie of modern life. Liberals are presumed to enjoy intellectual detachment from whatever violence they contemplate. But conservatives are deemed the half-savage relics of past times, potentially unhinged and on the precipice of violence. And so the slightest intimations of real or imagined violence in their ranks must be preemptively exposed and upbraided as they need not be when they come from liberals.

Michael Savage was summarily fired from a new job at MSNBC after he lost his temper and, as he explains, "react[ed] to a vicious personal attack made by *a crank caller*" by telling the caller to "get AIDS and die." But NPR's Nina Totenberg, Savage notes, could respond to Senator's Jesse Helms efforts to defund AIDS research with "I think he ought to be worried about what's going on in the Good Lord's mind, because if there is retributive justice, he'll get AIDs from a transfusion, or one of his grandchildren will get it."[163] Totenberg was *not* fired. Why the double-standard? The contexts are different, but the contents are similar enough to raise the question, and Savage is suggesting that part of the context was Totenberg's class privilege as a liberal elite. Whereas she was attacking a conservative, Savage was attacking a critic of a conservative. And whereas Totenberg delivered her remarks in the calm, deliberative tone of a well-spoken NPR host, thus evincing a "hygienic conception of life," Savage delivered his in the gruff, working-class accent of the ordinary American. *This* is what the elites ultimately despise.

Liberals claim to stand for civility and would denounce as a dangerous fanatic any conservative who called for divine retribution against *the grandchildren* of a political enemy. Yet Totenberg was given a free pass to do just this. The call for divine retribution just seems more thoughtful, less primitive and barbaric when voiced by a liberal—just as *Natural Born Killers* seems more thoughtful, less primitive and barbaric than *The Passion of the Christ*. The animus of liberals just seems more civilized, more temperate than the animus of conservatives. But this is because civility has no less than religious neutrality and moral censoriousness been defined by the dominant dispensation. Liberals aver that they enforce only an overlapping consensus of basic

[162] *D'Souza, The Enemy at Home, pg. 131.*
[163] Savage, *The Enemy Within*, pg. 219.

values to which all reasonable minds can accede. But conservatives insist that this commitment is vitiated by sectarian privileges that liberals will not acknowledge. Being culturally credentialed as sophisticated cosmopolitans, liberals could not possibly mean what they say. But as atavistic barbarians, conservatives probably do and so cannot be allowed to indulge in the full range of questionable human impulses permitted to liberals.

Conservatives believe this has always been liberalism's *modus operandi*, conservatives believe. 1960s anti-Vietnam dissident William Sloane Coffin propounded his "rule of conscience," which according to Kimball meant that Klansmen but not Weathermen should be arrested for their crimes. For "law was dispensable when it conflicted with duly ratified liberal sentiments."[164] Laws "may be violated if, and only if, one is a member of the elite."[165] The Weathermen are no longer and the Klan is no longer relevant. But the legacy of the 1960s lives on in the very fabric of our culture, as *Chronicles* says, privileging liberals with a license that is withheld from conservatives.

7. Stockholm Syndrome

Conservative claims of cultural oppression strike liberals as more than a tad melodramatic. Indeed, there has been much disagreement about whether a culture war even exists in America. As a particular characterization of what that war consists in, conservative claims of cultural oppression presuppose an affirmative answer to this question. Some commentators have argued that the image of stark polarization between progressives and traditionalists does not bear close scrutiny because most Americans are more moderate and non-ideological than the culture war's rhetoricians would have us believe. Most notably, Alan Wolfe has argued that the culture war is a creation of media and political elites, and that their deeply divisive ideological rhetoric says more about their own agendas than any powerful currents running through the electorate. If cultural issues seem to loom larger than before, this is because of culturally extrinsic factors like the ideological homogenization of political parties, gerrymandering techniques that give incumbents the electoral security to vote their ideology, and low primary election turnouts that give candidates an incentive to mobilize ideologically driven voters. With the base of the Republican Party being especially far removed from the American center, Republicans have held a special interest in

[164] Kimball, *The Long March*, pg. 136.
[165] Ibid., pg. 135.

perpetuating the culture wars myth.[166] Most Americans are moderates, but structural features of our political system ensure that the shrillest voices are heard the loudest.

On the other hand, James Hunter has countered that Wolfe's skepticism is premised on a debatable formulation of the culture wars question. Culture wars skepticism is motivated by "an implicit view of culture" that reduces culture to the sum total of individual opinions.[167] This is a "culture of politics" orientation that attends to the "push and pull of the mechanisms of power over cultural issues"—that is, to elections, campaigns, administrations, voting behaviors, etc. With culture thus conceived, it is easy to dismiss the culture wars as the purview of small cadres of activists who attempt to manipulate a much larger body of moderates.[168] But the culture wars hypothesis becomes more plausible once we transcend this methodological individualism and see culture "not as the norms and values residing in people's heads and hearts but rather as systems of symbols and other cultural artifacts, institutions that produce and promulgate those symbols, discourses that articulate and legitimate particular interests, and competing fields where culture is contested."[169] This "politics of culture" orientation is concerned, not with strategies of political mobilization, but with the symbolic dimensions of these mobilizations, with "the nature and institutional structures and dynamics of the discourse" and the "competing sources of authority that animate the conflict."[170] Whereas the "culture of politics" orientation implicitly conceives of "culture" as shorthand for the sum total of individually held opinions, the "politics of culture" perspective assigns culture a *sui generis* reality, as the source of those opinions' resonance.

So understood, our culture is indeed pervaded by deep-seated ideological rifts. Bona fide culture warriors may be few, but it is this minority that creates our political languages. And these languages are what provide "the categories through which people understand themselves." They are what carry the power "to objectify, to make identifiable and 'objectively' real the various and ever changing aspects of our experience."[171] This is why we can speak of a culture war. A literal war may be real and socially transformative notwithstanding that only a fraction of the populace is actually mobilized as combatants. And likewise, a culture war can be genuine notwithstanding

[166] James Davison Hunter and Alan Wolfe, *Is There A Culture War?: A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life*, eds. E.J. Dionne Jr. and Michael Cromartie (Washington D.C.: Brooking Institution Press, 2006), pg. 46-53.
[167] Ibid., pg. 20.
[168] Ibid., pgs. 90-91.
[169] Ibid., pg. 20.
[170] Ibid., pg. 90-91.
[171] Ibid., pg. 28.

that the population as a whole is much less divided than the activists, because it is the latter who set the terms of the discussion, the ways we look at issues. The ostensible centrism of the average American does not vitiate the culture war hypothesis because that centrism is not an alternative to the culture wars but *its product*. Centrism is itself defined by the culture wars, for centrism is ultimately just a set of partial concessions to each side that assuage some people's inner divisions without resolving the underlying conflict.

Hunter observes that most Americans adopted "middling positions" on civil rights and Vietnam. Yet these were pivotal social conflicts with profound implications for the country's future.[172] Someone who favored desegregation but asked that it proceed at a slower, less destabilizing pace could not be said to have transcended the sharp ideological divide separating segregationists and civil rights activists. For his moderation was just a way of coping with that divide. Similarly, the culture wars moderate who argues that abortion remain legal only for the first trimester of a pregnancy, or that the state be permitted to fund students' transportation to religious schools but not these schools' teacher salaries, has not discovered a genuine "third way" between traditionalism and progressivism. Whatever arguments he may muster must selectively trade on both side's ideological impulses, without providing another language through which to transcends them. However large the "center" may be numerically, it is not a "vital center," and is rather "mostly passive and contentless," writes Hunter.[173] The moderate is moderate because he has quiescently internalized the culture war into himself instead of taking a side. This is why he remains the perennial target of activists who are always eyeing the possibility of disrupting the unstable, because unprincipled, *modus vivendi* to which he has thus far resigned himself.

At their more sophisticated, conservative claims of cultural oppression embrace a "politics of culture" orientation and thus do not deny what Wolfe and others highlight as the centrism or moderation of most Americans. Some conservative claimants of cultural oppression do indeed trade on stark apocalyptic imagery, positing two opposing armies facing off on an open battlefield. But many others reject this as an oversimplification. Himmelfarb explains that the two cultures dividing America are not "fixed, reified entities" but "loose categories of concepts representing a complex of values and beliefs which are shared, not entirely but in good measure, by 'like-minded'

[172] Ibid., pg. 31.
[173] Ibid., pg. 93.

people."[174] The dominant culture in fact "exhibits a wide spectrum of beliefs and practices." The "elite culture," which includes the media and academia, exists at one end of it. But that elite is "only a small if a most visible and influential part of this culture," most of which consists "of people who are generally passive and acquiescent." These people "lead lives that, in most respects, most of the time, conform to traditional ideals of morality and propriety." However, they do so "with no firm confidence in the principles underlying their behavior" and are for this reason "vulnerable to weaknesses and stresses in their own lives, and undermined by the example of their less conventional peers or those whom they might think of as their superiors."[175]

Moderates are moderates, not because they have somehow risen above the fray of the culture wars, but because they are its victims, submerged in the confusion it has created. The tolerance and non-judgmentalism of the ordinary American, which Wolfe cites as evidence for the contrived character of culture wars vehemence, is for Himmelfarb an indication of the inroads made by the elites' moral relativism. What culture wars skeptics uphold as all-American centrism is in fact the demoralization of one belligerent by another, the oppression of conservatives by liberals. If the latter cannot see a culture war, this is because their interpretation of the data accepts the triumph of liberalism as a given, rather than as something that has been foisted on many who reject it in their heart of hearts.

D'Souza makes a similar argument. Eschewing any facile dichotomy between "a decadent liberal coastline and a virtuous conservative heartland," he explains that "[l]iberal values have penetrated the heartland," proving that "liberals are the dominant side in the 'culture war.'"[176] The moderation and ambivalence that some would construe as evidence for the artificiality of the culture wars is really evidence for the victory of one of its sides, evidence that erstwhile conservatives have gradually capitulated to liberalism in an abandonment of their own heritage. Poll data may indicate widespread moderation and centrism. But those data underdetermine their interpretation, underdetermine whether that moderation and centrism is philosophically principled or a reflection of an apathetic and exhausted ambivalence adopted in the face of liberal hegemony. Liberals will say that increasing numbers of Americans have been persuaded of liberal values, but conservatives believe that these Americans have rather been "penetrated" by those values, as

[174] Himmelfarb, *One Nation, Two Cultures*, pg. 126.
[175] Ibid., pg. 119.
[176] D'Souza, *The Enemy at Home*, pg. 134-35.

D'Souza says. The ideologically strident minority of conservatives we associate with the culture wars are not, as culture war skeptics would have it, a parochial interest group with a loud megaphone, but rather those rare individuals who somehow survived liberalism's initial onslaught and continue to resist its incursions against the odds. If conservative culture warriors seem like a fringe element, this is because liberalism has exalted its own contingent victories as the baseline through which to separate the fringe from the mainstream.

* * *

These judgments might be dismissed as ad hoc rationalizations for the fact that most Americans do not share the claimants' enthusiasms, and specifically their sense of righteous resistance before an overbearing liberal hegemon. This question cannot be answered at this stage of my argument. What I do hope to establish, rather, is that what might be dismissed as ad hoc rationalizations conform to a general pattern. And this is conservatism's appropriation of liberalism, the fact that the Right has become the Left in order to accuse the Left of becoming the Right. If conservative claims of cultural oppression adopt a "politics of culture" orientation, this is because they tacitly operate under sociological and psychological assumptions that traditionally belong to the Left.

It has often been noted that blacks confronting a culture of racial prejudice may respond by simply denying any trace of racial/cultural distinctiveness in the hopes of gaining white approval. Hence, observes Alexander Alenikoff, the "compliment" that some whites pay to blacks: "I don't think of you as black."[177] Here is the proverbial "Oreo" or "Uncle Tom" black who attempts to symbolically efface his skin color by adopting stereotypically white mannerisms and viewpoints, in order to escape rather than confront racism, which he has simply absorbed into his identity.

On the other hand, it has also been observed that against the Scylla of craven assimilation lies an opposite but equally self-defeating response to racial oppression, the Charybdis of internalizing positively valanced variants of traditional racist stereotypes. Richard Ford argues that this has been the misguided strategy of some multiculturalists, who have sanitized traditional stereotypes of black sloth and fecklessness into a "Colored People's Time" that eschews strict punctuality in favor of approximation. "Meetings that begin on C.P.T. Time usually begin about

[177] T. Alexander Aleinikoff, *A Case for Race Consciousness*, 91 Colum. L. Rev. 1060, 1081 (1991).

twenty minutes after the appointed time" explains critical race theorist Janice Haley-Benson.[178] An old stereotype is thus recast as enlightened liberation from the uptightness of the dominant white bourgeois culture and its obsession with efficiency and punctuality. Similarly, out-of-wedlock pregnancy has been celebrated as an expression of a distinctively black cultural ethos, which could only be opposed out of racism and xenophobia. Defending this view, critical race theorist Regina Austin endorses an ethic that "declares wily, audacious, and good all conduct that offends the white, male, middle-class establishments."[179]

Ford argues that this kind of multiculturalism has rendered some African-Americans complicit in their own racial oppression. In declaring their independence from the dominant white culture and celebrating their imagined cultural authenticity, these multiculturalists have merely surrendered to historical prejudice, erecting their identities on a foundation of caricatures and stereotypes.[180] In calling upon blacks to offend the hegemonic norms of the white culture, Austin is also calling upon them to embrace the stereotypes—like sexual promiscuity—on whose basis offense can be given. And so what gets held out as sophisticated resistance to prejudice is really an unwitting capitulation to it.

While such problems might seem unique to African-Americans, conservatives confront a similarly twin-horned dilemma in consequence of which their very resistance to liberalism can be turned against them. Goldberg urges conservatives to guard against being seduced by "the narrative of victimization." That narrative is correct on the merits—conservatives "are called racists, bigots, fools, fascist, etc. every day by those who control the commanding heights of the culture." But Goldberg believes that complaining about this can be counterproductive when it "concedes the authority of the liberal establishment to make such claims" and "encourages conservatives to internalize two unhealthy responses." The first is "the burning desire to offend liberals just for kicks." Though acceptable in moderation, this impulse can make conservatives come off as obnoxious, thus discrediting them. The other, antipodal but equally unhelpful, response is "self-hating conservatism," which causes conservatives "to apologize for being 'old-fashioned'" or to seek "to prove they 'care' too." Hence the "abomination" of "compassionate conservatism."[181]

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[178] Ford, *Racial Culture*, pg. 49.
[179] Regina Austin, *Sapphire Bound!*, 1989 Wis. L. Rev. 539, 555 (1989).
[180] Ford, *Racial Culture*, at 78.
[181] Goldberg, "Introduction," pg. xi.

These dangers closely mirror the dilemma faced by African-Americans. In declaring "wily, audacious, and good all conduct that offends the white, male, middle-class establishments," blacks are tacitly acceding to traditional racist stereotypes, thereby conceding the legitimacy of that establishment. And conservatives who act on their "burning desire to offend liberals just for kicks" fall into an analogous trap, because they thereby accede to the authority of the liberal establishment to enforce the stereotypes, like conservative incivility, on whose basis the offense is given. At the other extreme, just as blacks may obsequiously assimilate to the last details of stereotypical white comportment, artificially shedding every last trace of cultural distinctiveness in order to obtain the approval of their betters, so the "Uncle Tom conservative" is prepared to shed the better part of his conservatism in order to earn the grudging respect of the anointed. Afraid of being branded as benighted, he instead attains the dubious distinction of being acknowledged as a "reasonable conservative." Just like African-Americans, conservatives must walk a fine line if they are to retain their dignity and self-respect. Both alike must struggle with the ever-present possibility that they have in one way or another internalized the dominant dispensation, and that what seems like resistance to it is actually a surrender to it.

Whether a conservative responds to the slanders of "those who control the commanding heights of the culture" with self-hatred or with a "burning desire to offend liberals just for kicks," the important point is that the culture wars transpire, not only between liberals and conservatives, but also *within* conservatives themselves, as a struggle between their authentic conservatism and the internalized liberalism that compromises it. Even intense hostility to liberalism may be a symptom of this inner conflict inasmuch as it tacitly acquiesces in the cultural authority of the liberal establishment. The liberalism against which conservatives struggle is not, as per the "culture of politics" perspective, a discrete, clearly identifiable set of political actors, but, as per the "politics of culture" perspective, the power "to objectify, to make identifiable and 'objectively' real the various and ever changing aspects of our experience." Conservatives feel culturally oppressed because they feel it is liberals who hold most of this power.

The Left has long emphasized that a dominant white male European culture can deprive its victims of the very language through which to even articulate their grievances. Jerry Martin describes the "postmodern argument" as the view that "[l]anguage, ideas, and values… reflect the interests of groups and provide effective means by which dominant groups can control and shape

the self-understanding of less powerful groups."[182] Conservative claimants of cultural oppression now make the post-modern argument too. Addressing the root causes of Mitt Romney's 2012 presidential defeat, conservative commentator Bill Whittle observed:

> The problem which we've had as conservatives and Republicans for the longest time, and I mean for ten, fifteen, twenty years now, certainly since Ronald Reagan, is that as conservatives we do not believe in our own philosophy. The fact is that the GOP leadership and all the national-level candidates, again with one or two exceptions, are victims of Stockholm syndrome. The pop culture has beaten them up so severely that they are utterly unwilling to stand for what they claim to believe in publicly. They're in a way ashamed of it.[183]

Like the kidnapee who begins to identify with her own captor in order to cope psychologically, so conservatives have to various degrees internalized the values of their liberal overlords, inauthentically moderating their stances in deference to the dominant dispensation until they no longer remember what they believe in. Speaking satirically for liberals, Kahane discloses that "[v]ia our silken garrote of 'political correctness,' we have undermined and hamstrung your very ability to think with clarity, to judge with confidence—and to see us for what we really are."[184] The Left has "essentially deprived you of your own language"[185] and "robbed you of your tongue, of your fighting spirit."[186] The problem is not simply that political correctness has deprived conservatives of their right to *express* their beliefs—through media bias or campus speech codes—but that it has moreover and more insidiously obstructed their ability to even *form* beliefs, to translate their true sentiments into clear statements of position which they can then defend without embarrassment.

Frank observes that conservatives now portray themselves as "without agency," as "hapless victims adrift in a fatalistic universe where only liberals may act."[187] And conservatives believe this haplessness to be the consequence of their own internalized liberalism, which dampens both their consciousness and their self-esteem. Savage accuses liberals of making ordinary Americans feel "like a bunch of wet-behind-the-ears neophytes." Having been "drugged into submission,"[188]

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[182] Jerry L. Martin, "The University as Agent of Social Transformation: The Postmodern Argument Considered," in *The Imperiled Academy*, ed. Howard Dickman (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1993), pg. 220.
[183] http://www.davidhorowitztv.com/2012/11/16/bill-whittle/
[184] Kahane, *Rules for Radical Conservatives*, pg. xiv.
[185] Ibid., pg. 113.
[186] Ibid., pg. 201.
[187] Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, pg. 126.
[188] Savage, *The Enemy Within*, pg. 216.

these Americans must now "shake free of their brainwashing."[189] Similarly, Kahane charges that when a conservative looks in the mirror, he sees only "a coward, a weakling, a quivering mass of protoplasm, a spineless jellyfish, a neutered creature stripped of dignity and cowering in fear."[190] Not content to simply present their side of the argument, liberals have moreover de-centered conservatives' very sense of themselves, undermining their basic agency powers.

With conservatives thus enervated, liberals can then incentivize them to turn on their own and give liberals the dangerous satisfaction of hearing their own judgments repeated on the Right. Liberals, writes Coulter, will bestow a "Strange New Respect" on conservatives "who so crave liberal approval" that "they will gratuitously attack fellow conservatives." This is "the slutty girl's path to popularity" and the one taken by John McCain in 2000 when he excoriated conservative evangelists Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson as "agents of intolerance" who "shame our faith, our party, and our country."[191] Liberals will only be encouraged, and never appeased, by conservative apologies. But conservatives "who turn on the Republican Party from the left can expect instant stardom." The "establishment media give the monkey a banana for throwing feces at a Republican and there's always a monkey who wants the banana."[192]

Republican-appointed Judge John E. Jones III was given a banana after he ruled that teaching intelligent design violated the Establishment Clause in *Kitzmiller v. Dover*. He was fawningly hailed by the liberal media as "a man of integrity and intellect," as "moderate, thoughtful and universally well-regarded," and a "renaissance man." The truth, writes Coulter, was that he spent the better part of his career on the state liquor board. Nevertheless, he gave liberals what they wanted, another blow against Christianity, and the rewards soon followed. The *New York Times* "still won't mention that John Ashcroft went to Yale," notes Coulter, "but it managed to work in that Judge Jones's *father* graduated from Yale."[193] Those occupying "the commanding heights of the culture" wield the carrot as well as the stick. And in both cases, the instrument of coercion is effective only because conservatives have been secretly cowed by the cultural prestige of liberalism, internalizing their enemy as a part of themselves, becoming addicted to liberalism as to a drug whose ephemeral satisfactions come at the expense of their human integrity.

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[189] Ibid., pg. 196.
[190] Kahane, *Rules for Radical Conservatives*, pg. xiii.
[191] Ann Coulter, *Demonic: How the Liberal Mob Is Endangering America* (New York: Crown Forum, 2011), pg. 289.
[192] Ann Coulter, *Guilty: Liberal "Victims" and Their Assault on America* (New York: Three Rivers, 2009), pg. 115.
[193] Ann Coulter, *Godless: The Church of Liberalism* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007), pgs. 251-52.

Frank writes that many conservatives have found the "ready-made identity" offered up by anti-liberal backlash "so compelling that they have internalized it, made it their own, shaped themselves according to its attractive and uniquely American understanding of authenticity and victimhood."[194] But conservative claimants of cultural oppression insist that it is liberalism that offers the ready-made identity, and see their emergence into conservativism as the casting off of this false consciousness in favor of autonomous self-determination. Justin Katz achieved this only with the late realization that he had been shaped by a "Northeastern culture" where he "learned liberalism as a pose," a "social script that the properly educated were compelled to follow."[195] And Joel Pollack explains that he "did not take the final step of becoming a Republican for quite some time," hampered as he was by his "Democrat past and by the stigma that haunts any party that champions the right of individuals to succeed." His conversion meant he would now be accused of the sins of greed, racism, and sexism, but it was also what allowed him to overcome "the nagging, debilitating sense of guilt that accompanies Left-wing politics in general."[196]

The conservative who achieve this authenticity carries the cross of all the usual liberal slanders, but he is at least at peace with his own conscience. By contrast, the liberal seeks to escape this conflict and ends by internalizing it. Choosing outward peace over inner authenticity, he becomes the slave of an overbearing liberal superego, a "nagging, debilitating sense of guilt." As we saw, Anderson's "new post-liberal counterculture" offers "a liberating release" for students beaten down by politically correct orthodoxy. And this is because conservative claims of cultural oppression have as their objective, not to intellectually proselytize to conservatism, but *to erode our repressive inhibitions against the conservatism that is already there*. They seek, not to defend conservative ideas, but to liberate individuals for those ideas by exploding the veneer of naturalness and inevitability in which liberalism ensconces itself. With conservatism being the ordinary American's authentic default setting, liberalism's political successes are also its successes in compromising that authenticity, whose resuscitation is the *sine qua non* a new conservative awakening.

Liberals will predictably dismiss all this as histrionic posturing. But they are receptive to similar claims when they are issued by their own favored groups. Feminists have long held that

[194] Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, pg. 158.
[195] Katz, "A Nonconforming Reconstruction," pg. 73.
[196] Joel B. Pollack, "A Frank Exchange: The Tale of My Political Conversion," in *Proud to be Right: Voices of the Next Conservative Generation*, ed. Jonah Goldberg (New York: Harper, 2010), pgs. 152-53.

patriarchy is so insidious as to have colonized women's very subjectivities, depriving them of the very agency powers that would enable them to recognize and resist patriarchy. They too have been accused of histrionic posturing and hallucinating oppression. But this impression has a ready explanation in the very oppression being alleged, which can account for many conservatives' theoretical inarticulacy. Feminist Robin West writes that "[a]n injury uniquely sustained by a disempowered group will lack a name, a history, and in general a linguistic reality."[197] And Catherine MacKinnon argues that "[w]omen have been substantially deprived not only of their own experience but of terms of their own in which to view it."[198] It is just this kind of linguistic deprivation that now appears to afflict some conservatives, as Kahane and Savage seem eager to acknowledge. In the one case, it is women who have internalized patriarchy, shaping themselves in accordance with its dictates. In the other, it is conservatives who have internalized the vision of the anointed, accepting liberals' definition of them as benighted. If radical feminists characterize women as "pervasively constructed by male aggression,"[199] so perhaps conservatives have been pervasively constructed by liberal aggression. The liberal elites control, not only the institutions, but, even more crucially, the background norms that shape how conservatives view themselves. Resisting these norms and their internalization, conservative claims of cultural oppression signify an inward spiritual struggle as much as an outward political one.

To be sure, many conservatives will reject Kahane's and Savage's renditions of their predicament as hyperbolic. But the hyperbole is, in its *substance*, fully consistent with the musings of conservatism's more dispassionate theoreticians. A spineless jellyfish or quivering mass of protoplasm is precisely what could be expected to become of a conservative who, despite himself and against his deepest instincts, came to view liberalism, not as a perspective on reality, but as reality itself, as Kimball says. He would then have to see his opposition to liberalism as a perversion rather than a challenge, as Kimball also says. And this judgment would predictably yield the kind of self-division described, hyperbolically and histrionically, by Savage, Kahane and others. Kimball believes that "we are all liberals now," if not by conviction then by "contagion,"

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[197] Robin L. West, *The Difference in Women's Hedonic Lives: A Phenomenological Critique of Feminist Legal Theory*, 15 Wis. Women's L.J. 149 (2000).
[198] Catherine A. MacKinnon, "Sexuality," in *Campus Wars: Multiculturalism and the Politics of Difference*, eds. John Arthur and Amy Shapiro (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), pg. 72.
[199] Kathryn Abrams, *Sex Wars Redux: Agency and Coercion in Feminist Legal Theory*, 95 Colum. L. Rev. 304, 304 (1995).

and Kahane and Savage do no more than spell out the natural psychological consequences of that contagion.

The nature of the contagion is conveyed more temperately by Gelernter when he bemoans that "[t]oday, when Americans praise their own nation, they do it defiantly; that unselfconscious patriotic pleasure is gone."[200] The offense isn't just liberals' disdain for America, but that this disdain has filtered into the "habits, tastes, and feeling" of the ordinary American, whose patriotism can no longer be wholehearted. He now expresses that patriotism, not in its original purity, but in defiance of his own internalized liberalism, the final outcome of conservatives' cultural oppression. Liberals believe that, in condemning liberals' "assaults" on traditional values, conservatives are employing a metaphorical figure of speech that really designate what are *disagreements* with these values. But these grievances should be taken more literally, as references to the liberalism that liberals have succeeded in instilling in conservatives themselves. The assault isn't just against conservative ideas but against conservatives' very being. If liberals cannot acknowledge their conservaphobia, it is because they cannot acknowledge *this*.

In all these regards, conservative claims of cultural oppression are the mirror image of the Frankfurt School Marxists' attempts to rationalize the failure of socialist revolutionaries as the insidious effect of cultural manipulation—yet another respect in which the Left is the Right and the Right is the Left. If conservative claims of cultural oppression implicitly reject the methodological individualism that sustains culture wars skepticism notwithstanding their own professions of individualism, this is because that approach threatens to obscure the operation of oppressive social forces that structure the self-conceptions which methodological individualism accepts as brute data admitting of no further analysis. And if they are prepared to impute false consciousness notwithstanding that conservatives have traditionally opposed the concept as a tool of leftist tyranny, this is because they have, no less than the anointed, arrogated to themselves a privileged epistemic vantage point from which the self-conceptions of millions may be explained away as epiphenomena of forces they cannot perceive—the colonization of the America soul by the forces of academia, media, and Hollywood. Here as elsewhere, a framework of analysis that originated in the Left's critique of the wider society has become incorporated into the Right's critique of the Left itself.

[200] Gelernter, *America-Lite*, pg. 8.

8. Intellectualized Anti-Intellectualism

As an ostensible species of right-wing populism, conservative claims of cultural oppression strike most liberals as the same old rank anti-intellectualism. Frank writes that anti-intellectualism "is one of the grand unifying themes of the backlash, the mutant strain of class war that underpins so many of Kansas's otherwise random-seeming grievances."[201] And indeed, the traditional tropes of American anti-intellectualism can to varying degrees be discovered in these claims. Richard Hofstadter observes that "[i]n the course of generations, those who have suffered from the operations of intellect, or who have feared or resented it, have developed a kind of counter-mythology about what it is and the role it plays in society."[202] This counter-mythology portrays intellectuals as "pretentious, conceited, effeminate, and snobbish; and very likely immoral, dangerous, and subversive."[203] Pitting intellect against warmth of feeling, solidity of character, practical wisdom, and democracy itself, this counter-narrative reduces intellect to "mere cleverness, which transmutes easily into the sly or the diabolical."[204]

This age-old counter-narrative is certainly present in conservative claims of cultural oppression. Gelernter writes that "[i]ntellectuals are rebels without causes" for whom "disaffection" and "alienation" come with the job.[205] Intellectuals are seen to embody a primordial hostility to the existing order for which their avowed principles are cheap post-hoc rationalizations. Why their hostility? Ingraham proposes that many elites "are unhappy nerds who never got over being bullied by football players in high school."[206] Intellect is not the organ of truth but the perverse weapon through which the discontent and maladjusted exact revenge on their betters. Hence Hannity's warning that liberals "have turned the full force of their rhetorical firepower against anyone—particularly conservatives—who opposes them."[207] Where conservatives seek the truth, liberals cultivate "rhetorical firepower," a hollow verbal dexterousness that aims, not to persuade, but to bewilder, intimidate, and humiliate. Liberal intellectualism is there to impose rhetorical rules under which conservatives are destined to lose. Kahane writes that progressives

[201] Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*. pg. 191.
[202] Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, pg. 45.
[203] Ibid., pgs. 18-19.
[204] Ibid., pg.. 45.
[205] Gelernter, *America-Lite*, pg. 11.
[206] Ingraham, *Shut Up and Sing*, pg. xvi
[207] Sean Hannity, *Let Freedom Ring: Winning the War of Liberty over Liberalism* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), pg. 97.

have "wormed" their "cant and jargon" into ordinary discourse, forcing ordinary Americans to accept "rules designed for the artificial and stylized combat of the courtroom" as "applicable to daily life."[208] Using their empty verbal acrobatics, liberals have bewildered the superior intuitive wisdom of the ordinary American, which is effective in the real world but ill-suited to the artificial rules through which liberals maintain their dominion.

These tropes are all recurring themes of conservative claims of cultural oppression. Even where they are not articulated directly, they lurk not far underneath the surface at the level of intimation and insinuation. Nevertheless, the positioning of the conservative claimant of cultural oppression as the perspicacious outsider speaking truth to power has altered the meaning of conservative anti-intellectualism, engendering an attitude that cannot be neatly classified as either pro-intellectual or anti-intellectual and rather fuses the two in a novel way.

Fundamentalism, the alleged epicenter of right-wing anti-intellectualism, is a case in point. The "one-hundred per cent mentality," writes Hofstadter, was a religious style that, reacting to late nineteenth-century Darwinism, academic Biblical criticism, and rationalism, was "shaped by a desire to strike back against everything modern—the higher criticism, evolutionism, the social gospel, rational criticism of any kind."[209] This was a type of mind "totally committed to the full range of the dominant popular fatuities." Tolerating "no ambiguities, no equivocations, no reservations, and no criticism," this kind of person "considers his kind of commitedness as evidence of toughness and masculinity."[210] The one-hundred per centers were unabashedly dismissive of education and the life of mind. William Jennings Bryan condemned "mind worship" as "the great sin in the intellectual world today."[211] And Billy Sunday warned: "Thousands of college graduates are going as fast as they can straight to hell. If I had a million dollars I'd give $999,999 to the church and $1 to education. When the word of God says one thing and scholarship says another, scholarship can go to hell."[212]

By contrast, today's fundamentalists are not in the least dismissive of learning and intellect. On the contrary, they insist this is a stereotype perpetuated by secularists to discredit them. Just like fire and rock music, scholarship is a morally neutral instrument that can be used for good or

[208] Kahane, *Rules for Radical Conservatives,* pg. 102.
[209] Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life,* pg. 121.
[210] Ibid., pg. 118.
[211] Ibid., pg. 127.
[212]Ibid., pg. 122.

ill. Billy Sunday would give only a dollar to education. But his contemporary descendants endow their own institutions of higher learning, like Patrick Henry College, where activities like debate and moot court prepare students to defend their beliefs in the face of secularist encroachment. Fundamentalist youth who do not matriculate at religious colleges may attend Christian worldview training seminars to prepare them for the challenges that await them at secular institutions. There, they are taught how to engage the secular or left-wing professors and students whom they shall soon confront, learning how to detect hidden assumptions, demand evidence, identify contradictions, and thereby expose liberals' bogus claims to neutrality and objectivity. The fundamentalists of yesteryear were taught to turn their backs on the siren song of sinful intellectuals. But today's fundamentalists are eager to confront these sinful intellectuals head-on with their own counter-arguments, counter-knowledge, and counter-experts.

The evolution of the evolution controversy is illustrative. William Jennings Bryan famously declared at the Scopes Monkey Trial that he was "more interested in the Rock of Ages than in the ages of rocks."[213] But contemporary fundamentalists are very interested in the ages of rocks. Coulter observes that the Kansas State Board of Education couldn't find any evolution proponents to come make their case in school curriculum hearings. The "evolution fanatics justified their disappearing act on the grounds that members of the school board did not have open minds."[214] No doubt, these "evolution fanatics" agreed with Susan Jacoby that the "cloaking of anti-rational premises in the language of either philosophy or science has proved useful to both Protestant and Catholic anti-rationalists and is one of the hallmarks of the new old-time religion."[215] But for the "new-old time religion," it is these critics who are the real anti-intellectual sectarians. Fundamentalists have long been berated for their alleged ignorance and dogmatism. Yet they find no interlocutors when they go out of their way to embrace the virtues of rational debate, and only find their sincerity impugned. Like blacks who continue to be thought of as shiftless and stupid no matter what they undertake or achieve, fundamentalists continue to be treated as one- hundred-per-centers even as their conduct is manifestly that of a fifty-one per center. And so they cannot but conclude that it is they who now hold the balance of intellectual virtue and that it is secularists who are now guilty of the dogmatism and parochialism that has been

[213] Jacoby, *The Age of American Unreason*, pg. 21.
[214] Coulter, *Godless*, pg. 249.
[215] Jacoby, *The Age of American Unreason*, pg. 200.

pinned on them ever since the Scopes Monkey Trial. If most of the people with initials after their names disagree, this is only because liberals have established monopolistic control of biology departments, just as they have of humanities departments, thereby arrogating the cultural prestige through which to stigmatize dissenters as anti-intellectual.

Not all conservative claimants of cultural oppression are fundamentalists or even religious, of course, and the case of fundamentalism is surely unique in many ways. Nevertheless, the difference between the fundamentalism of yesteryear and the "new-old time religion" illustrates in microcosm that whatever anti-intellectualism may be discerned in conservative claims of cultural oppression is a more complex, multi-layered creature than the archetypal variants classically documented by Hofstadter. The conservative claimant of cultural oppression is hostile, not to intellectualism per se, but to the bogus version thereof propagated by the Left. Intellectualism is not as such corrupting or reducible to idle cleverness. For there *is* a genuine article, but it is the conservatives who possess it and the liberals who only *feign* it—albeit with great success. Liberals have been *trained* to feign it as part of their larger war on conservatives. Conceding the fact that better educated people tend to be more liberal, Harris observes that this "education gap" admits of two opposed interpretations. The first, favored by liberals, is "that better educated people will obviously have the right answers on the issues of the day, because they are smarter and see things more clearly." But the truth, writes Harris, is that this ostensible "education gap" is really an "indoctrination gap." The "wide consensus among the better educated on different questions is not proof that they have been taught to think for themselves, but irrefutable evidence that they have been programmed to think alike."[216] Conservative claims of cultural oppression seek to *expose the education gap as an indoctrination gap*.

Liberal intellectualism is pernicious, not because it stands pitted against warmth of feeling, solidity of character, or practical wisdom—the classic anti-intellectual narrative—but because what get passed off as intellectual credentials are really *cultural* credentials. Codevilla writes:

> Today's Ruling Class, from Boston to San Diego, was formed by an educational system that exposed them to the same ideas and gave them remarkably uniform guidance, as well as tastes and habits. These amount to a social canon of judgments about good and evil, complete with secular sacred history, sins (against minorities and the environment), and saints.[217]

[216] Harris, *The Next American Civil War*, pg. 63.
[217] Codevilla, *The Ruling Class*, pg. 9.

If the indoctrination gap cannot be readily recognized as an indoctrination gap, this is because to adopt the "tastes and habits" of the "Ruling Class" is to be automatically credentialed as given to critical reflection and inquiry. Correlatively, to reject these tastes and habits is to be dismissed as a know-nothing one-hundred percenter. But this, say conservatives, is a social illusion, a tool of liberal domination, the product, not of critical reflection, but of an automatic social reflex that liberalism has instilled in us.

Anderson writes that the casualness with which liberals dismiss conservative ideas betrays a "remarkable self-satisfaction." John Rawls's conception of the "reasonable," which rules "out-of-bounds any arguments that deny a 'mature adult woman' the right to a first-trimester abortion" and the *Romer* Court's summary conclusion that "objections to homosexual practices were a form of 'animus'" reflect the same "unshakable self-complacency" that defined the thinking of liberal Harvard psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, whose famous theory of moral development "culminated, comically, with… Harvard liberalism." Such coincidences are reminders that "people don't always (or perhaps even usually) come to the views they hold by reason, study, and reflection."[218] If conservatives feel no need to actually engage the technical arguments of a Kohlberg or a Rawls, this is a marker, not of anti-intellectualism, but of an anthropological sophistication that enables them to recognize the education gap as an indoctrination gap. Having discerned the recurring values that emerge again and again in ostensibly discrete intellectual realms, conservatives are persuaded that these are all just varied expressions of the same all-encompassing ideological impulses. Being epiphenomena of these impulses, the technical arguments of liberals are not to be accepted at face value, but rather exposed as instruments of the liberal encroachment. Far from "suffering from the operations of the intellect" as something foreign and menacing, today's conservative claimant of cultural oppression has "seen it all before."

Alvin Gouldner observes that higher education is the institution through which the "New Class is at first readied for contest against the old class." Colleges and universities are "the finishing schools of the New Class's resistance to the old class."[219] Taking this notion to its logical conclusion, conservative claimants of cultural oppression believe that the elite universities from which the liberal elites hail are more akin to social fraternities than to Platonic academies.

[218] Anderson, *South Park Conservatives*, pgs. 27-28.
[219] Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), pg. 44.

Admission to elite colleges is commonly seen as a marker of intellectual merit. But more important, writes Codevilla, is the candidate's contribution to a "social profile that fits the school's image of itself," a commitment to "fit in," to be "in with the right people," and give "the required signs that one is on the right side, and joining in despising the Outs."[220] Academic merit is a social construction of the ruling liberal elites, an institutional filter designed to weed out conservatives and set the stage for widespread liberal domination. First inculcated in the university, the elites' "tastes and habits" are later enforced with the threat of social ostracism. It is, writes Anderson, simply assumed in Rawls's Cambridge or Manhattan's Upper West Side or the CBS newsroom that one has "the correct liberal opinions," and those who do not will simply stop receiving dinner invitations.[221] In withholding these invitations, liberals are just doing what they were trained to do in the college classroom, where the ostracism of conservatives was first introduced to them as "progressive" behavior.

The elite university *believes* it has replaced an old WASP-regime of social virtue revolving around gentility and "character" with a new regime of intellectual virtue revolving around raw mental firepower. But conservative claimants of cultural oppression charge that *the new intellectual virtues are social virtues in disguise*, just as automatic and unreflective as those of the WASP *ancien régime*. It is the elite universities, laments Gelernter, that produced Obama, the "symbol of the new American elite, the new establishment, where left-liberal politics is no longer a conviction, no longer a way of thinking: it is built-in mind-furniture you take for granted without needing to think." Consequently, the nation is "filling inexorably with Airheads, nominally educated yet ignorant; trained and groomed like prize puppies to be good liberals."[222] To defend liberalism as a mere conviction is to refuse the role of the liberal prize puppy, to refuse liberalism as a *social identity*. But perversely, it is liberalism *qua* social identity, *qua* automatic social reflex, that has been culturally credentialed as the embodiment of a privileged intellectual acuity. Just as the classic finishing schools strove to inculcate a certain physical posture, so the elite universities now inculcate a certain mental and spiritual posture through which to announce oneself curious, broad-minded, given to scientific detachment and dispassionate analysis, etc.—that is, as a member of the anointed in good standing. With this training having tethered students' self-esteem

[220] Codevilla, *The Ruling Class*, pgs. 12-15.
[221] Anderson, *South Park Conservatives*, pg. 28.
[222] Gelernter, *America-Lite*, pgs. 109-10.

to liberalism, they become prize puppy liberals who cannot see that their intellectualism is really an exercise in social signaling.

F. Carolyn Graglia notes that "[f]eminism's war against the housewife has pitted the best educated, most sophisticated, most aggressive, and most masculinized portion of the female population against women who generally possess less education and less worldly experience."[223] This acknowledgment is not a concession to feminism, however. Whereas liberals will conclude that feminists' education and worldly sophistication is probative of feminism's truth, conservative claimants of cultural oppression deny that an aristocracy of brains is any more "natural" than an aristocracy of inherited titles and estates. On the contrary, it is just another arbitrary social hierarchy that naturalizes the interests and sensibilities of the dominant class. Defending the Republican Party's poorly-spoken 2008 Vice-Presidential nominee, Camille Paglia argues:

> One of the most idiotic allegations batting around out there among urban media insiders is that [Sarah] Palin is "dumb." Are they kidding? What level of stupidity is now par for the course in those musty circles? (The value of Ivy League degrees, like sub-prime mortgages, has certainly been plummeting. As a Yale Ph.D., I have a perfect right to my scorn.) People who can't see how smart Palin is are trapped in their own narrow parochialism -- the tedious, hackneyed forms of their upper-middle-class syntax and vocabulary.[224]

If Palin had to be caricatured as a cretin, this was because her own brand of intelligence posed a challenge to the liberal elites' conception of intellectual prowess, and hence to the identity they have built atop of it. Palin had to be dismissed as stupid because anything else would raise troubling question about whether the "tedious, hackneyed forms of their upper-middle-class syntax and vocabulary" inculcated at Yale Ph.D. programs truly embody the intellectual prowess with which the liberal culture associates them. The liberal elites believe they are motivated by reason rather than identity. But conservatives believe that liberals' commitment to a specific identity is betrayed in their very notion of what qualifies as reason.

Coulter condemns Palin's treatment at the hands of television commentator Charlie Gibson, who famously stumped her with a seemingly straightforward question about whether she agreed with the "Bush Doctrine." One might think that any serious vice-presidential candidate would have to be familiar with this. But the truth, writes Coulter, is that even foreign policy experts were confused by the reference, a neologism concocted by Gibson that had never really been in circulation. Gibson opted for a "deliberately arcane way to ask a simple question in order

[223] Graglia, *Domestic Tranquility*, pg. 96.
[224] http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/camille_paglia/2008/10/08/palin.

to make himself look brilliant." The interview therefore "had little to do with Palin." Gibson was just an ex-morning show host pursuing his own agenda in order to win acceptance from his betters.[225] The liberal elites' putative intellectualism is a social performance functioning, not to enlighten, but to preserve and augment their store of cultural capital through a *posture* of critical thinking and truth-seeking. Conservatives are merely the foils through opposition to whom these qualities can be affirmed and advertised. The invention of an intellectually gratuitous argot intended to reduce Palin to a deer staring into the headlights revealed that posture as a posture, a social performance calculated to reinforce the anointed's hierarchical relationship to the benighted.

Liberals may possess a more sophisticated syntax and vocabulary. But it is the conservative claimant of cultural oppression who possesses the *anthropological* sophistication to recognize the *social meaning* of that syntax and vocabulary. Like Mike Gallagher, the claimants study liberals the way a primatologist studies apes, discerning semi-instinctual reflex actions where liberals see reflective judgment, collective patterns and pressures where liberals see individual initiative, and, most generally, causes where liberals see reasons. How can such scientific detachment be dismissed as anti-intellectual, the conservative will ask? To the extent conservative claimants of cultural oppression play loose with the facts, this is not because of anti-intellectualism, but because *truth is too pedestrian a concern for the critical theory of the Right*. As we saw in the previous chapter, this enterprise is concerned, *not* with the "the truth of or about [a] discourse," but with "analyzing existing discourses of power to understand how subjects are fabricated or positioned by them, what powers they secure (and disguise or veil), what assumptions they naturalize, what privileges they fix, what norms they mobilize, and what or whom these norms exclude." That is exactly what Coulter was doing in her defense of a seemingly hapless Sarah Palin.

To be sure, there have always been conservative intellectuals who believed that liberal intellectuals have been blindly socialized into their liberalism but did not reject the life of mind as such. But this orientation has become *fused* with what was formerly anti-intellectual right-wing populism in order to *intellectualize* populist antipathy to intellect. This has permitted less educated "populists" to rail against intellectuals without feeling themselves to be anti-intellectual while concomitantly endearing that populism to conservative intellectuals, who might otherwise have

[225] Coulter, *Demonic*, pgs. 256-57.

felt compelled to dismiss it as a perversion of true conservatism. Instead, they can join the populists in condemning liberal intellectualism as self-serving and fraudulent.

This logic is often misunderstood by liberals. Jacoby charges that, in pinning the "intellectual elite" label on liberals, conservative intellectuals attempt to conceal their own privileged class status.[226] They are just as prosperous and politically connected as their liberal counterparts. But they exempt themselves from the label solely on the basis of their affiliation with the Republican Party.[227] However, the contradiction is dissolved within the worldview of conservative claims of cultural oppression. Marxists recognize that someone of bourgeois origin can choose to ally himself with the proletariat and enter his bourgeois privileges into its service. Such a person is a member of the bourgeoisie as measured by education, wealth, habits, social knowledge, and so forth. But he is a member of the proletariat as a matter of political allegiance. And similarly, a conservative intellectual qualifies as an intellectual inasmuch as he employs the tools of the intellect. But he is a non-intellectual inasmuch as he wields these tools *against* the class interests of the intellectuals, in the service of the ordinary American. The conservative intellectual is a class-traitor who leads the fight to expose the education gap as an indoctrination gap and thus overthrow the unfair advantages that liberals draw from intellectualism.

Thomas Sowell remarked that the greatest advantage of a Harvard degree is that one will no longer be intimidated by people with Harvard degrees. And the ordinary conservative achieves this immunity vicariously through the conservative intellectual. Having "been through the system," the conservative intellectual is a whistleblower who exposes the machinations of liberals from the inside, obviating the need for a Harvard degree. Goldberg writes that liberals "place their faith in priestly experts who know better, who plan, exhort, badger, and scold,"[228] idealizing Kennedy's "'action-intellectuals" who "yearned to be supermen, a Gnostic priesthood imbued with a special knowledge of how to fix society's problems."[229] The conservative intellectual disavows all such ambitions, however. He wields his intellectual advantages, not to badger and scold the American people, but to expose the badgering and the scolding for what they are. The claimants' intellectualism is a counter-intellectualism purged of its elitist distortions, one informed by the superior insight of which only outsiders are capable. Conservative claimants of cultural oppression

[226] Jacoby, *The Age of American Unreason*, pg. 287.
[227] Ibid., pgs. xviii-xix.
[228]Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism*, pg. 14.
[229] Ibid., pg. 213.

are not anti-intellectuals but "meta-intellectuals" who expose the illusions and delusions of intellectuals in just the same way that the latter purport to expose those of everyone else.

9. Concluding Reflections and Adumbrations: A "Higher Truth"?

Susan Jacoby writes that "[i]t is much easier to understand the resurgent religious fundamentalism of the 1920s than it is to understand the politicization of anti-rationalism over the past twenty-five years." Both embody fear of modernism, hatred of secularism, and anti-intellectualism. But whereas the reactionary fundamentalism of the early Twentieth Century can be readily attributed to nostalgia for a simpler, less confusing time, no such factors explain the resurgence of these impulses today. "What Edenic past," Jacoby wonders, "is calling out today to those who rail against experts, scientists, and intellectual 'elites'?"[230] It is possible to understand why an American in 1800 would "have sought the answer to life's problems in a passionate 'born again' relationship with God." But this becomes more mysterious some two-hundred years later, given the vastly greater "disjunction that exists today between fundamentalist faith and the sum of human knowledge."[231]

Not all conservatives are fundamentalist, or evangelical, or even religious. But many liberals feel similarly perplexed by the existence of conservatism in general. Why exactly does the United States not enjoy the progressive consensus that Western European nations appear to have achieved on many fronts? Historians can offer explanations aplenty—America's Puritan heritage, the frontier experience, the absence of a feudal past, and so forth—the careful examination of which lies beyond the scope of this inquiry and my own competence. And yet one can still ask, with Jacoby, why the forces generated by these distinctive experiences have not been more thoroughly submerged by the general momentum of modernism and secularism, which seem much more entrenched in Europe. The past cannot provide the entire explanation, because there must also be something *in the present* that allows the past to be continually reborn and revitalized.

That other half of the explanation, I am proposing, lies in the political psychology we have come to know as conservative claims of cultural oppression. Though emanating from a

[230] Jacoby, *The Age of American Unreason*, pg. 29.
[231] Ibid., pg. 186-87.

convergence of traditional right-wing impulses, these claims also have a life of their own, because they fuse those impulses with the very forces that might have otherwise submerged them. It is this new identity and social practice that breathes fresh life and resonance into what liberals dismiss as strange atavisms. These atavisms have become bound up with a multifaceted adversarial posture whose satisfactions imbue them with an appeal they would otherwise lack. The result is conservative claims of cultural oppression.

These claims are much more than a victim narrative. Just as importantly, they chronicle the heroism of the uphill battle, the struggle of the lowly underdog who perseveres against all the odds, in his dignity if in nothing else. Moreover, the victimization in question is of a highly rarefied, Kafkaesque variety. The claimants understand themselves as speaking truth to a power that conceals itself at every turn, to forces that will never officially announce their goals, their motivations, or even their existence. This does not typically devolve into the crude conspiracism that we usually associate with the extreme right. There is the visceral sense that things are not as they seem, to be sure. But whereas this once meant things like the John Birch Society alleging that President Eisenhower was a knowing agent of communism, the conservative claimant of cultural oppression judges the problem to be largely structural and unconscious or semiconscious, and not the calculated product of human agency. There is indeed a liberal conspiracy, but it consists in hidden layers of meaning rather than secret plots. It transpires, not in smoke-filled backrooms, but in the *fabric of our culture*, as *Chronicles* says.

Richard Hofstadter observes in his *The Paranoid Style in American Politic*s that the political paranoid—which in his time meant the right-wing, populist rabble-rouser—doesn't recognize his enemy as "caught in the toils of the vast mechanism of history, himself a victim of his past, his desires, his limitations," and instead exalts him as a "free, active, demonic agent" who "manufactures the mechanism of history and, indeed, deflects the normal course of history."[232] This pathos is present in conservative claims of cultural oppression to various degrees. But these claims are foremost distinguished by the imperative to *deflate* liberalism by exposing the forces that blind liberals to the nature of their own motivations, to the status of their culture *as a culture*, the product of a history they do not themselves understand. Liberals are thus opaque to themselves, the victims of their past and limitations. As Goldberg says, they lie not only to others but also to

[232] Richard Hostadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), pg. 32.

themselves, and this makes them something quite different from the free, active, demonic agents that haunted the right-wing populist of old.

Liberals' ability to deceive themselves makes them elusive adversaries. But this elusiveness also provides conservatives with a missionary zeal befitting a minority of the aroused and awoken in a Brave New World of well-socialized automatons blinded by their own pieties. Conservatives are not only outsiders, but also outsiders whose true insight has been slandered as unhinged paranoia by the powers that be, people condemned to struggle against a world that slanders the most enlightened as the most benighted. This posture provides a unifying vocabulary to individuals from across a broad diversity of backgrounds, educations, religious beliefs, and political priorities, giving them the mutual bond of a shared enemy. Transcending all their differences is a shared commitment to resistance against transgressions and usurpations that are as all-pervasive as they are invisible to the naked eye. The imperative to give the Left a "taste of its own medicine" and, if possible, "beat it at its own game," is not mere political expediency, whatever political expediency it has. It also serves an existential, quasi-religious function, channeling an age-old aspiration to pierce the veil of illusion and reveal a truth higher than can be acknowledged by the established order.

If the forces of anti-modernism should have, as Jacoby contends, persevered right into twenty-first century America, this is because they have become fused with what Alasdair MacIntyre calls "one of the most characteristically modern of activities," the *unmasking* of the "unacknowledged motives of arbitrary will and desire which sustain the moral masks of modernity."[233] It is this imperative, and not traditionalist reverence for the wisdom of the ages, that drives conservative claims of cultural oppression onward. The claimants are united, not by self-interest, or self-pity, or fear, or hate, or even by "a burning desire to offend liberals just for kicks," but by an existential passion and yearning to *unmask,* to pull down the veil of illusion behind which the transgressions and usurpations of liberalism lie concealed, so that this Great Wizard of Oz might finally be exposed in his all-too-human nakedness.

* * *

But *what* exactly do these claims purport to unmask? A fuller answer to this question will have to await later chapters, but we can already adumbrate its outlines. Certainly, I have not argued

[233] Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), pg. 72.

that the parallels running between conservative claims of cultural oppression and left-critique prove their moral equivalence, whatever the moral force of left critique may be. The issue thus far hasn't been plausibility but *intelligibility*. And my argument is that much is lost on this front if we begin with the premise that conservative claims of cultural oppression are free-standing, ad hoc political contrivances that occasionally appropriate various leftist tropes for rhetorical effect. On the contrary, these claims draw their resonances from certain broad currents of Western civilization which well antedate the recent machinations of contemporary culture warriors.

One of these currents, we saw, is the dichotomy between *Kultur* and *Civilization*, and so conservatives' sense that they are being oppressed by liberal *Civilization*, by an ethos that is culturally thicker than the moral abstractions by which liberals articulate their creed. Uday Metha writes that notwithstanding liberalism's official universalism and inclusionary ideals, it has often conditioned political inclusion on the achievement of a "properly socialized rationality" without which individuals are held too "ignorant" or "inscrutable" or "uncivilized" to merit political rights. Though a general capacity for rationality is ascribed to all human beings, behind these ascriptions lies a "thicker set of social credentials that constitute the real bases of political inclusion."[234]

What Frank and other liberals would dismiss as mere rantings and ravings point us to precisely this problem, because ignorant, inscrutable, and uncivilized is precisely how liberals tend to see conservatives. If liberals do not regard conservatives as quite their equals, this is because conservatives lack a "properly socialized rationality" that would credential them as equals in the eyes of liberals. They have not been deprived of their basic political rights as were the "uncivilized" colonial subjects of old European powers. But liberals can exert power in other subtler ways. Stephen Macedo observes that liberalism properly understood involves, not only a "foreground" of the familiar liberties and constitutional protections,[235] but also a "hidden curriculum," a "background statecraft that educates indirectly by shaping social norms and redefining contours of the moral environment."[236] Liberalism is covertly *transformative*. Since the qualities of the liberal personality are not givens of human nature, liberalism can maintain the

[234] Uday S. Metha, *Liberal Strategies of Exclusion*, 18 Pol. & Soc'y 427 (1990).
[235] Stephen Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), pgs. 8-9.
[236] Ibid., pg. 6.

its official foreground of rights and liberties only by transforming people's basic ethos, subtly enforcing a host of informal norms and expectations through various institutional mechanisms.[237]

This places conservative claims of cultural oppression in a new light. What conservatives decry as the undemocratic hegemony of the elites across government and civil society refers to precisely this background, to liberalism's "hidden curriculum." And what conservatives in their various ways say is the disingenuousness of liberalism refers to the tension between foreground and background. As we will later see, conservative claims of cultural oppression originate in the fact that this background statecraft can be effective only *by remaining in the background*. This background is never fully articulated and acknowledged. And it operates through what, *from a certain perspective*, are double-standards and unacknowledged social stigmas—a "censorship of fashion." If the claimants are "anti-intellectual," this is because they sense intuitively that liberal intellectualism both perpetuates and conceals this "background statecraft"—a web of informal coercions aimed at molding *people*. And if the claimants are "paranoid," this is because the subtlety of these machinations makes it exceedingly difficult for conservatives to tie their visceral sense of things to any specific, clearly identifiable referents. In short, they have predictably failed to articulate something that is intrinsically resistant to rational exposition, as I suggested in Chapter One.

Coulter laments that Republican George Allen lost his 2006 Virginia Senate race after referring to a "tracker" that his Democratic opponent had sent to observe his campaign events as "Macaca." The media quickly concluded that this was a racial slur. The tracker, S.R. Sidarth, was Indian, and it was all downhill from there for Allen. But Sidarth, retorts Coulter, was actually a "little Nazi block-watcher[]… intruding on peoples' enjoyment of public events with intimidating video surveillance." Sidarth averred that he was the only "person of color" present. But he was also the "only person in the audience doing opposition research for the rival candidate" as well as the son of a wealthy banker, probably the richest person in the audience. He was a student at "the prestigious University of Virginia" while the audience which he had come to "humiliate" came from a Virginia town on the Kentucky border where the median household income was $23,431. Coulter concludes that "[t]oday's privileged elites go to distant rural towns to ridicule ordinary

[237] Ibid., pg. 137.

Americans and then run back to the *Washington Post* to whimper that they have been mortally offended."[238]

Sidarth saw himself as gathering political intelligence, not intimidating attendees with his very presence. But if the "smiling face of upper-middle-class benevolence" indeed disguises a "venomous hatred," as Lasch believes, then perhaps his mere presence sufficed to humiliate the "half-savage relics of past time," who were not so privileged as to share his "hygienic conception of life." Sidarth did not convey his contempt verbally. But it may have been broadcast through Bourdieu's "imperceptible queues of bodily *hexis*"—to which conservatives are attuned as liberals are not. Many feminists have argued that men are typically oblivious to the power-advantage that a patriarchal culture bestows upon them irrespective of their conscious designs. And in similar vein, Sidarth may have been blind to the effects of his presence on those lacking the liberal privilege of which he unselfconsciously availed himself. It was not his conscious intent to serve as a "little Nazi block-watcher," a subject gazing at objects, as it were. But his insensitivity to the broader power-inequality underpinning his conduct cannot redound to his moral credit. Senator Allen's prejudice may have been more overt than Sidarth's, but it was not necessarily more egregious. And it at least had the virtue of being open and honest.

The point here is not that Coulter makes this argument successfully, or even that it could be made successfully. Rather, it is that much that liberals dismiss as the hallucinatory stupidity of conservative claims of cultural oppression is more charitably interpreted as an implicit rejection of the facile rationalism that liberals themselves reject where women and minorities are concerned. Here, liberals can recognize that the present is always saturated by a long, complicated history, and that subtle interplays of inherited social meanings shape the broader context of human action. And this is also the intuition behind Coulter's seemingly outrageous attack on Sidarth. The Macaca incident had a racial dimension, clearly. But prejudice can operate along multiple vectors, and this dimension may have been intertwined with the normalizing social hierarchy described by Lasch, a hierarchy between the "civilized" liberal and the still half-savage conservative, between the anointed and the benighted. As we will see along a host of fronts, *the instruments of left-critique can, once suitably reinterpreted, fill in the logical lacunae by which conservative claims of cultural oppression would otherwise be vitiated.*

[238] Coulter, *Guilty*, pg. 165.

An anthropologist would feel compelled to investigate whatever layers of hidden meaning might endow the otherwise nonsensical behaviors of an indigenous tribe with a new intelligibility. To the extent they aspire to a scientific understanding of the world, liberals must follow suit in a good faith effort to suspend their gut reaction to conservatives' cultural grievances—which is to indulge in the kind of bemused incredulity that Coulter's arguments naturally elicit. The evidence for a liberal bigotry is concededly impressionistic and anecdotal. But it could scarcely be otherwise, given the nature of the bigotry being alleged. If the average white may be suspected of harboring a subtle, largely unconscious racism that may be betrayed only in the subtle minutiae of his comportment, then should it not be expected that the subtlety—and hence the plausible deniability—will be all the greater among the liberal elites, whose "education gap" affords them a verbal dexterity lacked by the ordinary American?

The question at this stage is not whether conservative claims of cultural oppression are rational or irrational, but whether whatever irrationality may be imputed to them possesses a deeper *structure* than has been recognized, and therefore admits of a level of exegesis that is preempted by the usual refrains about "anti-intellectualism" or "authoritarianism" or "anger" or "paranoia." If so, then we must articulate that structure before we can fairly judge these claims. The usual labels are not necessarily "false," but they are mere *placeholders* designating phenomena for which we lack an adequate vocabulary. This vocabulary is precisely what must be developed. Conservative claims of cultural oppression may not present themselves in a form that lends itself to rarefied academic discussion. But they do present us with a concrete human immediacy that is all too often filtered out of such discussions. They do not at first blush seem to deserve to be taken "seriously." But close inspection reveals questions whose seriousness cannot be gainsaid.

Though I have made every effort to approach these claims charitably, that they are regularly suffused with all manner of elision and dishonesty cannot be denied. Contra Ingraham, the most obvious reason why liberals preferred de Villepin to George W. Bush is that the former opposed the Iraq war while the latter initiated it, a fact by comparison with which any jingoistic praise showered on Napoleon is insignificant. And if the elites would, as per Ingraham's hypothetical, be more disturbed by simulated rapes performed by American soldiers than by simulated rapes performed by rap superstars, one obvious explanation is that the former represent their country while the latter represent only themselves.

But while the logical distinctions defended by liberals are reasonable, the question posed by conservative claims of cultural oppression is whether these reasonable distinctions are being exploited to promote a broader set of social meanings which the official logic of liberal argument does not capture, an undeclared effort to transform sensibilities in a more "civilized" direction. Conservative claims of cultural oppression may give short shrift to important logical distinctions while also tracking subtle interplays of social meaning from which those distinctions would otherwise distract us. If the claimants are at a rhetorical disadvantage—vulnerable to the "full force" of liberals' "rhetorical firepower" as Hannity says—this is because their arguments are premised on a holistic, largely ineffable sense of the cultural landscape that is inherently less articulate than liberal argument. Ingraham's suggestion that the elites' attitudes toward Middle America mirror those of European explorers toward the "dark continent" of Africa seems far-fetched. But that absurdity may just reflect the difficulty of articulating the subtleties of liberalism's transformative background, a "hidden curriculum" seeking to instill conservatives with a "properly socialized rationality."

This would explain what liberals see as conservatives' overheated rhetoric and intellectual dishonesty. The dishonesty, I will be arguing, is the *price* of intimating what by its very nature resists being put into words. Michael Bérubé writes that the right-wing assault on higher education "is not entirely relativistic; it is not simply a matter of grabbing any argumentative handle that happens to be lying nearby." For "these activists believe—insofar as their own words can be believed—that they are acting in the service of a higher truth." Their facts may be wrong, but they "fib for truth."[239] And our question is whether there exists some "higher truth" in the context of which the intellectual dishonesty *makes sense* as the partial, distorted articulation of that higher truth, a truth whose nuances and complexities may be lost on conservatives themselves.

Part of this higher truth, we will see, is the existence of a certain class of people who *understandably* given their position as not fully "liberalized" *must* perceive liberalism as disingenuously illiberal, who are *condemned* to the paranoia and anti-intellectualism that liberals impute to them. In this respect at least, conservatives would qualify as genuine victims. I will flesh out these intuitions in later chapters. At the moment, they remain mere intuitions. But these are the intuitions that follow from a charitable, anthropologically sophisticated stance toward

[239] Michael Bérubé, *What's Liberal About the Liberal Arts?: Classroom Politics and "Bias" in Higher Education* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), pg. 46.

conservative claims of cultural oppression, as well as from any liberalism that remains properly reflexive about whether its own highest principles have been properly understood and applied.

Chapter Three

Convoluted Stories, Right Eclecticism

Most liberals will dismiss the beliefs just examined with sighs of impatience. These sighs express a basic liberal intuition, aptly articulated by Nunberg:

> [T]he Democratic Left has always been susceptible to a particular kind of stereotyping by its opponents. People don't usually require a convoluted story to explain the political views of bourgeois conservatives or proletarian radicals. But it takes more ingenuity to discredit the motives of people who don't seem to be motivated by obvious self-interest. So conservatives have always tried to dismiss those concerns as the signs of baser motivations like social pretension, dilettantism, or effete sentimentality."[1]

But if the Democratic Left has always been vulnerable to this kind of stereotyping, conservatives have always and correlatively been susceptible to the counter-charge that these stereotypes rest on "convoluted stories," stories that, being suspiciously elaborate, must be disingenuous and nefariously motivated. Conservatives are therefore also "susceptible to a particular kind of stereotyping" by their opponents. They understand even before opening their mouths that their political opinions will be suspected as empty rationalizations for some form of arbitrary self-interest—either tangible economic self-interest, as in a preference for lower upper-income taxation and reduced social welfare spending, or the intangible, symbolic variety, as in the perpetuation of patriarchy or heterosexual privilege. Their defense of laissez-faire will be analogized to the rapaciousness of nineteenth-century robber barons, just as their apprehensions about the "normalization" of homosexuality will be likened to racist resistance to racial integration. Plead though they may that their positions are truly principled, conservatives are condemned to play defense against the more plainspoken egalitarianism of liberals, by comparison with which their own views must indeed appear convoluted, and thus disingenuous.

Conservatives know that liberals are always waiting to issue these judgments. Hence Ben Shapiro's sense that there is always a "patina of character assassination" lying underneath liberals' criticisms of conservative policies. Hence also Peter Schweizer's observation that hypocrisy "has

[1] Geoffrey Nunberg, *Talking Right: How Conservatives Turned Liberalism into a Tax-Raising, Latte-Drinking, Sushi-Eating, Volvo-Driving, New York Times-Reading, Body-Piercing, Hollywood-Loving, Left Wing Freak Show* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007), pg. 63.

proven to be a wonderful weapon for liberals in their war against conservatives."[2] Liberals commit their own fair share of hypocrisy, to be sure. But their cultural dominance allows them to downplay their hypocrisy as merely individual lapses lacking broader social significance while casting that of conservatives as an essential feature of conservatism itself. Whereas liberals are guilty only of their own personal failings, conservatives are additionally guilty *of conservatism*, a guilt for which their hypocrisy is merely additional evidence. Conservatives may refuse to acknowledge their egoism and hatefulness, but this is precisely what their hypocrisy is understood to betray.

Liberals take this to be quite obvious. But conservatives retort that this obviousness is merely a social construction of liberalism, merely the interpretive lens which the victors have imposed on the vanquished. "For over two hundred years, the Left has had an effective but unearned monopoly on the rhetoric of virtue," laments Roger Kimball.[3] And conservatives believe that this monopoly has enabled liberals to project all of their vices onto them—either attributing to conservatives vices that are uniquely liberal or else burdening them with exclusive responsibility for what are regrettable human constants. Projection, writes Coulter, is "liberals' number-one human trait."[4] If earlier dispensations succeeded in projecting vice and sinfulness onto blacks, Jews, women, Gypsies, and assorted infidels, then the new regime of liberalism has merely seized upon conservatism and conservatives as the new target. This is not how liberals see themselves, of course. But their "science," "reason," and "progress" are merely ideological stratagems with which to legitimate this new "enlightened" scapegoating.

Reviewing a wide body of academic research into the psychological foundations of conservatism, psychologist John Jost and his colleagues conclude that conservatism is significantly correlated with an interrelated set of epistemic, existential, and ideological motives originating in aversion to change and equality:

> Although we maintain distinctions among specific hypotheses for the purposes of assessing cumulative empirical evidence for and against each, one of the virtues of our motivated social–cognitive perspective is that it helps to integrate seemingly unrelated motives and tendencies. Specifically, we argue that a number of different epistemic motives (dogmatism–intolerance of ambiguity; [refusal of] cognitive complexity; closed-mindedness; uncertainty avoidance; needs for order, structure, and closure), existential motives (self-esteem, terror management, fear, threat, anger, and pessimism), and

[2] Peter Schweizer, *Do As I Say (Not As I Do): Profiles in Liberal Hypocrisy* (New York: Broadway Books, 2005), pgs. 4-5.
[3] Roger Kimball, *The Long March: How the Culture Revolution of the 1960s Changed America* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000), pg. 23.
[4] Ann Coulter, *Guilty: Liberal "Victims" and Their Assault on America* (New York: Three Rivers, 2009), pg. 136.

> ideological motives (self-interest, group dominance, and system justification) are all related to the expression of political conservatism….
>
> Theoretical and empirical considerations lead us to conclude that virtually all of the above motives originate in psychological attempts to manage uncertainty and fear. These, in turn, are inherently related to the two core aspects of conservative thought mentioned earlier—resistance to change and the endorsement of inequality.[5]

But conservatives reply that this is a pseudo-scientific veneer for a campaign of cultural propaganda aiming to specifically associate conservatives with what are actually the moral and intellectual failures of liberals. Liberalism reinforces a set of social understandings that arrogates to liberals the virtues of intellect, civilization, tolerance, transparency, awareness, altruism, and cosmopolitanism while socially defining conservatives in terms of their opposites. Liberals can indulge their identitarian impulses with impunity under a hard-nosed scientistic facade, as Jost's assessments have become the conventional wisdom of "educated people," who can now disguise their conservaphobia as "theoretical and empirical considerations." The Jost study and others like it are merely high-tech scapegoating rituals supervised by the high priests of liberalism, the liberal elites, who are charged with keeping conservatives down. Conservatives refuse to acquiesce in this state of affairs, and their claims of cultural oppression seek to introduce ambiguity into the neat divisions that liberals would draw between victim and victimizer and between the virtuous and the vicious. Thus do they seek to expose that liberal virtue is not what it seems.

Frank characterizes the "Great Backlash" of the culture wars as "a curious amassing of petty, unrelated beefs with the world."[6] And this impression is confirmed in part by some conservatives. Codevilla writes that the "Country Class" of ordinary Americans "speaks with many voices" and "defines itself practically in terms of reflexive reactions against the rulers' defining ideas and proclivities."[7] However, we shall now see how this seemingly anarchic diversity is underpinned by a unifying impulse to tear down liberalism's veil of illusion and thereby restore equality between liberals and conservatives. What Frank dismisses as a "curious amassing" of petty grievances is better understood as a right-wing analogue of what Roger Kimball, borrowing from Fredric Crews, calls the "Left Eclecticism" that now dominates the humanities.

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[5] John T. Jost; Jack Glaser; Arie W. Kruglanski; Sulloway, Frank J, *Political Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition*, Psychological Bulletin, Vol 129(3), May 2003, 339-375, pg. 351.

[6] Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2005), pg. 123.

[7] Angelo M. Codevilla, *The Ruling Class: How They Corrupted America and What We Can Do About It* (Beauford Books 2010), pg. 52.

Left Eclecticism encompasses a "wide variety of anti-establishment modes of thought." But these are unified by

> [a]n understanding, ultimately borrowed from the Marxist ethos, that analytic and theoretical discourse is to be judged primarily by the radicalism of its stance. The schools of thought thus favored make sharply divergent claims, yet all of them set themselves against allegedly repressive Western institutions and practices. In dealing with a given painting, novel, or piece of architecture, especially one dating from the capitalist era, they do not aim primarily to show the work's character or governing idea. The goal is rather to subdue the work through aggressive demystification—for example, by positing its socioeconomic determinants and ideological implications, scanning it for any encouraging signs of subversion, and then judging the result against an ideal of total freedom.[8]

Like Left Eclecticism, the Right Eclecticism of conservative claims of cultural oppression is characterized by sharp internal disagreements as to both substance and rhetoric. But also like Left Eclecticism, it is marked by a certain unity of purpose. And this is to "subdue" liberalism through "aggressive demystification." Right Eclecticism seeks, not to *refute* liberalism as a set of ideas, but to *expose* liberalism's basic self-understanding as fraudulent, to reveal that the various existential, epistemic, and ideological motivations that Jost and other liberals would impute to conservatives are the hidden rot lying at the core of liberal virtue. It is liberals, not conservatives, who need order, closure, and structure. It is liberals, not conservatives, who pursue group dominance and endorse inequality. If conservatives are to discredit conservaphobia, they must first discredit those from whom it issues, the liberal elites, and this is what the critical theory of the Right ultimately endeavors to do.

In all their permutations, the final upshot of conservative claims of cultural oppression is that liberals, progressives, leftist, secularists, humanists—whatever they be called—are secretly guilty of the very moral and intellectual failures for which they excoriate religious traditionalists and other conservatives. If the "Country Class" defines itself "practically in terms of reflexive reactions against the rulers' defining ideas and proclivities," this is because the upshot of these ideas and proclivities is in every case to reinforce what is an inequitable division of moral, intellectual, and cultural capital between liberals and conservatives in America today. Whatever their subject matter and whatever their tone, conservative claims of cultural oppression are a Nietzschean enterprise, an attempted *revaluation of values* that would expose the vice in what the Left bandies as its virtues and thereby elevate the comparative virtue of conservatives. Underneath

[8] Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998), pg. 44.

Frank's "curious amassing of petty, unrelated beefs about the world" lies the unremitting impulse to reverse the roles of perpetrator and victim, of proving, as Coulter says, that liberals "are not offended, they are offending. They are not wounded victims, they are marauding oppressors. They are not innocents. They are guilty."[9]

Conservative claims of cultural oppression seek to impugn, not only the motives of liberals, but also the very *meaning* of liberalism. The point is not simply that liberals are basely motivated, but that the ideals of liberalism embody a concealed repressiveness that we have been trained to overlook. The stigmas with which conservatives are now saddled are simply the punishment that awaits anyone who refuses that training. And it is in order to overthrow this training that conservatives seek to subdue liberalism, to reveal liberal virtue as just the visible tip of a hidden iceberg of liberal vice.

In this chapter, I will undertake six case studies of this basic project, examining six "convoluted stories" each of which seeks to in its own way subdue liberalism. With this achieved, I shall in the next chapter proceed to systematize the conservative protest into a general theory that separates the wheat from the chaff and thereby reveals this protest's "higher truth." While conservative claims of cultural oppression are often implausible when taken literally and at face value, they embody certain basic intuitions whose philosophical exposition will reveal this higher truth. This truth does not "refute" liberalism in any narrow, logical sense, but it does call upon liberals to rethink the contours of their present identities, which are inescapably intertwined with the cultural oppression of conservatives.

1. The Liberal as Crypto-Fascist

The project of subduing liberalism assumes many shapes and invites endless creativity. But it is perhaps at its most poignant and self-conscious in Jonah Goldberg's *Liberal Fascism*, which as noted earlier was written in response to the author's personal experience with the "sublimely confident" slanders of liberals. Richard Hofstadter describes the "moral atmosphere of Progressivism" as one of "warm philanthropy and breathless idealism in which the needs of the less gifted and underprivileged commanded a generous response."[10] This is the conventional wisdom, and also the way Progressivism's contemporary heirs, the liberal elites, like to think of

[9] Coulter, *Guilty*, pg. 32.
[10] Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), pg. 340.

themselves. But this conventional wisdom is precisely what Goldberg seeks to overthrow in arguing that Progressivism was an important source of intellectual inspiration for European fascism.[11] While liberals are accustomed to accusations of closet socialism, the comparison with fascism seems outlandish given the conventional association of fascism with the extreme Right and of modern liberalism with the moderate Left. However, Goldberg argues that this received wisdom is mistaken and that fascism has always been a phenomenon of the Left.[12] If we believe otherwise, this is only because the fascism label has been "projected onto the right by a complex sleight of hand"[13] by liberals eager to slough their own sins off onto conservatives.[14] The political spectrum itself, taught to us as Poli Sci 101, is merely an artifact of the liberal culture, cultural propaganda serving to stigmatize conservatives with the insinuation that they are merely less extreme versions of Nazis and fascists.

Goldberg argues that all the criteria used to associate fascism with the Right are invalid. The Nazis' virulent anti-Semitism might seem to place them squarely on the right of the political spectrum. But anti-Semitism no more distinguishes the Right from the Left than it does fascists from non-fascists. Karl Marx was a committed Jew-hater[15] and Hitler's Italian ally Mussolini dismissed anti-Semitism as a silly distraction.[16] We have moreover been trained to forget that the Nazis professed to be and campaigned as socialists. If we now believe that the Soviets were the only genuine socialists and that the Nazis merely bandied the label, this is because we have internalized the Soviet perspective on the matter.[17] Stalin never recognized the Nazis as socialists. But this merely reflected an interfamilial rivalry between different schools of socialism each of which had a natural interest in discrediting the other, to which end they obscured their deep affinities—such as contempt for tradition, for proceduralism, and a love of centralized planning.[18] Hitler did despise communism. But this had nothing to do with anything that places communism on the left side of the political spectrum—hostility to capitalism or the bourgeoisie—and rather reflected his paranoid conviction that communism was an essentially foreign and Jewish

[11] Jonah Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), pg. 8.
[12] Ibid., pg. 7.
[13] Ibid., pg. 8.
[14] Ibid., pg. 9.
[15] Ibid., pg. 75.
[16] Ibid., pg. 327.
[17] Ibid., pg. 70.
[18] Ibid., pg. 287.

conspiracy.[19] The Nazis were hardly indifferent to characteristic leftist concerns like ameliorating poverty or assuring basic economic rights. And this belies the notion that fascism is merely a more extreme version of conservatism the way socialism is a more extreme version of the welfare state.

The ideological core of fascism is not anti-Semitism, racism, or even anti-communism, but "a cult of action, unity, and contempt for the 'system.'"[20] Fascism is defined, not by rabid nationalism as such, but by a set of emotional or instinctual impulses that fuel an uncompromising quest for community, the "urge to 'get beyond' politics, a faith in the perfectibility of man and the authority of experts, and an obsession with the aesthetics of youth."[21] Fascism calls upon man "to lay aside the anachronisms of natural law, traditional religion, constitutional liberty, capitalism, and the like and rise to the responsibility of remaking the world in his own image."[22] To this end, it sanctions an all-powerful state led by "an enlightened avant-garde who would serve as the authentic, organic voice of the 'general will.'"[23]

Thus understood, fascism displays striking affinities with the Progressive movement and its legacy in contemporary liberalism, which just like fascism promulgates a "sweeping vision of social justice and community and the need for the state to realize that vision."[24] Just like the fascism of old, the liberalism of today "sees no realm of human life that is beyond political significance."[25] Goldberg observes that this single-minded totalitarian impulse is betrayed by Michael Learner, an intellectual guru of Hilary Clinton, when he "insists that his new politics of meaning must saturate every nook and cranny of our lives by smashing the compartmentalism of American life." We must, Lerner tells us, "have our metaphysics confirmed in every human interaction and encounter."[26] It is this totalizing imperative that separates the Left from the Right and makes fascism a more extreme, violent, and undemocratic form, not of conservatism, but of liberalism, whose do-goodery obscures its underlying impulses.

Close inspection of the historical record reveals that what liberals imagine *distinguishes* liberalism from fascism—and therefore from the conservatives they suspect are incipiently fascist—actually reveals liberalism's *affinities* with fascism. One might associate vegetarianism

[19] Ibid., pgs. 74-5.
[20] Jonah Goldberg, *The Tyranny of Clichés: How Liberals Cheat in the War of Ideas* (Sentinel 2012), pg. 224.
[21] Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism*, pg. 14.
[22] Ibid., pg. 31.
[23] Ibid., pg. 12.
[24] Ibid., pg. 327.
[25] Ibid., pg. 14.
[26] Ibid., pg. 332.

and animal rights with a benign egalitarianism that selflessly extends the circle of moral concern to non-human animals, which seems as far removed from fascism as it gets. But these concerns, argues Goldberg, "were merely different facets of the obsession with organic order that pervaded the German fascist mind, then, and the liberal fascist mind today."[27] This totalizing spirit is the reason why public health and the environment have loomed large for fascists and liberals alike. We do not usually associate Nazism with nature preserves, sustainable forestry, and the fight against air pollution. But the Nazis were among the first to take up these concerns,[28] just as their "antismoking and public health drives foreshadowed today's crusades against junk foods, trans fats, and the like."[29] These affinities are not coincidences, but windows through which we may peer at liberalism's subterranean imperiousness, which is simply better disguised and less direct than that of self-admitted fascists.

Liberals imagine that their social libertarianism stands in stark contrast to the moralistic authoritarianism of conservatives, which fascism then takes to its logical extreme. But Goldberg argues that fascism was foremost defined by its *hostility* to traditional morality and the traditional family, which it hoped to replace with the authority of the state. And so conservatism is really quite antithetical to fascism. As the champions of "traditional family values," conservatives are painted as "crypto-fascists, incapable of thinking maturely about sex." But it is in fact liberals who now follow the Nazis in seeking "to invade the family, to breach its walls and shatter its autonomy."[30] This is sold to the public as support for education, which we are told is necessary to help children grow into independent citizens and critical thinkers. But the liberal obsession with education, argues Goldberg, is the historical legacy of a fascistic Progressivism, for which "capturing children in schools was part of the larger effort to break the backbone of the nuclear family, the institution most resistant to political indoctrination."[31] The Left's attacks on traditional morality present themselves as exercises in cosmopolitan sophistication, but they are actually "little better than a reprise of fascist arguments."[32]

For every fascist evil, Goldberg identifies a liberal analogue thereof which, though more benign in its repercussions, runs parallel to that evil in its underlying impulses. Liberals pride

[27] Ibid., pg. 389.
[28] Ibid., pg. 384.
[29] Ibid., pg. 19.
[30] Ibid., pg. 376.
[31] Ibid., pg. 326.
[32] Ibid., pg. 176.

themselves on their conciliatory multilateralism. But they are in constant search of what William James dubbed "the moral equivalent of war,"[33] some social problem through which they can generate the same sense of collective solidarity that the classic fascists achieved through militarism and conquest. Hence liberals' nostalgic yearning for "the unifying experiences of the labor and civil rights movement,"[34] which they attempt to recreate in their contemporary group-think and do-goodery. Where the Gestapo had reeducation camps, today's Left has counseling and sensitivity training.[35] Unlike classical fascists, liberals present their policies of social control as the forward-thinking liberation of the individual's full potential. But this just means that "[t]he quintessential liberal fascist isn't an SS storm trooper" but rather "a female grade-school teacher with an education degree from Brown or Swarthmore."[36] The latter may seem less menacing than the former. But the underlying impulses are similar, the submersion of the individual into a new all-encompassing community that promises liberation from the constraints of tradition and human nature itself.

This hubris is why liberal fascism must, just like its more violent European counterparts, designate scapegoats to symbolically embody all that resists its vision. And this scapegoat is the white male. The white male, writes Goldberg, is "the Jew of liberal fascism."[37] The white male is not being led to the gas chambers, of course. But attacking him affords liberals with the same psychological satisfactions that anti-Semitism afforded Nazis. Just like the Jew, the white male is excoriated as the scourge of all that is good, true, and beautiful, the bearer of illegitimate privileges, someone whose all-pervasive social, political, and cultural influence must be exposed and curtailed for the public good—precisely the mission adopted by liberals.

* * *

Liberal Fascism was poorly received by scholars of fascism, and one does not have to be one to suspect that Goldberg has generated a spurious affinity between fascism and liberalism by disingenuously abstracting a few of their features away from their all-important historical contexts and philosophical rationales, treating these as mere side-notes. After all, it will always be possible

[33] Ibid., pg. 6.
[34] Ibid., pg. 329.
[35] Ibid., pg. 283.
[36] Ibid., pg. (find page)
[37] Ibid., pg. 368.

to subsume much that does not truly belong together under vague and impressionistic abstractions like a "sweeping vision of social justice and community" or a "cult of action."

But *Liberal Fascism* is at its core a conservative claim of cultural oppression. And so its ultimate purpose is less to establish the moral equivalence of liberalism and fascism as historical phenomena than to "level the playing field" between liberals and conservatives as contemporary political actors. To this end, Goldberg seeks to overthrow what he judges to be a one-sided liberal-centric reading of American history according to which "there are only two perpetrators of official misdeeds: conservatives and 'America' writ large." Given that only conservatives can be bigots or tyrants, we will "virtually never hear that the Palmer raids, Prohibition, or American eugenics were thoroughly progressive phenomena." These are sins for which America itself must atone.[38] The truth, however, is that "the liberal closet has its own skeletons."[39] Enjoying the benefit of hindsight, today's liberals speak of fascism unequivocally as an evil. But their progenitors in early twentieth-century Progressivism often spoke approvingly of the fascist movements that were germinating across the Atlantic.[40] And this was because they had a good deal in common with them.

Blind to this history, liberals are also blind to their own tendencies, which they have projected onto conservatives. Liberals "keep saying 'it can't happen here' with a clever wink or an ironic smile to insinuate that the right is constantly plotting fascist schemes," when the truth is that "it did happen here" in the form of early twentieth-century Progressivism.[41] This is what the liberal narrative conceals, to the benefit of liberals and at the expense of conservatives. America writ large can be made to assume responsibility for the moral lapses of liberals because liberals have persuaded us that fascism is a phenomenon of the political Right, so that nothing remotely fascist could possibly be attributed to contemporary liberalism or its historical progenitors. Conservatives are thought to differ from Nazis only as a matter of degree at best and to be incipiently fascistic at worst, whereas the continuities and parallels between fascism and liberalism are systematically obscured, so that liberalism may be identified with all that is good, true, and beautiful.

[38] Ibid., pg. 118.
[39] Ibid., pg. 22.
[40] Ibid., pg. 30.
[41] Ibid., pg. 120.

Though accusatory in its title, *Liberal Fascism* is intended less as an indictment than a call for moral humility from liberals, an attempt to reverse the historical amnesia that blinds them to the true nature of their own political impulses. The ultimate aim is not to quantify contemporary liberalism's affinities with fascism as sufficient to qualify liberals as "really" fascists, but to suggest that, however these be quantified, it is conservatives, not liberals, who lie at the furthest remove from fascism, and that it is the received wisdom to the contrary that facilitates the lopsided distribution of moral and political capital from which conservatives suffer.

Liberals may be nicer people than Gestapo agents. But this is owing, not to the intrinsic impulses of Progressivism, but to the traditional American values by which Progressivism is presently constrained. Goldberg argues that such factors as America's "geographical size, ethnic diversity, Jeffersonian individualism, a strong liberal tradition, and so on," have combined to render American fascism "milder, more friendly, more 'maternal' than its foreign counterparts."[42] "Milder" and "more maternal" may vastly understate the differences between modern liberalism and fascism from a historical point of view. But Goldberg's project is ultimately psychoanalytical rather than historical. It is an investigation of the basic, constituent human impulses which may assume varied ideological shapes in reflection of different circumstances—which have fortuitously served to sublimate and civilize the drives of fascism in the American context. Goldberg's purpose is not to indict liberals but to *subdue* liberalism, by isolating its essential core from the wider cultural currents in which that core has thus far been camouflaged. While liberals will hold themselves out as pragmatists and fact-finders, underneath this self-image lies a particular sensibility, a psychological need for order, for progress, for consensus, for expertise. And these needs are the seeds from which fascism would germinate if not held in check by America's essentially conservative heritage. The need for this precarious restraint is why conservatives refuse to take liberal idealism at face value.

Charles Taylor observes that "modern humanism is full of potential for… disconcerting reversals: from dedication to others to self-indulgent, feel-good responses, from a lofty sense of human dignity to control powered by contempt and hatred, from absolute freedom to absolute despotism, from a flaming desire to help the oppressed to an incandescent hatred for all those who stand in the way."[43] The conservative claimant of cultural oppression senses that the seeds of the

[42] Ibid., pg. 8.
[43] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), pg. 699.

latter are always germinating somewhere in the depths of the former, that liberal do-goodery is always just a few short steps away from liberal totalitarianism, and that the one is merely a gateway to the other. Contemporary liberals may repudiate the heavy-handed political repression of other progressive offshoots like European fascism. But they have not repudiated what are the *seeds* of that repression, their sweeping vision of social reform and social unity implemented by the centralized authority of experts. That is why the fascist threat, whatever it may be, will come from the Left rather than the Right. If this goes unrecognized by the received wisdom, this is because that wisdom is itself a component of that threat.

Philosopher Thomas Nagel observes that however tempted we may be to condemn Nazi war criminals as uniquely evil, none of us can say who we would have become under similar conditions. For none can know how their basic psychological tendencies would have interacted with such a radically changed environment:

> Ordinary citizens of Nazi Germany had an opportunity to behave heroically by opposing the regime. They also had an opportunity to behave badly, and most of them are culpable for having failed this test. But it is a test to which the citizens of other countries were not subjected, with the result that even if they, or some of them, would have behaved as badly as Germans in like circumstances, they simply did not and therefore are not similarly culpable. Here again one is morally at the mercy of fate, and it may seem irrational upon reflection, but our ordinary moral attitudes would be unrecognizable without it. We judge people for what they actually do or fail to do, not just for what they would have done if circumstances had been different.[44]

By contrast, Goldberg is calling upon us to rise above our "ordinary moral attitudes" and adopt the higher rationality that Nagel argues is unattainable for real human beings. And this rationality reveals that it would be contemporary liberals rather than conservatives who would find themselves most drawn to Nazi ideology under an altered set of circumstances, where liberals' constituent impulses would be the more readily channeled into overt fascism. However alien this overt fascism may be to liberals' present political project, the basic sensibilities are akin, and it is only the constraints which the American context imposes on these that explains why the outcomes are so different.

As I will explain at greater depth in later chapters, much that liberals would dismiss as conservative conspiracism expresses a certain Nietzschean naturalism whose logic is rarely articulated but can be identified in the subtext of conservative argument. What strikes liberals as

[44] Thomas Nagel, *Moral Questions* (Cambridge University Press 1991), pg. 34.

conservatives' eschewal of rational*ity* is, in its deeper hermeneutic structure, an eschewal of the rational*ism* that underpins liberals' claims to moral superiority, and hence the liberal identity. Nietzsche writes:

> This seems to me to be one of my most essential steps and advances: I have learned to distinguish the cause of acting from the cause of acting in a particular way, in a particular direction, with a particular goal. The first kind of cause is a quantum of dammed up energy that is waiting to be used up somehow, for something, while the second kind is, compared to this energy, something quite insignificant, for the most part a little accident in accordance with which the quantum "discharges" itself in one particular way—a match versus a ton of powder. Among these little accidents or "matches" I include so-called "purposes" as well as the even much more so-called "vocations": They are relatively random, arbitrary, almost indifferent in relation to the tremendous quantum of energy that presses, as I have said, to be used up somehow.
>
> …Is the "goal," the "purpose" not often enough a beautifying pretext, a self-deception of vanity after the event that does not want to acknowledge that the ship is *following* the current in which it has entered accidentally?[45]

If liberals dismiss *Liberal Fascism* as outrageous, this is because they identify their liberalism with the particular "purposes" and "vocations" to which they are presently committed, which are quite different from those of bona fide fascists. But within the Nietzschean perspective tacitly adopted by Goldberg, the official purposes are mere "matches," mere accidents of history, and so without the moral significance that liberals would assign them. Liberalism is ultimately "a quantum of dammed up energy that is waiting to be used up somehow, for something." And this "something" is a function, not of inner principle, but of political environment, which happens to channel the drives of liberalism toward ostensible do-goodery. It is because of this intuition that conservatives dismiss liberal ideals as a "beautifying pretext" disguising "baser motivations like social pretension, dilettantism, or effete sentimentality."

Being rationalists at heart, liberals presume that their present, conscious motivations are dispositive of their moral status. But these motivations are "relatively random, arbitrary" in the context of their overall organismic economy, which prescribes certain general psychological needs but then leaves the specific mechanism of their satisfaction to the accidents of the surrounding culture. This is why liberals are "morally at the mercy of fate," as Nagel would say. It is only owing to lucky circumstances that liberals' basic impulses can find expression in the moral equivalent of war rather than war itself, in progressive education rather than midnight Gestapo raids, in the deconstruction of dead white male literary bias rather than anti-Semitic rampages.

[45] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Vintage Books 1974), pgs. 315-16 (Sec. 360).

Alter the circumstances and the former could transmute into something like the latter. This is the danger that liberals unwittingly harbor in the depths of their being. And *Liberal Fascism* is a wake-up call for them to engage in a kind of Augustinian self-examination, to look deep below the surface of their seemingly noble motives in order to discern the morally ambiguous, all-too-human substrate of these motives' constituent impulses. These impulses could manifest themselves very differently under a changed set of political and cultural conditions, so whatever differences might exist between modern liberalism and the classic fascisms cannot redound to liberals' moral credit, and hence their claims to moral superiority.

Not only are liberals and their good intentions "morally at the mercy of fate," those good intentions moreover threaten to alter that fate for the worse. For every liberal incursion against America's traditional values must further erode the inhibitions which have thus far served to sublimate and civilize liberal fascism. This is precisely what liberals, with their culturally oppressive "clever winks and ironic smiles," cannot see but which the conservative, standing outside of liberalism and its sublime self-confidence, perceives in its full horror. From there he beholds Manchurian candidates who, driven by a program they do not understand, are by imperceptible increments creating the conditions for their own final activation. The clever winks and ironic smiles are no less than anything else but steps in this process, and Goldberg is seeking to place these winks and smiles in the historical context that would reveal their as yet unconscious, subterranean meaning. In this way does Goldberg subdue liberalism. Liberals like John Jost may deploy their "science" to impugn the basic agency powers of conservatives. But Goldberg aims to demonstrate that it is liberals who have forfeited these powers through their *submission to liberalism itself*, which drives them on in ways they cannot fathom.

2. The Liberal as Crypto-Racist

Accusations of fascism can usually be taken with a grain of salt in our culture, as they seem essentially hyperbolic. But charges of racism have more of a sting, and conservatives' reputation for racism and hostility to civil rights has been a perennial thorn in their side. And so they have in their Right Eclecticism developed a set of "convoluted stories" intended to subdue liberalism's claims to moral superiority on this front. The core of these stories is the assertion, as Nunberg puts it, that conservatives are "the true inheritors" of the civil rights tradition as embodied by Martin

Luther King.[46] For it is conservatives' opposition to all forms of color consciousness that now upholds that legacy, which has been betrayed by liberals and their enthusiasm for color-conscious policies like affirmative action and multiculturalism. This counter-narrative holds that conservatism and the civil rights movement draw on the same moral sources, the traditional American values despised by liberals. O'Reilly thus reminds us that King was a "traditionalist" who believed that the civil rights movement stood for "the most sacred values of our Judeo-Christian heritage."[47] Hence the heavy presence of African-Americans in institutions like churches and the military, which embody these traditional American values. Ingraham notes that the military enjoys a level of racial diversity missing at liberal elite organizations like People for the American Way or the Metropolitan Museum of Art.[48] Liberals may celebrate diversity, but it is conservatives who actually deliver it.

Conservatives endeavor, not only to appropriate the legacy of the civil rights movement, but to recast its history in a way that highlights the role of Republicans in supporting desegregation and of Democrats in opposing it, in the hopes of thereby depriving the Democratic party of its pride of place as the vanguard of racial equality. The Democratic Party now enjoys a reputation as the enlightened defender of racial equality whilst Republicans are held suspect as relics of a racist past. But Cupp and Joshpe argue that this stereotype is a function of historical accident, "the mistakes of a few high-profile Republicans" like Barry Goldwater, who personally supported desegregation but opposed federal civil rights legislation out of his constitutional conscience. Such accidents of history have been relentlessly exploited by liberals in order to feed the "cult of the Republican Racist." This image, argue Cupp and Joshpe, is a "product of revisionist history and a political weapon of necessity" that has served to obscure the Democratic Party's historical antipathy to racial equality from the Civil War onward.[49]

One might think that the nature of Goldwater's motivations and the role of some Republicans in enacting civil rights legislation are by now irrelevant, given the political realignments that emerged from the 1960s. The defection of Southern Segregationist Democrats to the Republican party, the purging or demoralization of moderate and progressive Republicans,

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[46] Nunberg, *Talking Right*, pg. 157.
[47] Bill O'Reilly, *Culture Warrior* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), pg. 145.
[48] Laura Ingraham, *Shut Up & Sing: How Elites from Hollywood, Politics, and the UN Are Subverting America* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2003), pg. 149.
[49] S.E. Cupp and Brett Joshpe, *Why You're Wrong About The Right: Behind The Myths—The Surprising Truth About Conservatives* (New York: Thresholds Editions, 2008), pgs. 6-7.

and the transformation of the GOP into an instrument of ideological conservatism would seem to render hopelessly anachronistic any attempt to paint the Democrats as the party of racism and Jim Crow. But it is precisely this conventional wisdom that conservative claimants of cultural oppression mean to challenge, for they understand themselves to be that wisdom's victims. The traditional bastions of segregation may have gravitated to the Republican Party. But the real reason, say conservatives, was not some "Southern Strategy" of covert, dog-whistle racism, but principled opposition to the cultural chaos of the 1960s, with which the Democrats became identified. The liberal narrative refuses to recognize this chaos and its consequences. In occluding this, that narrative serves the twin ideological functions of 1) absolving liberalism of responsibility for the decay of traditional values and 2) portraying the ordinary American as still mired in unatoned racism, and so as requiring liberal interventions.

This assessment is just another liberal projection, conservatives believe, because it is in fact liberals who remain unaware of *their* racism. The Democratic Party has not truly repudiated its former racist appeals, but merely disguised and sublimated them, rechanneling the racial animus that once inspired lynchings into liberal social policy, which is just a politically correct way of subordinating African-Americans. Black conservative Deroy Murdock writes that "[t]he Republican Party and conservatives generally have spent the last 147 years trying to liberate black Americans and make them self-reliant, while Democrats and liberals have spent most of that time either trying to hold blacks behind or making them dependent on big-government solutions."[50] There is therefore a natural continuity between the solidly Democratic South's support for slavery and Jim Crow and the contemporary Democratic Party's support for affirmative action and social welfare programs, just as there is a natural continuity between the Republican Party's historical role as the party of abolition and Reconstruction and its contemporary hostility to the welfare state. Speaking satirically as a progressive Democratic, Kahane explains that "[w]here once we hunted black people down, strung them up on trees, returned them with all the power of the state to their slave masters, and kept them riding in the back of the bus, we now shower them with our tender mercies."[51] Liberals have arrogated the mantle of civil rights and racial equality. But this is yet further stealth and subterfuge, because these ideas are being used to once again enforce back

[50] Qt. in Ibid, pg. 5.
[51] David Kahane, *Rules for Radical Conservatives: Beating the Left at Its Own Game to Take Back America* (Ballantine Books, 2010), pg. 128.

dependency and black group-identity, both of which were first created by slavery. Thus, black conservatives charge that blacks unswervingly loyal to the Democratic Party remain stuck on the "Democratic plantation," refusing the "underground railroad" offered by the Republican commitment to the free market.

In line with his general theory of liberalism, Goldberg traces the racial consciousness of today's liberals to the Progressive era. While the progressives did favor certain forms of social equality, they were also fascinated with Darwinism and fashioned their prescriptions around what they imagined were its implications. The minimum wage now carries egalitarian connotations. But Goldberg reminds us that progressive economists originally defended the policy on eugenic grounds. Since black and Chinese laborers could undersell whites, the worry was that "the unfittest might survive at the expense of the fittest" (i.e., whites). As one progressive put it, "[t]he Coolie cannot outdo the American, but he can underlive him." The progressives wanted to raise the minimum wage "to a white man's worth," in order to restore the races to their proper Darwinian standing, so that the less fit would not out-survive the more fit.[52]

The liberal narrative celebrates birth control as a crucial step in women's liberation. But in like fashion, Goldberg observes that Margaret Sanger first promoted birth control by hitching a "racist-eugenic campaign to sexual pleasure and female liberation." In persuading women that birth control was a "necessary tool for their own personal gratification," Sanger "brilliantly used the language of liberation to convince women they weren't going along with a collectivist scheme but were in fact 'speaking truth to power.'"[53] Here as elsewhere, the problem with liberal individualism is not its excesses but its fraudulence, the hidden tribalistic impulses operating underneath the façade of that individualism, in which liberals do not truly believe. Today's liberals do not stand by eugenic ideas as originally expounded. But Goldberg believes that the spirit that first animated these ideas—that "three generations of imbeciles are enough" as Oliver Wendell Holmes notoriously announced in upholding the constitutionality of forced sterilization—"endures in the often unspoken rationale for abortion." Likewise, the eugenic premise that "the state should pick winners and losers based upon the accidents of birth" continues to live on in liberalism's affinity for multiculturalism, which also subordinates the individual to his group-identity.[54]

[52] Goldberg, *The Tyranny of Clichés*, pg. 106.
[53] Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism*, pg. 272.
[54] Ibid., pgs. 253-54.

Just like liberal fascism, liberal racism is subtle and genteel, channeling morally objectionable impulses into an outward beneficence that disguises the underlying impetus. Like liberal fascism, liberal racism consists in a set of general drives that pre-exist the specific ideologies into which they will crystallize in reflection of the conditions at hand. Thus, the issue is not the present-day conscious intentions of liberals, but the structural possibilities that are latent in their broad political sensibilities. Here as elsewhere, these are revealed in the suppressed history of Progressivism, and conservatives hope that exposing the hidden wellsprings of liberalism will compel liberals to accept responsibility for sins they would prefer to associate with either conservatives or America itself.

Goldberg alleges that "the color-blind doctrine championed by progressives in the 1960s was a very brief parenthesis in a very long progressive tradition."[55] But liberals will retort that what Goldberg represents as a curious inconsistency and interlude reflects the fact that America generally was moving to overcome a racism from which no one, including progressives, had been immune. Those at the forefront of this movement first embraced color-blindness as a rallying cry against segregation. With this formally abolished, they now embrace color-consciousness in order to eradicate the ongoing legacy of racism and racial discrimination. Color-consciousness is a temporary measure through which to fully realize the same ideals that were first defended under the mantle of color-blindness, a means rather than an end in itself. There was therefore no "brief parenthesis" in the Progressive tradition, but rather the logical unfolding and purification of an egalitarian impulse.

But Goldberg seeks to subdue liberalism, and he does this by recasting what purports to be a logical unfolding as a rationalizing ideology that conceals a darker story. The suggestion is that the "brief parenthesis" of the 1960s was a conceptual expedient by means of which progressives transitioned from a cruder, overtly racializing talk of "Coolies" to the subtler, more sophisticated variety of racism that motivates liberals' special solicitude for minorities via multiculturalism and affirmative action. As in his examination of liberal fascism, Goldberg is engaging in a political psychoanalysis that distinguishes liberalism proper from its contingent civilizing sublimations, in order to expose how an ostensibly repudiated past lives on in the hidden depths of the present, endowing liberalism with a subterranean structure that liberals will not acknowledge to others or even to themselves.

[55] Ibid., pg. 254.

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If liberals have successfully immunized themselves to the racism charge, this is because they have, as with fascism, succeeded in pinning the label on conservatives. One expedient in this effort, explains Goldberg, has been the ideological invocation of "Social Darwinism," which serves to insinuate some kind of moral and intellectual affinity between the economic libertarianism of nineteenth-century free-marketers and the atrocities of twentieth-century Nazis. Social Darwinism is an "alchemist trick" that transmogrifies "the gold of freedom into the lead of Hitlerism"[56] and is routinely invoked by the Left to defame conservatives. Social Darwinism has become a generic term for "All Bad Things having to do with genetics, fascism, racism, evolution, free-markets, or any human behavior that might be seen as callousness of a right-wing sort."[57] You "can be a Social Darwinist if you believe in small government and the free market." But you can also be a Social Darwinist "if you believe in herding the lesser races and enfeebled into camps."[58] This political ethnocentrism posits the ideals of liberalism as the Archimedean standpoint from which the motivations of conservatives may be inferred, so that racism and libertarianism become ideological cousins by liberal fiat. The result is that conservatives are expected "to atone for the racism, real and alleged, of various dead conservatives" whilst liberals are relieved of the need to explore "their own historical association with eugenics," to consider the possibility that "there is something inherent to a 'pragmatic' ideology of do-goodery that makes it susceptible to eugenic ideas."[59] Liberals cannot see this because they have intellectualized and sublimated their racist-eugenic motivations and then projected these disavowed impulses onto conservatives, whose libertarian impulses can then be slandered as symptoms of racism.

The outraged liberal will retort that the truth of Goldberg's historical claims is irrelevant given that he personally rejects eugenics, disavows any eugenic rationales for policies he does support, and indeed had never even heard of the "historical association" between Progressivism and eugenics before learning of it from Goldberg. But conservative claimants of cultural oppression respond that this outrage at guilt by association is an expression of liberal privilege. For Goldberg's argument merely confronts liberals with what is the daily lot of the conservative, who is condemned as racist or incipiently racist regardless of his stated position, and merely

[56] Goldberg, *The Tyranny of Clichés*, pg. 100.
[57] Ibid., pg. 100.
[58] Ibid., pg. 103.
[59] Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism*, pg. 245

because liberals judge him guilty of a generalized right-wing callousness casting a shadow on all he does. If liberals refuse to accept the professed motivations of conservatives at face value, then conservatives will respond in kind, and mete out to liberals the same medicine to which they are well accustomed.

Taking this under advisement, the liberal might reply that while he will answer to any specific flesh-and-blood conservatives whose motivations he may have misjudged, these vaporous complaints about some general historical maligning of conservatism do not interest him. But the critical theory of the Right reveals that this response too is a species of liberal privilege. And the conservative claimant of cultural oppression will no more accept this response than would the radical feminist accept the argument that a sexually abused woman can have no grievance against a pornographer because the woman depicted in his pornography was not her but some other woman, or because the man who abused her was not the pornographer but some other individual who may or may not have consumed the pornographer's specific product. Catherine MacKinnon writes:

> If pornography is an act of male supremacy, its harm is the harm of male supremacy made difficult to see because of its pervasiveness, potency, and success in making the world a pornographic place. Specifically, the harm cannot be discerned from the objective standpoint because it *is* so much of "what is."[60]

> The trouble with this individuated, atomistic, linear, isolated, tort-like—in a word, positivistic—conception of the injury is that the way pornography targets and defines women for abuse and discrimination does not work like this. It does hurt individuals, not *as* individuals in a one-at-a-time sense, but as members of the group "women." Harm is caused to one individual woman rather than another essentially the way one number rather than another is caused in roulette. But on a group basis, as women, the selection process is absolutely selective and systematic. Its causality is essentially collective and totalistic and contextual. To reassert atomistic linear causality as a sine qua non of injury—you cannot be harmed unless you are harmed through this etiology—is to refuse to respond to the true nature of the specific kind of harm.[61]

The Left is the Right and the Right is the Left because, here as elsewhere, the instruments of left-critique "fill out" the logical lacunae of conservative claims of cultural oppression. Whether the injury be to women or to conservatives, the chains of causation are subtle, indirect, incremental in impact, and do not lend themselves to any decisive empirical confirmation. But this is, in the one case as in the other, owing to the very nature of the oppression being alleged, which is no less real

[60] Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), pg. 154.
[61] Ibid., pgs. 156-57.

for being holistic rather than atomistic. Just like MacKinnon, conservative claimants of cultural oppression believe that the honest exercise of our general social intelligence permits us to recognize certain recurring patterns of association and, through these, an unspoken narrative of collective defamation. Just like MacKinnon, they believe that the unwillingness or inability to recognize this narrative bespeaks a vested interest in its propagation. If liberals cannot recognize liberal domination, the reason is that this domination has come to constitute "so much of 'what is.'"

Whether or not the liberal in question has personally slandered any given conservative, he benefits from the general practice of slandering conservatives, because the social hierarchy which these slanders have engendered has now been built into the liberal identity and the broader social space it inhabits. Even if the liberal has not have personally slandered a non-racist conservative as racist, he has almost certainly participated in the general discourse of Social Darwinism in some fashion or other, thereby contributing to a cultural environment in which it becomes possible to associate free markets with slavery or genocide. This rhetorical environment harms conservatives even if it does not do so in a "one-at-a-time" sense, to borrow again from MacKinnon. Even where liberals do not directly accuse conservatives of racism, the latter know they are socially vulnerable to the charge, which gives liberals a power-advantage that they wield irrespective of their conscious designs. And this is enough to implicate them in conservatives' cultural oppression, and hence liberal privilege. If the grievances of conservatives seem downright hallucinatory to liberals, this is for the same reason the grievances of feminists seem hallucinatory to many men (and some women), because a standard of atomistic causality is deployed to obscure the essentially collective, totalistic, and contextual nature of the injury. In permitting liberals to insinuate without stating, this background simply immunizes liberals to confrontation and argument, making their conservaphobia invisible to their rationalist epistemology.

Coulter highlights this kind of totalistic injury in her take on the battle over the judicial appointment of Charles Pickering, who she argues was branded a reactionary and filibustered at the behest of "an oddball collection of pro-abortion left-wingers" while receiving no credit for having put his own physical safety at risk as a prosecutor pursuing the Ku Klux Klan in the 1960s. Beyond risking life and limb for civil rights to the point of requiring FBI protection, Pickering also sent his children to Mississippi public schools in the 1970s, where they would be surrounded by black faces. His nomination was moreover supported by Charles Evars, brother of slain civil rights

leader Medgar Evars. And yet he found himself opposed on the basis of his presumed hostility to "civil rights."[62] The reason, say conservatives, was that he had already been adjudged guilty of a general "callousness of a right-wing sort," at which point they felt entitled to assume whatever they wanted about him.

The obvious rebuttal to Coulter is that the activists' concern was with how Pickering would rule on any abortion-related controversies, and that his willingness to simply do his job as a prosecutor by upholding the rule of law has no logical bearing on this issue. "Civil rights" can mean many things, and one can without inconsistency praise Pickering for supporting certain civil rights while opposing his nomination to the federal bench on the basis of his hostility to certain others, like abortion. Unless someone was impugning Pickering's willingness to faithfully apply federal anti-discrimination laws, his laudable personal history on this front is simply irrelevant.

But here too, the instruments of left-critique fill out the logical lacunae of conservative claims of cultural oppression. As we saw in Chapter One, the critical theory of the Right is concerned, not with the *truth* of a discourse, but with the discourse's "subterranean structure or aspects," with how "existing discourses of power fabricate or position subjects, secure and disguise powers, naturalize assumptions, fix privileges, and mobilize norms." And so the issue here is not whether abortion can be plausibly classified as a "civil rights issue" but how the discourse of civil rights is deployed to collectively defame conservatives as incorrigibly racist. Even if defensible with respect to abortion, the suggestion that Pickering was hostile to "civil rights" functioned to invoke a background narrative that, just like the discourse of Social Darwinism, casts every conservative position as just another manifestation of a generalized right-wing callousness that right-minded liberals are destined to confront again and again in myriad contexts. Liberal opponents of Pickering may not have directly accused him of racism, but the prestige of the liberal narrative meant they didn't have to in order to insinuate it.

Liberals are quick to discover analogous forms of insinuation in the rhetoric of conservatives. Thomas Ross observes:

> The rhetoric of innocence in affirmative action discourse uses one of the most powerful symbols of our culture, the symbol of innocence and its always present opposite, the symbol of the defiled taker. When the white person is called the innocent victim of affirmative action, the rhetorician is invoking not just the idea of innocence but also the idea of the not innocent, the defiled taker. The idea of the defiled taker is given a particular

[62] Ann Coulter, *Demonic: How the Liberal Mob Is Endangering America* (New York: Crown Forum, 2011), pg. 193-94.

> name in one of two ways. First, merely invoking the "innocent white victim" triggers at some level its rhetorically natural opposite, the "defiled black taker." This implicit personification is made explicit by the second part of the rhetoric, the questioning of the "actual victim" status of the black person who benefits from the affirmative action plan. The contrast is between the innocent white victim and the undeserving black taker. The cultural significance of the ideas of innocence and defilement thus gives the rhetoric of innocence a special sort of power.[63]

The upshot is that those who employ the "rhetoric of innocence" should not be accepted as the principled defenders of meritocracy they claim to be. The narrow logic of their arguments is that individuals disadvantaged by affirmative action are not personally responsible for the wrongs for which affirmative action is intended to compensate and that the notion of collective reparations is anathema to principles of meritocracy. But Ross suggests that these arguments are actually the playing out of a racist trope that was once expressed less subtly. The rhetoricians of innocence present themselves as rational deliberators. But they are actually conduits for a culturally transmitted racism for which their seemingly respectable defenses of meritocracy are mere vehicles. The defender of meritocracy holds himself out as trying to induce a kind of reflective equilibrium that will compel his interlocutor to repudiate affirmative action. But he is fundamentally disingenuous regarding the actual *social meaning* of his argument, which covertly draws on a racial narrative not acknowledged by the official argument. He may not entertain self-conscious racial prejudice. But his tone and word choices evoke familiar racist imagery.

The question posed by conservative claims of cultural oppression is whether liberals are also "rhetoricians" in Ross's sense, and therefore seek to place conservatives in a position analogous to the "defiled black taker." If liberals are "bullies" who foster a "culture of fear and intimidation," as Shapiro alleges, this would be in the same way the defender of white "innocence" is a bully. The rhetorician of innocence exploits of the social undertones of "innocence" in order to invoke an unspoken narrative that denigrates blacks as parasitic looters or rapists. And in like fashion, the liberal exploits the social undertones of "civil rights" and "Social Darwinism" to invoke an unspoken narrative tracing every conservative proposal to the same black well of bottomless nefariousness. The rhetoricians of innocence preempt rational discussion of affirmative action's merits by associating it with black looters and rapists. But the rhetoricians of civil rights and Social Darwinism do the same to conservatives by always discovering some way

[63] Thomas Ross, *Innocence and Affirmative Action*, 43 Vand. L. Rev. 297, 310 (1990).

to associate their ideas with a general "callousness of a right-wing sort." Conservatives, then, are not alone in making "dog-whistle" appeals to prejudice.

What liberals dismiss as conservatives' irrationality and disingenuousness is more charitably interpreted as conservatives' *reactions* to these dog-whistles. The cultural oppression of which they complain is the tension between official foreground and the all-important yet unacknowledged background of Macedo's transformative liberalism. This background operates, not through argument, but through Shapiro's "patina[s] of character assassination," the cumulative effect of which is to prod sensibilities in a liberal direction. And so it doesn't much matter whether the conservative in question is actually racist, because racism is understood to be just a symptom of the broader malaise of conservatism itself, which is liberalism's ultimate target. If conservatives' reasoning about race, racism, and eugenics seems suspiciously convoluted, this is because that reasoning is the medium through which liberalism's transformative background is being subdued. The injustice from which conservatives suffer being largely surreptitious and unacknowledged, it can only be foregrounded by transcending the narrow, atomistic rationality in terms of which liberals would prefer to delineate the conceptual stakes, in favor of a more holistic approach wherein what seem like narrowly circumscribed issues are reinterpreted as symbolic of the recurring patterns that lay underneath the surface of liberal argument.

Conservative claimants of cultural oppression will not confine their attention to any narrow, issue-based logic because their perennial issue is always the proper allocation of moral credits and debits within the fabric of American culture. They judge that they have been cheated on this front and that this general misallocation of moral capital continuously redounds to their disadvantage in ways great and small in sundry spheres of social and political life. If the claimants refuse to "stick to the issues," as liberals ask them to do, this is for the same reason the social democrat refuses to reduce "justice" to the voluntariness of discrete financial transactions. Conservative claims of cultural oppression seek a form of distributive justice from which questions of everyday justice—like whether Pickering's views on abortion were being accurately represented—is an ideological distraction. Liberals may dismiss these claims as a "curious amassing of unrelated beefs about the world." But this is because they are blind to these beefs' underlying coherence, judging them according to intellectual rules which they do not insist upon when it comes to the grievances of blacks, women, and gays, whose collective, totalistic injuries will be recognized as real.

3. The Liberal as Crypto-Aristocrat

No less than its monopoly over the cause of racial equality, liberalism's reputation as the selfless ally of ordinary workers against powerful business interests is seen by conservatives as a social illusion, which must be overthrown if they are to reestablish cultural and rhetorical equality with liberals. Conservative claims of cultural oppression pursue this end by casting liberals in the role of anti-democratic aristocrats, which conservatives will no longer accept for themselves. As we saw, conservative claims of cultural oppression attribute the rise of "ultra-liberalism" to the mass bohemianization of society. And Himmelfarb observes that the morality of bohemia is also the morality of aristocracy and privilege. Quoting Adam Smith, she reminds us:

> In every civilized society, in every society where the distinction of ranks has once been completely established, there have always been two different schemes or systems of morality current at the time; of which the one may be called the strict or austere; the other liberal, or if you will, the loose system. The former is generally admired and revered by the common people: the latter is commonly more esteemed and adopted by what are called people of fashion.

The "people of fashion," notes Himmelfarb, treat indulgently what Smith calls the "vices of levity"—"luxury, wanton and even disorderly mirth, pursuit of pleasure to some degree of intemperance, the breach of chastity." But adhering to the strict or austere more system, the "common people" regard such vices with the "utmost abhorrence and detestation." They recognize that these vices are nearly always ruinous to them, even if they can be indulged in with impunity by the people of fashion, whose privilege shields them from the consequences.[64] And Himmelfarb believes this explains why Europe is more socially liberal, more accepting of mass-bohemianization, than America: "If Europeans do not share our 'obsession,' as they say, with morality, dismissing it disparagingly as 'moralistic,' it is perhaps because their ethos still has lingering traces of their monarchic and aristocratic heritage—those vestiges of class, birth, and privilege that are congenial to a 'loose' system of morality." By contrast, "Americans, having been spared that legacy and having relied from the beginning upon character as a test of merit and self-discipline as the precondition of self-government, still pay homage to 'republican virtue.'"[65]

Liberals view themselves as forward-thinking emancipationists and excoriate social conservatives as retrograde moral authoritarians. But Himmelfarb's argument is that liberals are

[64] Gertrude Himmelfarb, *One Nation, Two Cultures: A Searching Examination of American Society in the Aftermath of Our Cultural Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), pg. 3.
[65] Ibid., pgs. 19-20.

in fact today's "people of fashion," the scions of the very anti-democratic traditions they claim to oppose. For the morality they celebrate was in the first instance the morality of the aristocracy, of those more greatly tolerated by the people sitting at the *right* of the French National Assembly. And so what liberals celebrate as their emancipatory ideals are in reality the atavistic residue of a feudal past. The Left is the Right and the Right is the Left because it is today's Left, with its exaltation of social freedom and expressive individualism, which is the true descendent of yesterday's Right, just as it is today's Right, with its concern for the self-restraint of "traditional morality," that is the true descendent of yesterday's Left, a defender of the "common people" and their republican virtues against the aristocratic decadence that would ruin them. As we saw, Corey Robin argues that conservatism seeks to "make medievalism modern." But this is yet another liberal projection as conservatives see it, because this is precisely what liberals are themselves doing when they attack traditional morality.

It is a perennial theme of conservative claims of cultural oppression that the secular, morally libertarian culture pushed by the liberal elites unfairly advantages them at the expense of those who can least do without the traditional morality and religion of which these elites would deprive them. Robert Bork warns:

> Persons capable of high achievement in one field or another may find meaning in work, may find community among colleagues, and may not particularly mind social and moral separation otherwise. Such people are unlikely to need the more sordid distractions that popular culture now offers. But very large segments of the population do not fall into that category. For them, the drives of liberalism are catastrophic.[66]

It is no coincidence that the liberal vision is advanced by those whose professional stature provides their lives with a meaning and coherence that the assault on traditional values undermines for the silent majority—which is consequently left susceptible to debilitating social ills that the elites are privileged to avoid. It may be of no great consequence when a tenured radical rails against the repressiveness of bourgeois norms from within the safe confines of the ivory tower. But it is of far greater moment when the less privileged, and especially the underclass, absorb these adversarial attitudes, in the process abandoning the only values that could save them from crime, drug addiction, illegitimacy, etc. If conservatives are critical of the underclass's habits, this then reflects, not racism or any other prejudice, but the fact that liberalism has inflicted the greatest

[66] Robert H. Bork, *Slouching toward Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (New York: Regan Books, 1996), pg. 63.

damage among the most vulnerable. Himmelfarb observes that a level of delinquency which a white suburban teenager can indulge with relative impunity may be "literally fatal to a black inner city teenager."[67] And Goldberg charges that, not content to just personally indulge in Dionysian excess, "today's secular royalty" of Hollywood liberals "feel compelled to export values only the very rich and very admired can afford." Madonna could urge her followers to cast off their bourgeois sexual hang-ups. But whereas she could simply settle down with a husband and kids once she outgrew her hedonism, the "lower-middle-class girls from Jersey City who took her advice" were not so lucky.[68]

Conservatives believe the liberal elites have a vested interest in perpetuating the cultural pathologies of the underclass. Sowell charges that members of the black underclass have become the "mascots" of Left intellectuals, whose "real agenda" is "to score points against American society" by exploiting the underclass as a counter-cultural symbol of resistance to hegemony.[69] In a similar vein, Himmelfarb argues that the "new class" that reigns within the media, the academy, the professions, and government is the "mirror image" of, and has a "symbiotic relationship" with, the underclass, which is used to symbolize the new class's embrace of avant-garde values.[70] Likewise, O'Reilly accuses that **"**the S-P [secular-progressive] crowd, especially the mainstream media, has glorified the gangsta world and, indeed, makes money from it. Those white, middle-aged, ponytailed music executives are no better than crack dealers. They know their product dehumanizes its constant customer and encourages awful behavior."[71]

Whereas liberals would trace the plight of the poor to racism, the excesses of capitalism, and above all the callousness of conservatives, the latter trace it to the cultural ambitions and excesses of the liberal elites. Liberals think themselves tolerant. But this tolerance is a disingenuous façade, merely another liberal ruse. Moral relativism and subjectivism are not the transcendence of ideology—as the liberal narrative would have it—but, on the contrary, ideological weapons through which to disguise the injuries which the people of fashion would inflict on the common people. The latter's moral degradation augments the political and cultural capital of the Left no less than vast armies of low-wage workers augment the profits of

[67] Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), pg. 244.
[68] Goldberg, *The Tyranny of Clichés*, pg. 178.
[69] Thomas Sowell, *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* (Encounter Books, 2005), pg 56.
[70] Himmelfarb, *The De-Moralization of Society*, pg. 244.
[71] O'Reilly, *Culture Warrior*, pg. 149.

industrialists. This degradation is simply the currency of liberal ambition, merely another way for the anointed to set themselves against the benighted and their moral traditionalism. Just like the bourgeoisie for Marx, the liberal elites exercise an illegitimate dominion over the means of production. They produce symbols and ideas rather than material goods. But through these they impinge on the moral lives of the non-elites no less than large corporations impinge on their economic lives and physical safety. And like all dominant groups, the liberal elites are accustomed, and therefore blind, to the disproportionate power they wield. Unacquainted with the anomie which their dominion inflicts on the less privileged, they are naturally incredulous before conservative claims of cultural oppression. But then this incredulity is just a symptom of their inability to empathize with subordinated classes.

This framing enables the Right to become the Left in order to accuse the Left of becoming the Right. If liberals believe that state regulation is a legitimate means of redressing gross inequalities of economic power, then conservatives respond that some form of moral regulation may be required to protect those whose cultural influence is being unfairly marginalized by the media and Hollywood. The Left, notes D'Souza, is "unfailingly vigilant in exposing business for polluting the natural environment," but "when is the last time a liberal democrat denounced Hollywood or the music industry for polluting the moral environment?"[72] Just like the callous nineteenth-century robber barons they despise, the liberal elites use an ideologized conception of freedom to conceal the suffering of the lower orders, a simplistic "my liberty ends at your nose" ethic that declines to recognize the extended chains of social interconnectedness which give democratic majorities a legitimate interest in regulating their moral environments. This is what social conservatives believe they defend. They are not, as liberals would have it, meddlesome moralists foisting their personal preferences on unwilling others, but socially-minded egalitarians who hold liberals accountable for the externalities that their liberalism inflicts on non-liberals—like Goldberg's forgotten lower-middle-class girls of Jersey City, or O'Reilly's consumers of gangsta rap.

This illegitimate dominion will be defended under the banner of freedom. But just as the Left relativizes the value of economic liberty to the interests of capitalists, so conservatives relativize the value of expressive autonomy to the New Class culture of wordsmiths, artists, and

[72] Dinesh D'Souza, *The Enemy at Home: The Cultural Left and its Responsibility for 9/11* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), pg. 132.

entertainers. Bork observes that the student radicals of the 1960s were later attracted to careers through which they could influence opinions and attitudes,[73] their ultimate passion. But not everyone shares this passion. And the radical expressive individualism liberalism celebrates will only resonate for those who share this powerful need for symbolic manipulation—and the social privilege that permits it. It is only the molders of opinion and sensibility whose career paths require an unqualified right to continually transgress the boundaries of decency and good taste. Liberals will sugarcoat this aggression in anodyne abstractions like self-expression or autonomy. But conservatives believe these abstractions are ideological instruments of elite domination, initiated in the 1960s and continuing to this day. The 1960s were, as Kimball says, a revolution "of the privileged, by the privileged, and for the privileged."[74] It was a revolution, not of individualists against collectivists, but of one collective against another, of the people of fashion against the common people, whose cause has now been taken up by conservatives.

* * *

Himmelfarb's contraposition of an egalitarian conservatism humbly embodying austere republican virtue against a liberalism of the socially privileged drawn to aristocratic vice is advanced as a thesis about the social determinants of poverty. But it is also a conservative claim of cultural oppression addressing the plight of the *political* underclass, conservatives, which labors under a reputation of callous indifference to the economic one. Here as elsewhere, conservatives' ultimate goal is to subdue liberalism. And this is realized by conceptualizing the problem of inequality in a way that substitutes cultural power for economic power as the fulcrum of class warfare, thus shifting responsibility for poverty from the economically libertarian Right to the socially libertarian Left.

Goldberg notes that we have been trained to stereotype the conservative businessman as uniquely callous to the plight of the less privileged, the one most likely to say "let them eat cake!" But this is "a form of cultural propaganda." For "the most obvious inheritors of the cocooned arrogance and self-indulgence we associate with members of the monarchical courts of Europe are to be found not in boardrooms, but among the most celebrated liberals of American life: Hollywood celebrities." It is the glitterati of Hollywood, and not sober, stiff-lipped CEOs, who

[73] Bork, *Slouching toward Gommorah*, pg. 51.
[74] Kimball, *The Long March*, pg. 248.

hire out "a private retinue of vassals, tutors, and hangers-on" to "recreate a private court no less opulent and self-indulgent than the entourages of seventeenth-century France." It is the liberal glitterati of Hollywood, not stolid bourgeois conservatives, who "travel with full-time aromatherapists, masseuses, acupuncturists, and, one presumes, court jesters." And it is likewise the former, not the latter, who attempt to recreate the sumptuary laws with which kings and queens once codified their privilege. No CEO, no matter how successful, would think to bar people from photographing his elbows, as has Jennifer Lopez, or hire an assistant whose only job was to hand him towels, as has Mariah Carey.[75] Conservative businesspeople may sometimes underpay their workers, but they do not treat them as mere vassals—as did Barbara Streisand when she instructed that employees of the MGM Grand avoid eye-contact with her as she performed.[76]

Liberals will dismiss these indictments as intellectually hollow ad hominems. Frank argues that the preening narcissism of Hollywood celebrities "are all products of capitalism as surely as are McDonald's hamburgers and Boeing 737s."[77] But Goldberg is suggesting that capitalism as such cannot explain the wide behavioral discrepancies between these liberal celebrities and those who truly embody the spirit of capitalism, conservative businesspeople. Amorphous and intangible though it may seem, "culture" is no mere superstructure of economic power and rather enjoys a self-subsistent life of its own. If liberals deny this, the reason is that they have a vested ideological interest in doing so, because they thereby conceal that they pursue *their* self-aggrandizement culturally rather than economically. Liberals may be egalitarian in rhetoric, but they have merely opted for one egoistic currency over another and then passed off this preference as their moral superiority. The charge that liberals are basely motivated by what Nunberg calls "social pretension, dilettantism, or effete sentimentality" isn't just an opportunistic ad hominem swipe, but part and parcel of conservatives' basic conviction in the *autonomy of culture* as a wellspring of human action.

It is often said that conservatives exploit cultural wedge issues to "distract" attention away from economic ones. But it is more accurate to say that they seek to *fuse* the cultural and the economic by assigning liberal economic policies a specific cultural meaning that ordinary Americans reject viscerally. In this spirit, Codevilla charges that Woodrow Wilson "spoke for the

[75] Goldberg, *The Tyranny of Cliches*, pgs. 175-76.
[76] Ibid., pg. 98.
[77] Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, pgs. 240-42.

thousands of well-off Americans who patronized the spas at places like Chautauqua and Lake Mohonk." By "such upper-middle-class waters," these progressives imagined themselves "the world's examples and the world's reformers" and "dreamed big dreams of establishing order, justice, and peace at home and abroad."[78] Liberalism is thus a pastime of the privileged, akin to spa visits, a self-satisfied reverie in which ordinary Americans worried about putting food on the table can ill-afford to indulge. Affluent liberals may be prepared to pay the higher taxes that liberalism demands, but this is merely the price of their conspicuous consumption, the consumer good being liberalism itself. If liberals are, as George Will alleges, contemptuous of the average Wal-Mart shopper, this is because he is merely looking for an affordable large-screen television and cannot afford the higher-end product line of liberal condescension.

In a similar vein, Irving Kristol argues that the consumer and environmental movements represent novel variants of an age-old aristocratic contempt for the bourgeoisie's unacceptably quotidian preoccupation with the satisfaction of ordinary human needs.[79] These movements allege they are responding to the deformation of the people's true preferences by advertising and other undemocratic social forces. But these rationales merely disguise atavistic aristocratic pretensions to superior taste in the democratic garb of public-spiritedness. Like liberal fascism and liberal racism, liberal public-spiritedness is the creative adaptation of ancient, now discredited impulses to novel conditions. Liberals believe themselves altruistic. But this altruism cannot be taken at face value, because the essence of liberalism is to serve as an outlet for various aristocratic pretensions, of which public displays of *noblesse oblige* toward the less fortunate is merely one component. What Sowell calls the vision of the anointed is thus a politicized and intellectualized variant of what the people of fashion have always believed about the common people. Where the aristocrats of old looked down upon the peasantry, today's liberals look down upon the upon the ordinary American, whose crudity is now castigated in political or existential terms, like his supposed "unawareness."

Conservative claims of cultural oppression do not defend big business (or the Republican Party) at all costs, and will happily attack them so long as the malfeasance in question can in some way be associated with the cultural prominence of liberal sensibilities—which have predictably made inroads into heretofore conservative sectors. Thus, that some high-ranking corporate

[78] Codevilla, *The Ruling Class*, pg. 17.
[79] Irving Kristol, "The Adversary Culture of Intellectuals," in *Encounter*, October 1979, pgs. 5-14.

executives have renounced their citizenship in order to qualify for certain tax breaks suggests to Ingraham, not untrammeled greed or the inexorable logic of capitalism, but "an unpleasant whiff of elitist post-Americanism."[80] In the same vein, Gelernter laments that corporations are prepared to cut deals with human-rights violators like China and Saudi Arabia because, having been "[c]ut off from history and their own national and religious traditions," today's "globalists" are now "adrift on the amoral seas of international business, where such ideas as liberty and truth, justice and democracy are either dead weight or liabilities."[81] The problem is not the incentives generated by capitalism itself, but that capitalism has become culturally compromised by the liberal dispensation, which undermines its capacity for moral self-regulation. Nihilistic CEOs are thus in their own way just as susceptible to the blandishments of liberalism as the forgotten girls of Jersey City. Both have internalized the same liberal values and merely act them out in different ways.

It is "negative orientation to privilege," writes Codevilla, that distinguishes the corporate officer who wants his company to grow by producing a better product at lower cost from his colleague who wants his company to join the "Business Roundtable of large corporations" whose close ties to government will move it closer to the taxpayer-subsidized feeding trough. It is also "negative orientation to privilege" that distinguishes "the school-teacher who resents the union to which he is forced to belong for putting the union's interests above those of parents wishing to choose their children's schools."[82] Corporate America (and therefore its Republican backers) may be properly criticized, but its vices are not uniquely nefarious or conservative, because they are ultimately symmetrical with those driving the traditional constituents of the Democratic Party. If Republicans appear to act inconsistently with their professed laissez-faire principles by disbursing "corporate welfare," this is not, as the Left believes, because Republicans are the designated servants of specific class interests, but a reflection of the growing hegemony of cultural liberalism. Having first eroded America's traditional "negative orientation toward privilege" within its core constituencies, like teachers' unions, liberalism has now infiltrated big business, where this negative orientation is being eroded as well. Big business and big government are just two alternative vehicles through which the people of fashion prosecute their war against the austere

[80] Ingraham, *Shut Up & Sing*, pgs. 24-25.
[81] David Gelernter, *America-Lite: How Imperial Academia Dismantled Our Culture (and Ushered In the Obamacrats)* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012), pg. 151.
[82] Codevilla, *The Ruling Class*, pg. 55.

Republican virtue bequeathed by the founders, against the "negative orientation toward privilege" of the common people.

With the economic and the cultural having been blurred into each other in this fashion, it is only a short step to the suggestion that it is liberals, not conservatives, who are implicated in an unholy alliance with corporate America. And Goldberg suggests precisely this. "[T]here's virtually no major issue in the culture wars," he writes, "where big business has played a major role on the American right while there are dozens of examples of corporations supporting the liberal side."[83] After all, corporations "have accepted the totalitarian logic of diversity gurus," who insist that "if you aren't actively promoting diversity—with goals, timetables, and the like—you are actively opposing it."[84] John Ransom detects the same collusion in Citibike, a bike-sharing program established as part of the federal bailout of Citigroup. This, he chastises, is a wasteful program that merely subsidized the "feel-good hipness of those who know better than you," so that affluent liberals might better advertise their environmental bona fides.[85]

Liberals' collaboration with corporate America betrays that they have never been categorically committed to equality as such, and have only wielded the ideal as a cudgel against the bourgeois culture. This was formerly epitomized by America's stodgy, old-fashioned patrician class. But with America's upper crust now repudiating traditional values and signing onto avant-garde ones like diversity and environmentalism, it has endeared itself to progressives, who now pursue their egalitarianism at the expense of others who have not signed on, the ordinary Americans who stubbornly resist the liberal dispensation. Today's "self-described progressives," observes Harris, are very well connected to big corporations and usually "display nothing but contempt for the Chamber of Commerce mentality of America's small-business people."[86] The latter are not people of fashion, after all, and so their interests and values must be discounted.

* * *

All this might be dismissed as just a long line of intellectually gratuitous ad hominem attacks. After all, the narcissistic self-indulgence of Hollywood celebrities can have no logical

[83] Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism*, pg. 312.
[84] Ibid., pg. 315.
[85] http://finance.townhall.com/columnists/johnransom/2014/05/26/another-liberal-amenity-for-the-urban-upper-class-courtesy-taxpayers-n1843333/page/full
[86] Lee Harris, *The Next American Civil War: The Populist Revolt Against the Liberal Elite* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), pg. 48.

bearing on the question of whether upper-income tax rates are fair or not. And whether or not the typical CEO has more common decency than Barbara Streisand, his decision to outsource jobs to China is exponentially more consequential than her condescending treatment of hotel staff. These are the "real issues," say liberals.

But conservative claimants of cultural oppression believe that the "real issues" cannot be the subject of rational, undistorted communication under the present cultural dispensation, in which conservatives have ahead of time been adjudged morally bankrupt, the targets of a silent narrative defaming them at every turn. "Day after day," laments Codevilla, "the Ruling Class's imputations—racist, stupid, prone to violence, incapable of running things—hit like artillery cover for the advance of legislation and regulation to restrict and delegitimize."[87] Conservative claims of cultural oppression are not assessments of the proposed legislation but responses to the artillery cover that precedes it, not ordinary political discourse but a meta-discourse aiming to transform the conditions under which ordinary political discourse transpires. "Identity politics" are no mere distraction from the substantive questions, because the balance of power on this front is the ineluctable background against which "substantive" issues are conceptualized and debated.

This is something the Left can recognize when it comes to its own causes. The consciousness-raising exhorted by its critical theorists, along with their imputations of structural or unconscious racism, sexism, and homophobia, are not as a strict logical matter relevant to the highest-order principles of distributive justice invoked on behalf of women and minorities. Yet these identity-based accusations are not dismissed as idle distractions from more "serious" bread-and-butter issues, because it is understood that the former cannot but impinge on the latter. However, rhetorical rules of the road which may be properly adopted by academic elites in defense of their preferred victims are dismissed as anti-intellectual ad hominems whenever invoked by conservatives on behalf of ordinary Americans. The Left is permitted to "subdue" its ideological opponents through "aggressive demystification." But conservatives who undertake to do the same are accused of harboring "a curious amassing of petty, unrelated beefs with the world."

Seen in this light, the question is not whether conservatives' anti-aristocratic discourse is intellectually honest, but whether it is any more dishonest than liberalism and its anti-conservative discourses. Sowell observes that the Left-Right dichotomy is "a somewhat Ptolemaic view of the political universe, with the political left being in the center of the universe and all who differ—in

[87] Codevilla, *The Ruling Class*, pg. 63.

any direction—being called the 'right.'" This, says Sowell, is what allows liberals to suggest that "fascists are just more extreme versions of 'conservatives,' in the same sense in which socialism is a more extreme version of the welfare state," and so discredit conservatives through guilt by association.[88] But if the Left insists on associating conservatives with fascists merely because both can, in very different ways, be set in opposition to the empty abstraction of "equality," then conservatives will respond in kind. They will offer their own Ptolemaic system centering around their own empty abstraction and their own brand of guilt by association—a system in which environmentalism, diversity, and teachers' unions are no less than special favors to investment banks set in opposition to "negative orientation toward privilege." The critical theory of the Right concerns itself with power rather than truth and sees truth in whatever promises to erode liberal power.

4. The Liberal as Crypto-Imperialist

The displacement of the economic by the cultural can also have foreign policy implications. Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education*, which initiated the author's notoriety as a conservative commentator, made a point of upbraiding the multicultural Left's hypocrisy in celebrating non-Western cultures as the noble victims of Western imperialism while papering over the inconvenient truth that these racist, chauvinistic, and homophobic cultures reject the values for which the Left claims to stand.[89] The Left refuses to denounce such cultures as barbaric and retrograde because it must maintain victim solidarity between the Third World and women, homosexuals, and other minorities in America, who are thought to suffer under the same yoke of oppression.[90] But then these Left multiculturalists are actually exploiting the Third World for their own purposes, using its denizens as mouthpieces for their sophisticated critiques of American society, ethnocentrically imposing their own political categories on foreign cultures where they do not belong.[91] In "subordinat[ing] the understanding of Asia, Africa, and Latin America to Western ideological

[88] Thomas Sowell, *The Vision of the Anointed: Self-Congratulation as a Basis for Social Policy* (New York: Basic Books 1995), pg. 209.
[89] Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), pg. 86.
[90] Ibid., pg. 80.
[91] Ibid., pg. 72.

prejudices" the Left had embarked on a "new cultural imperialism no less narrow and bigoted than that of colonialist researchers in safari outfits and pith helmets."[92]

D'Souza's later *The Enemy at Home* also accuses the Left of cultural imperialism, but in a different way that inverts the argument of *Illiberal Education*. *The Enemy at Home* is a response to the Left's claim that it was American foreign policy which precipitated the 9/11 attacks, and that America therefore bears a share of the responsibility for them. While most conservatives decry such self-reproach as un-American, D'Souza concedes that it carries a grain of truth. Those who maintain that 9/11 was the predictable consequence of American decisions are not altogether off the mark, for there is indeed a sense in which "We made them do this to us." However, these leftists overlook that "it is precisely *they*—their actions and values—and not the foreign policy decisions of conservatives or mainstream liberals, which are the root cause of the problem."[93] Muslim rage toward America has in fact been fueled by the imperialistic ambitions of the cultural Left, which has "fostered a decadent American culture that angers and repulses traditional societies, especially those in the Islamic world that are being overwhelmed with this culture."[94]

The Left, charges D'Souza, has been "waging an aggressive global campaign to undermine the traditional patriarchal family and to promote secular values in non-Western cultures,"[95] imposing its own "liberal family values"[96] on traditional societies. Along with sundry multinational treaties and international conferences, the United Nations "provides the left with venues through which to elevate their own priorities into universal human rights" and then bully non-Western leaders into adopting them.[97] These are America's real crimes against the developing world. Muslim resentment toward America is an understandable response, not to any economically or militarily imperialistic foreign policy decisions, but to the cultural decadence that the liberal elites cultivate at home and then export abroad in the name of freedom and progress. Muslims do indeed resent some aspects of American foreign policy, like support for Israel. But this is a mundane clash of interest, not an existential threat to Islam.[98] By contrast, what Muslims see as "the coercive transmission of corrupt American values to the Muslim world"[99] is just such

[92] Ibid., pg 81.
[93] D'Souza, *The Enemy at Home*, pg. 3.
[94] Ibid., pg. 2.
[95] Ibid., pg. 2.
[96] Ibid., pg. 154.
[97] Ibid., pg. 260.
[98] Ibid., pg. 102.
[99] Ibid., pg. 103.

a threat. This cannot but yield a festering resentment and desire to lash out, which culminated in 9/11.

Many conservatives believe that Muslims hate the West because they hate the values of prosperity, freedom, and democracy. But D'Souza argues that this is a misunderstanding:

> [W]hat angers religious Muslims is not the American Constitution but the scandalous sexual mores they see in American movies and television. What disgusts them is not free elections but the sights of hundreds of homosexuals kissing one another and taking marriage vows. The person that horrifies them the most is not John Locke but Hillary Clinton.[100]

The D'Souza of *Illiberal Education* posited a very wide chasm between the values of the Third World and those of ordinary Americans. But the D'Souza of *The Enemy at Home* minimizes the divide, arguing that most Muslims are not radicals but traditionalists, who just like American conservatives embrace freedom and democracy, and merely ask that these principles be construed consistently with their traditional values. Muslims in the developing world may not support the full gamut of rights and liberties to which we have grown accustomed. But it is to be expected that the meaning of freedom and democracy will be inflected by local traditions. Given that "most European countries have democratically chosen to relinquish some of their economic liberties in the interest of economic security," why "can't Muslim countries choose to give up some of their civil liberties in order to promote civic morality?"[101]

With the differences between Islam and traditional American values having been suitably downplayed, D'Souza is positioned to offer a solution to the problems that precipitated 9/11. And this is an alliance between Muslim and Christian traditionalists. As a result of the Left's prominent role in international activism and popular culture, "traditional Muslims see one America and do not realize that there are two Americas,"[102] do not realize that many Americans share their revulsion toward the pornographic culture that the cultural Left pushes on Christians and Muslims alike. It is therefore imperative that conservatives convey to traditional Muslims that they "share common ground" on traditional values.[103] While the Left "is allied with some radical Muslims in opposition to American foreign policy," the Right is "allied with an even larger group of Muslims in their opposition to American social and cultural depravity."[104] Winning the war on terror

[100] Ibid., pg. 16.
[101] Ibid., pg. 280.
[102] Ibid., pg. 278.
[103] Ibid., pg. 276.
[104] Ibid., pg. 25.

requires creating a wedge between a minority of Islamist radicals and the great mass of tradition-minded but non-fanatical Muslims, who can be won over to America's side. However, this requires an honest acknowledgment of Muslim cultural grievances, the first step toward a new solidarity between ordinary Americans and indigenous Third World peoples, both of which are oppressed by a common enemy, the liberal elites.

* * *

D'Souza's hypothesis attracted few supporters, even among the conservatives for whom his book was written. But *The Enemy at Home* is best understood, not as a thesis of international relations, but as a highly innovative conservative claim of cultural oppression. The underlying impetus is revealed in D'Souza proposal that

> [t]he right should organize an international conference on the effects of Hollywood and American popular culture on non-Western cultures. It would be fascinating to hear from Muslims and other traditional people about how their local cultures are being affected by Hollywood movies and TV shows. Besides, on what basis would self-styled American liberals object to a proposal so open-minded and multicultural?[105]

Whereas the D'Souza of *Illiberal Education* sought to outflank the Left from the Right, by seizing upon the Left's moral universalism, the D'Souza of *The Enemy at Home* attempts to outflank the Left *from the Left,* by seizing upon its moral relativism. The goal is not just to expose hypocrisy but to *subdue liberalism* by *forcing liberals into the position of conservatives*. For it now the Left, not the Right, that appears to be foisting its own parochialism on unwilling others. And so it is the Left, not the Right, that is truly guilty of xenophobic intolerance. D'Souza observes that the American media portrayed Dutch politician Pim Fortunyn as a "right-wing extremist" who was assassinated by a radical Muslim on account of his hostility to Muslim immigration. In this way, the media managed to associate Islamophobia with the Right. But his was in fact an Islamophobia of the Left. As "Europeans recognized, Fortuyn was no right-winger" but rather a "flamboyant homosexual whose argument was that Muslim immigrants were, on account of their religious beliefs, threatening the core values of Holland," which included "legal drugs, legal pornography, legal prostitution, and widespread social acceptance of homosexuality."[106] Islam and conservatism are united in their opposition to these currents. And this is why conservatives should be embracing

[105] Ibid., pg. 284.
[106] Ibid., pg. 125.

multicultural respect for Islam rather than ceding this territory to the Left, which can never truly tolerate Islam.

The Right has become the Left in order to accuse the Left of becoming the Right because reconceptualizing imperialism as cultural, rather than economic or military, dominance allows D'Souza to reinterpret events that were widely understood to betray the moral failings of conservatives into symbols for the moral failings of liberals. The Abu Ghraib incident in Iraq was associated with "prisoner abuse, lack of accountability, and torture," and so was cited as "a textbook case of the abuses of empire."[107] Thus characterized, the abuse of Iraqi detainees redounded to the anti-imperialism narrative of the Left. But D'Souza observes that the incident wasn't terribly egregious as such abuses go. Far more gruesome forms of torture are commonplace in the Muslim World, which is well accustomed to prisoner abuse and unaccountable governments. Rather, Abu Ghraib's unique injuriousness must be understood in more culturally specific terms, and this is the *sexual* humiliation and degradation of the Iraqi detainees. These abuses served "as a metaphor for how little Americans care for other people's sacred values, and for the kind of humiliation that America seeks to impose on the Muslim world."[108] The sexual humiliation of the detainees reflected "the sexual immodesty of liberal America,"[109] which had infected the minds of the perpetrators. Liberals would assign responsibility for Abu Ghraib to the benighted, but D'Souza is suggesting that the perpetrators had been seduced by the vision of the anointed. Had they been "professors at an elite liberal arts college, their videotaped orgies might easily have become the envy of academia." But being mere "low-life Appalachians," they were simply unequipped to defend their depravity with any "elevated thoughts"[110]—as can the liberal elites. The guilty soldiers could therefore serve as convenient scapegoats, when they were really just acting out an ethos that liberals have promoted for decades. Liberals refuse to see what was *distinctive* about Abu Ghraib because to see this would also be to see their own complicity in creating the moral atmosphere that permitted it.

To see this is to see the illiberalism inherent to liberalism. Will Kymlicka observes that even as contemporary liberals have become more reluctant to impose liberalism on foreign countries, they have simultaneously become more willing to impose it on illiberal national

[107] Ibid., pg. 147.
[108] Ibid., pg. 150.
[109] Ibid., pg. 151.
[110] Ibid., pg. 151.

minorities. This is inconsistent, however, because all the arguments against the former also apply against the latter. Whether at home or abroad, the forcible imposition of liberalism will be perceived as "a form of aggression or paternalistic colonialism."[111] This is the challenge D'Souza raises for those who ordinarily make it a principle to approach non-Western cultures in a spirit of intellectual charity, on the premise that our reflexive aversion to their ostensible illiberalism may be tainted with ethnocentric prejudice. For the upshot of D'Souza's argument is that liberals must treat American traditionalists with the same deference that they would extend to denizens of the developing world. However one weighs the morality of "imposing liberalism," there can be no rational basis for letting the mere geographic proximity of American traditionalists enter the equation.

The Enemy at Home is a *cosmopolitan defense of traditionalism*, a cosmopolitan defense of what liberals would prefer to dismiss as the benighted parochialism of American social conservatives. Frank would trace the cultural grievances of Kansans to the machinations of cynical Republican strategists. But this analysis cannot be extended to the entire Third World, with which D'Souza urges a conservative alliance based on a shared cultural oppression. If leftists dismiss the entire state of Kansas as a "bunch of yahoos," as Scarborough alleges, this might be for the same reason why, according to D'Souza, "[m]ost people on the left won't admit that they consider Muslims too backward and fanatical to entrust them with the ballot."[112] The discourse of cultural imperialism, traditionally wielded by the left to debunk the pretensions of "white" or "bourgeois" culture is now wielded by conservatives to indict liberalism and its treatment of its own colonized populations, the Muslims abroad and Christians at home who are therefore natural allies. Conservative America is thus in a role analogous to the one enjoyed by "indigenous cultures" within the Left, just as the Left is in the role of colonial administrators arrogantly scoffing at the native folkways of "primitive" people. If the D'Souza of *Illiberal Education* could accuse leftists of employing non-Western culture as mouthpieces for their own critiques of American society, then the D'Souza of *The Enemy at Home* appears to have learned a thing or two from them.

[111] Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford University Press, 1995), pg. 167.
[112] D'Souza, *The Enemy at Home*, pg. 259.

5. The Liberal as Crypto-Theocrat

James Hunter observes that notwithstanding the mutual mistrust between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews in an earlier era of American history, these groups were united by an overarching consensus on the basic sources of moral truth, with biblical imagery and metaphor uniting otherwise antagonistic religious traditions. However, the secularization and expanding pluralism of the Twentieth Century eroded these hitherto uncontested understandings, which formed the unifying background of sometimes virulent doctrinal disagreements As a result, the pivotal rifts in American life no longer revolve around differences of doctrinal creed. Americans now find themselves divided, not as Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, but as adherents of "orthodoxy" and adherents of "progressivism," with these earlier groupings now subdividing internally along these new lines. What was previously uncontested, the basic sources of moral truth, has now become a source of intense controversy, overshadowing heretofore pivotal sectarian rifts.[113]

Orthodoxy, says Hunter, involves a commitment on the part of adherents to an external, definable, and transcendent authority, a "consistent, unchangeable measure of value, purpose, goodness, and identity"[114] which presupposes "a dynamic reality that is independent of, prior to, and more powerful than human experience."[115] By contrast, cultural progressivism defines moral authority in primarily "this-worldly" terms that synthesize the "spirit of rationalism and subjectivism" that defines the modern age.[116] The first component of this synthesis is the tradition of "Enlightenment naturalism," which grounds moral legitimacy in empirical evidence about the human condition. The second is the "tradition of Enlightenment subjectivism," now called "liberal or expressive individualism," according to which our psychological nature enjoys a crucial moral significance that a legitimate social order must acknowledge.[117]

This is undoubtedly how most progressives frame their differences with traditionalists. And some traditionalists agree, albeit with a different set of normative valences, as when they plead for the insufficiency of human reason as a moral compass or reduce "Enlightenment subjectivism" to self-indulgent egoism. However, conservative claims of cultural oppression are

[113] James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books 1991), pg. 76.
[114] Ibid., pg. 44.
[115] Ibid., pg. 120.
[116] Ibid., pg. 44.
[117] Ibid., pgs. 124-25.

foremost defined by their *rejection* of Hunter's dichotomy. Lasch writes that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the "knowledge classes" is a "skeptical, iconoclastic state of mind," a commitment to a "culture of criticism" that is "understood to rule out religious commitments."[118] But as we have time and again observed, conservative claims of cultural oppression refuse to credit liberalism with a skeptical, iconoclastic state of mind. Liberalism is not only in error as to the proper role of religion in politics and society, but also in error as to *itself*, because it fails to recognize that *it*, liberalism, is no less of a religion, no less defined by a "consistent, unchangeable measure of value, purpose, goodness, and identity" than the traditional Christianity it despises. The pretense that liberals have transcended religion is a politically expedient sleight-of-hand that disguises what is one religion's arrogation of legal and political power. A secularist group like People for the American Way, writes Goldberg, "serves as a tireless mason in the construction of the wall between church and state, shrinking the public space for traditional religion and building the foundations of a secular counter-church of liberalism."[119] Liberalism is attacked, not *qua* Enlightenment hubris, but *qua* comprehensive religious creed that conceals itself behind a facade of Enlightenment rationalism.

Liberals will dismiss all this as empty rhetoric grounded in logical and semantic confusion. Nunberg writes that conservatives have, in a "semantic sleight of hand," exploited the ambiguity of the term "secular"— which can denote both active hostility to religion, as in Soviet Communism, and our own very different commitment to church-state separation—in order to spuriously associate a group like the ACLU with avowedly atheistic totalitarian regimes.[120] With American secularism portrayed as a comprehensive doctrine that contests religion's answers to substantive cosmological questions, it becomes easy to then portray liberalism, the foremost defender of secularism, as a kind of counter-religion seeking to supplant traditional religion under a veneer of religious neutrality and kindred concepts. However, this logic seems premised on the facile semantic equivocation described by Nunberg, conservatives' obstinate refusal to acknowledge the nature of "secularism" as it exists in *our* society.

[118] Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), pg. 215.
[119] Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism*, pg. 337.
[120] Nunberg, *Talking Right*, pg. 161.

However, conservatives' gambits to "religionize" liberalism rests on more than just this, and rather reflect a general theory of human nature and history that enjoys widespread credence in conservative circles. Bork explains:

> The inner need for pervasive meaning was satisfied through most of history in Western civilization by religions. But as religious faith began a retreat, beginning in the eighteenth century and proceeding apace in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the intellectual's need for meaning did not decline but remained urgent. Now, however, meaning must be found in a secular belief system. It is difficult to think of anything that would fit this specification for most intellectuals other than politics. For a few, meaning might be found in devotion to a field like scientific inquiry, but for the vast majority of intellectuals, for whom no such achievements are possible, politics must be the answer. To be a civil religion, however, this politics cannot be the politics of mundane clashes of material interests and compromises; it must be a politics of ideology.
>
> In our time that means left-wing politics, which offers a comprehensive world view and a promise of ultimate salvation in a utopia that conventional politics cannot offer. The religious impulse underlying left radicalism has been noted. Weber remarked that when certain types of German intellectualism turned against religion, there occurred "the rise of the economic eschatological faith of socialism." Not only communism but fascism and Nazism were faith systems of the Left, offering transcendental meaning to their adherents.[121]

While these intellectuals claim their values are intellectually motivated, these in fact express an "inner need for pervasive meaning." Having lost their moorings in traditional theistic faith, intellectuals now pursue ad hoc and ersatz spiritual fulfillment elsewhere, in radical politics, while disguising their spiritual motivations in a façade of sober rationalism and pragmatism. "Deprived of God, human beings will always seek another all explaining creed," warns Herbert London.[122] And this all-explaining creed is liberalism itself, the vision of the anointed and its crusade against the benighted. Left intellectuals are not just innocently misguided in their views but culpably blind in their understanding of their own motivations. By rejecting traditional religion, they have left themselves psychologically vulnerable to dangerous political seductions in whose name they would unravel traditional norms in favor of a void that only totalitarian ideology can fill.

It is the allure of secular eschatology, argues Bork, that explains the upheavals of the 1960s. For "[w]ithout reference to a supernatural being, SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] was proposing, largely through politics, to bring their secular vision of the kingdom of God to fruition on earth, now."[123] Unrestrained by the humility inculcated by traditional religion, this novel, New

[121] Bork, *Slouching toward Gommorah*, pg. 85.
[122] Herbert London, *America's Secular Challenge: The Rise of a New National Religion* (New York: Encounter Books, 2008), pg. 36.
[123] Bork, *Slouching toward Gommorah*, pg. 27.

Left religiosity represented a narcissistic indulgence in feelings of personal transcendence, the impossible yearning to extricate oneself once and for all from the shackles of inherited tradition and will a new self into being. Like other features of the 1960s, this millenarianism and yearning for transcendence lives on in what has become mainstream liberalism, as in the Supreme Court's announcement in *Casey v. Planned Parenthood* that "[a]t the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."[124] This is not a purely secular ideal, but the secularization of what was formerly experienced as a religious longing to rise above the limitations of our mundane workaday existence, which liberals now pursue politically.

Not all conservatives trace the religious inception of modern liberalism to the 1960s. As we observed, Goldberg traces the subterranean meaning of liberalism to the Progressive era, which it turns out was just as Christian as it was fascist. While there were some secular progressives, Progressivism as a movement was "fundamentally Christian."[125] Being "dedicated in the most fundamental way to the Christianization of American life," progressives wanted to smash the wall of separation between church and state.[126] One prominent progressive, for example, denounced the practice of seeing the world "divided into things sacred and things secular" and asserted that "to a Christian all things must be sacred—his business as well as his church."[127] Like Bork, Goldberg argues that these originating impulses live on in contemporary liberalism, where they have been provided a secular facade. Though Hillary Clinton is often denounced as a "radical leftist in liberal sheep's clothing," she is more accurately viewed "as an old-style progressive and a direct descendant of the Social Gospel movement of the 1920s and 1930s."[128] The Christian language and imagery may no longer be in vogue, but the same agenda is now advanced through "a secularized vocabulary of 'hope.'"[129]

Whatever their preferred genealogy of liberalism, conservative claimants of cultural oppression are united in the conviction that liberal ideals are post-hoc rationalizations for other-worldly religious passions seeking this-worldly incarnation. The meaning of contemporary liberalism is found, not in the sober musings of Locke, Kant, or Mill, but in a perverse will to

[124] Ibid., pgs. 103, 87, 111.
[125] Goldberg, *The Tyranny of Clichés*, pg. 82.
[126] Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism*, pg. 87.
[127] Ibid., pg. 82.
[128] Ibid., pg. 319.
[129] Ibid., pg. 15.

secularize religious impulses that should not be secularized. While liberalism would associate hostility to the church-state separation with ignorant Bible-thumpers, it is itself ignorant of its own intellectual lineage, which was premised on precisely this hostility. In resisting the liberal agenda, it is therefore conservatives who carry the mantle of secularism. For it is they, not liberals, who are demanding what is all things considered a *higher* wall of separation between church and state. Whereas conservatives who would interject religion into public life only ask for a seasonal nativity scene or a few moments of voluntary school prayer, liberal interjectors attempt to erect an entire political order on the foundations of the do-goodery that was once thought the proper purview of churches and synagogues. Conservatives may be the ones speaking in defense of Judeo-Christian values. But it is liberals who seek the more thoroughgoing imposition of those values through their redistributive economic schemes. Modern liberalism, writes Goldberg, is "a religion of state worship whose sacrificial Christ was JFK and whose Pauline architect was LBJ."[130] Liberals do not couch their commitments in religious terms, of course. But of what moment can this be, ask conservatives, when what matters is the substance of their agenda, not the verbiage? Secular liberalism may be less codified than other theologies, but this informality is simply the measure of its disingenuousness.

* * *

The notion that liberalism immanentizes what were previously upheld as transcendent values enables conservatives to recast a wide range of political disagreements as a clash of rival sectarian creeds. The tenets of secularism, warns London, "form the basis for a seductive new religion" that is "based upon individual self-directed actions as the source of salvation…and upon manifest disapproval of the transcendent." This is in fact a "new form of paganism."[131] Thus, what liberals would characterize as a conflict between imperious moralists seeking to foist their personal values on the wider community and righteous individualists defending their liberties is reconceptualized as a religious struggle between two collectives, a struggle between Judeo-Christianity and a paganism that ascribes absolute value to this-worldly self-affirmation. Though imagining themselves liberated from old-time religion, liberals have simply regressed into a religious tradition even older and more superstitious than the one they decry. They are defending,

[130] Ibid., pg. 215.
[131] London, *America's Secular Challenge*, pg. 21.

not the individual against the collective, but the interests of one sectarian creed against those of another. Their victories herald, not progress toward enlightenment, but devolution toward paganism.

Writing in *The American Conservative*, Donald Devine warns of a resurgent paganism in the imminent triumph of same-sex marriage. Liberals will uphold same-sex marriage as the victory of sexual individualism against the communal restraints of traditional Christianity. But Devine believes that this image stands the truth on its head. For it was Christianity that first introduced individualism into the world. The denizens of pagan antiquity were entirely submerged in clan, cult, tribe, and state. These authoritarian social relations were pervaded by sexually exploitative hierarchies, of which the practice of homosexuality was an important component. Though homosexuality may now be associated with individual self-expression, it was originally defended as part and parcel of the old pagan order. And what we now call traditional values have always been the formula for overcoming that order. It was Christianity which, in severing divine authority from Caesar's, first created a space for individualism, offering the family as a refuge from the pagan hierarchies that formerly repressed the individual. The imminent triumph of gay marriage, then, is only a reassertion of collectivist hierarchy, not a victory for individual freedom. So much is evident, argues Devine, in the massive influence that liberal-dominated institutions have exerted on behalf of gay rights. These institutions told the American people "that allowing equality in marriage was the moral thing to do." But in pushing this message on those who disagreed, they were replacing "the individual freedom arising from Christianity" with "an assertion of cultural and political power."[132] And this is what opponents of the homosexual agenda are ultimately resisting.

Devine's argument must strike liberals as a convoluted story if ever there was one. But conservative claimants of cultural oppression believe that this incredulity just testifies to liberals' obliviousness. Insensible to their creed's hidden, subterranean heritage, liberals cannot recognize that gay rights is, like every liberal cause, driven onward by a subterranean tribalism that hides itself from the naked eye.

Coulter detects a resurgent paganism and an accompanying hostility to Christianity in the zeal of environmentalists. Liberals "swoon in pagan admiration of Mother Earth, mystified and overawed by its power" even as they "deny the Biblical idea of dominion and progress, the most

[132] http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/same-sex-marriage-isnt-about-freedom/

ringing affirmation of which is the United States of America," Coulter writes.[133] While liberals eschew Christian theology, that theology has simply been recapitulated in pagan/secular terms, as traditional religious impulses seek out corrupted this-worldly vessels. Goldberg thus notes that an "environmentally themed hotel in California has replaced the Bible in all its rooms with [Al] Gore's An Inconvenient Truth" and that "anyone with kids certainly understands how the invocations to 'reduce, reuse, recycle' are taught like catechisms in schoolrooms across the country."[134] Some conservatives argue that climate science itself is an outlet for this theological perversion. Ingraham explains that the church of "Apocalyptic Manmade Global Warming" has "a holy scripture you cannot question" as well as high priests "whose interpretations are infallible" and whose sermons "warn of hellfire, rising oceans, and plagues as punishment for our sins."[135] Environmentalists are obstinate and dogmatic because they have unbeknownst to themselves conflated the secular and the profane, seizing upon secular concerns to channel religious impulses that they would reject in their original form, but which have now been reborn in their calls for secular progress.

David Horowitz detects the residues of Christian theology in politically correct education. Noting that a UC Santa Cruz course requires students to perform sections from the feminist play *The Vagina Monologues* before the class, Horowitz observes that this "was no doubt the procedure in religious monasteries during the Middle Ages, when students were required to perform Morality Plays exemplifying church doctrine."[136] What liberals present as progressive "hands on" or "student-centered" education is thus a contemporary variant of an essentially religious motif. Not content to merely present and argue their radical opinions, leftists furthermore seek to inculcate them through a secularized religious discipline. The rise of the modern research university is alleged to have eclipsed the sectarian denominational college in higher education. But the spirit of the latter has actually been reborn in the former, which has become "a secularized version of the church school, whose purpose was to train students in a religious creed." This is why academic radicals see academic freedom and intellectual diversity as threats to their "calling."[137] What these

[133] Ann Coulter, *Godless: The Church of Liberalism* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007), pg. 3.
[134] Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism*, pg. 382.
[135] Laura Ingraham, *Power to the People* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2007), pgs., 282-84.
[136] David Horowitz and Jacob Laskin, *One-Party Classroom: How Radical Professors at America's Top Colleges Indoctrinate Students and Undermine Our Democracy* (New York: Crown Forum, 2009), pg. 256.
[137] David Horowitz, *Indoctrination U.: The Left's War Against Academic Freedom* (New York: Encounter Books, 2009), pg. 127.

radicals promote as their "revolutionary" or "transformative" projects are just secularized iterations of what was once called "redemption." And redemption now means redemption from conservatism. The academic radicals wish to create a world without racism, sexism or classism, and this essentially means the purging of conservatives—a "purification ritual" in which "an army of saints" roots out "the party of sinners."[138]

The purpose of all these comparisons is not simply to discredit the welfare state, same-sex marriage, environmentalism, or academia, but to subdue liberalism and thus "level the playing field" between the anointed and the benighted. The objective is to establish that liberals and conservatives are *arguing on the same plane* notwithstanding liberals' presumption that they have transcended the sectarian narrowness of conservatives. Contrasting their reason to the mere faith of conservatives, liberals imagine they have achieved a rare state of existential and epistemic liberation. But conservative claimants of cultural oppression insist that the lines liberals draw here are blurrier than they are prepared to acknowledge. For what liberals interpret as their liberated condition is actually their enslavement to religious impulses which they fail to recognize as such—but which conservatives, being securely anchored tradition, possess the sagacity and historical memory to discern. What passes for enlightenment, a stance of critical reflexivity, is merely the medium for religious impulses that, having been unmoored by secularization, must now be expressed indirectly and disingenuously.

The difference between religious traditionalism and secular liberalism is not that one is sectarian whilst the other is cosmopolitan, but that one freely acknowledges its sectarianism while the other conceals it. In acknowledging that their powers of reason are constrained by a pre-rational worldview, conservative claimants of cultural oppression believe they demonstrate a self-awareness absent among those who arrogantly deny their human limitations, a Socratic humility that is to be contrasted with the epistemic hubris of the liberal elites. The difference between the benighted and the anointed is the difference, not between faith and reason, but between faith and blind faith, between a faith that recognizes itself as such and a faith that hides its true nature.

[138] Ibid., pg. xxvii.

6. The Liberal as Crypto-Conservative

As we observed with Frank in Chapter One, ridiculing the "personal tastes and pretensions" of liberals has become the "stock-in-trade" of many conservative writers. And nowhere are these examined more closely than in David Brooks's *Bobos in Paradise*. As we saw, many conservatives believe that the legacy of the 60s lies in bohemia's colonization of mainstream American life. The overt, unabashed radicalism has subsided. But it lives on surreptitiously in the mores and tastes of the liberal culture and, more consequentially, in the lower classes at whose expense the "new class" aggrandizes itself. But *Bobos in Paradise* takes issue with what Brooks argues is a one-sided picture. While the legacy of the 60s does indeed live on in our contemporary tastes and mores, the bohemianism has actually become *fused* with traditional values in the bourgeois bohemians, or Bobos, a new upper middle-class identity that struggles to maintain an always tension-fraught synthesis of a traditional middle-class work-ethic and new vintage countercultural ideals. In a whole host of spheres, from sex to morality to leisure to work, it has become difficult to distinguish the antiestablishment renegade from the pro-establishment company man, who have now become one.[139]

Brooks does not identify the Bobos as liberals. They are moderates by temperament and may hold a range of economic and foreign policy views. Nevertheless, bohemia constitutes one of the two pillars of their identity, and it is clear that the Bobos are "culturally liberal" in the sense that aggrieves conservatives—cosmopolitan, multiculturally-inclined, tradition-averse, and egalitarian. Unlike most conservatives, however, Brooks is prepared to describe this cultural liberalism in fairly favorable terms. The old WASP elite was an elite of blood and breeding that was temperamentally anti-intellectual and unreflectively accepted its elite status as just the fabric of things. But as heirs to the counter-culture, the Bobos cannot take their status for granted and are acutely conscious that it must be earned.[140] Unable to rely on the prestige of inherited family pedigree, they must produce "subtle signifiers that will display [their] own spiritual and intellectual identity."[141] To this end, they have developed a "code of expressive individualism" that celebrates "endless innovation, self-expansion, and personal growth."[142] The prime directive of the educated

[139] David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: the New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), pg. 10.
[140] Ibid., pg. 22.
[141] Ibid., pg. 17.
[142] Ibid., pg. 226.

classes is now "Thou shalt construct thine own identity."[143] Some conservatives would reduce the legacy of the 60s to unbridled narcissism and self-indulgence. But the Bobos seem motivated, not by "a crass and vulgar selfishness" based in "narrow self-interest or mindless accumulation," but by a "higher selfishness" based in spiritual fulfillment, emotional enrichment, and experiential variety.[144] While Brooks's characterizations may carry a tinge of the sardonic, they are a far cry from Himmelfarb's or Kimball's tones and despair and indignation.

Where *Bobos in Paradise* becomes a conservative claim of cultural oppression is not in Brooks's largely laudatory general characterizations, but in the entertaining minutiae of his off-the-cuff observations, which ironically eviscerate the substance of the general characterizations. Brooks's official position is that bohemia and the bourgeoisie have co-opted each other in equal measure.[145] Yet it is the bohemian values that loom largest in the official, and therefore superficial, text of Bobos attitudes while the bourgeois values lurk underneath the surface as the unspoken yet all-important subtext that reveals the hollowness of the bohemian façade.

The original bohemians identified with social outcasts and the poor, whom they upheld as victims of the bourgeois order.[146] And in this spirit, the Bobos adhere to a policy of "one-downmanship" to signal their disdain for the shallow artifice of social hierarchy. This is why the basic formula for social status in the Bobo world is net worth multiplied by antimaterialistic attitudes: "to be treated well in this world, not only do you have to show some income results; you have to perform a series of feints to show how little your worldly success means to you."[147] Thus, Bobos are drawn to "socially approved acts of antistatus deviance" that mock "your own success in a manner that simultaneously displays your accomplishments and your ironic distance from them."[148] In this spirit, a Bobo might respond to a question about where he went to school with "Harvard?," pronouncing it as though to suggest that the questioner might never have heard of America's most famous university.[149] The Bobo understands full well that his interlocutor has heard of Harvard, but he must remove any suggestion that his ego has become invested in its

[143] Ibid., pg. 34.
[144] Ibid., pg. 134.
[145] Ibid., pg. 43.
[146] Ibid., pg. 68.
[147] Ibid., pg. 50.
[148] Ibid., pg. 50.
[149] Ibid., pg. 51.

prestige. He wishes to be esteemed, not for his admission to Harvard, but for his indifference to his admission to Harvard.

This policy of one-downmanship is assisted by a "code of financial correctness" dictating that wealth be converted into spiritual and intellectual uplift.[150] So consumption patterns must always be defensible as satisfying a need rather than a mere want: "Spending on conspicuous display is evil, but it's egalitarian to spend money on parts of the house that would previously have been used by servants."[151] While "[o]nly a shallow person would spend hundreds of dollars on caviar," a "deep person would gladly shell out that much for top-of-the-line mulch." Spending $65,000 on a vintage Corvette is vulgar. But spending that much on a Range Rover with plenty of storage space is acceptable, because it can be classified as a tool. Bobos draw their self-esteem from their activities, not possession as such, and so are drawn to possessions that symbolize activity. Consumer products must signify, not raw wealth, but the realization of their highest ideals, which Range Rovers and top-of-the-line mulch serve to symbolize.

With such observations in mind, one begins to question whether Brooks truly believes that culture and counter-culture have co-opted each other in equal measure. For his concrete illustrations of this proposition continually insinuate that it is the counter-culture that has been co-opted by capitalism, and that Bobo anti-materialism is only a thin veil for a new form of status consciousness that is blind to its own nature. The Bobos' ostensibly "down-to-earth" tastes seem like excuses which this new identity makes for itself, a series of feints without deeper meaning. Seen in this light, Brooks's professed admiration for the Bobos' conciliatory synthesis seems like thinly-veiled flattery that is intended to be recognized as such. It is itself a form of Bobo irony, homage that it is extended with one hand and then retracted by the other.

Brooks's various forays into the subtleties of Bobo sensibilities seem consistently calibrated to highlight the paradox that the Bobo "code of expressive individualism" is indeed a *code.* The Bobos' tastes and habits seem typecast and predictable almost to the point of absurdity. The heretofore opposed cultures of bohemia and the bourgeoisie may now be fused. But this, we are told, is through the "squads of biscotti-nibbling Bobos" that can be spotted in "Latte towns" like Wayne, Pennsylvania.[152] These "squads" betray that Bobo individualism is highly codified

[150] Ibid., pg. 85.
[151] Ibid., pg. 89.
[152] Ibid., pgs. 61-62.

and incapable of delivering on the spiritual depth it advertises. If one asks Wayne's Great Harvest Bread Company to "slice the bread in the store, they look at you compassionately as one who has not yet risen to the higher realm of bread consciousness," observes Brooks.[153] The Bobos aspire to a higher consciousness, but this aspiration is ultimately a form of social signaling. While the Bobos ostensibly embrace the counter-culture, Brooks's close scrutiny reveals that they have unselfconsciously discarded its essential substance. The Bobos' innovation, self-expansion, and personal growth proceed along lines that are in their own way no less narrowly circumscribed than were the lives of the old WASP aristocracy they displaced. The "ideal Latte Town," Brooks tells us, "has a Swedish-style government, German-style pedestrian malls, Victorian houses, Native American crafts, Italian coffee, Berkeley human rights groups, and Beverly Hills income levels."[154] In short, the Bobos' expressive individualism has proven compatible with achieving a remarkable degree of social consensus on the nature of the good life.

The same basic of contradiction recurs in every sphere of Bobo endeavor. Many conservatives worry that "the forces of Anything Goes are sweeping through American culture." But Brooks argues that this oversimplifies as far as the Bobos are concerned. Bobos are indeed "far more relaxed about things like posture and proper attire." But they are "far more restrictive about anger, spitting, and smoking."[155] They do not instill their children with moral discipline in the traditional sense, but their preoccupation with their children's emotional development and career success provides a substitute for that discipline. The Bobos do not subscribe to the traditional Protestant work ethic. Yet they have "constructed their own ethos that creates a similar and perhaps even more rigorous system of restraints." In their fixation on health and exercise, Bobos "have reduced even leisure time to a form of self-discipline."[156] The traditional moralist restrains pleasure in the name of duty, but the Bobos are reconcilers who "strive to blur their duties with pleasure."[157] And this transforms many spheres of heretofore unmonitored activity into subjects of social surveillance. Bobos engaged in pastimes like skiing or tennis "are constantly evaluating each other to see who is serious and who is not," and "if you went out onto some field or trail or court and acted happy and goofy, you'd be regarded as someone who is insulting the

[153] Ibid., pg. 57.
[154] Ibid., pg. 104.
[155] Ibid., pg. 197.
[156] Ibid., pg. 138.
[157] Ibid., pg. 203.

whole discipline."[158] Bobos may be nonjudgmental in their articulated worldviews—embracing what Charles Murray calls a "code of ecumenical niceness."[159] But they become surreptitiously judgmental where judgmentalism may seem least called for.

Whereas the WASPs "liked refined manners that demonstrated self-mastery," the Bobos prefer "loose manners that demonstrate honesty." The WASPS would make a performance of entertaining their guests and let servants prepare dinner out of sight, but Bobos "invite their guests backstage to the kitchen and given them some veggies to chop."[160] Bobo "looseness," then, is no less ritualized than WASP self-mastery, no less a matter of conveying the right social queues to the right people at the right time. Uncomfortable with ostentation, the Bobos are attracted to "the perfectionism of small things" and to this end will occupy entire evenings scouring hardware catalogues for the "world's finest pullout spray head." But the idea here is to show "that you have so much brainpower to spare, you can even be thoughtful about your water flow."[161] What initially seems like a bohemian embrace pre-social, purely sensuous pleasure rooted in our animal nature is on closer inspection revealed to be an oblique form of social status-assertion, for which the Bobos' Romantic naturalness is only a facade. What presents itself as the natural self-love of Rousseau's savage turns out to be the artificial, other-directed pride of the civilized man. In each and every case, the Bobos can deliver only a simulacrum of the genuine article. The Bobos may scoff at the unreflective hang-ups of an earlier, more conservative America. But they are beholden to their own such hang-ups, which are not the less socially coercive for being unspoken and unacknowledged.

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These interrelated contradictions all follow logically from Brooks's basic thesis that the "social revolution of the late sixties was not a miracle or a natural disaster, the way it is sometimes treated by writers of the left and right," but rather the natural consequence of changes in the culture of upscale America that were already in the works.[162] Impeded by conventional notions of success, the rising members of the privileged classes engaged, "not only [in] a political effort to dislodge

[158] Ibid., pg. 212.
[159] Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010* (New York: Crown Forum, 2012), pg. 289.
[160] Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise*, pg. 83.
[161] Ibid., pg. 91.
[162] Ibid., pg. 31.

the establishment from the seats of power," but also in a cultural effort "to destroy whatever prestige still attached to the WASP lifestyle and the WASP moral code" and thereby open the door for a new dispensation that celebrated their spiritual and intellectual ideals.[163] If the most common Left and Right assessments of the 1960s are both inaccurate, this is because that generation revolted not as individuals—who might be described as either free-spirited or narcissistic and self-indulgent according to one's perspective—but as a distinct social *class* with distinct class interests.

The Bobos' expressive individualism is not only a code but moreover the code of a dominant class, to which others must now adapt:

> Today, America once again has a dominant class that defines the parameters of respectable opinion and taste—a class that determines conventional wisdom, that promulgates a code of good manners, that establishes a pecking order to give shape to society, that excludes those who violate its codes, that transmits its moral and etiquette codes down to its children, that imposes social discipline on the rest of society so as to improve the 'quality of life,' to use the contemporary phrase.[164]

Where the Left sees raw courage or idealism and the Right sees raw nihilism or irascibility, Brooks discerns a slowly evolved cultural sensibility, an intricate blend of continuity and discontinuity with the old ways. The radicals of the 1960s celebrated expressive individualism, but this was a culturally-mediated individualism that never fully overcame its origins in the old order. This is why Brooks goes out of his way to illustrate how the vices of the WASP *ancien régime* are always being recapitulated in the Bobo dispensation in one fashion or another. The Bobos are unlikely to actually use their expensive, professional-grade outdoor gear for the strenuous tasks for which they were designed. But "just as in the age of gentility hypocrisy was vice paying homage to virtue, so today among the Bobos rugged gear is comfort paying homage to adventure."[165] The Bobo ethos seems marked by a refreshing self-awareness and sociological objectivity that were conspicuously absent in WASP country-clubs. But what is refreshing when contrasted with old-fashioned stuffiness becomes exasperating when contrasted with the Bobos' own professed ideals, which they never really deliver on.

If the myriad hypocrisies don't much tarnish Brooks's overall assessment of the Bobos, whose confused synthesis of virtues he deems palatable, this is because he is in the end *writing as a conservative*. Resigned to the limits of human nature, Brooks recognizes that Bobo shallowness

[163] Ibid., pgs. 32 –33.
[164] Ibid., pg. 46.
[165] Ibid., pg. 90.

is not the worst thing to be wrought from the crooked timber of humanity. Indeed, the shallowness is merely the byproduct of the Bobo's visceral conservativism. If many conservatives' assessments of the 60s' legacy are unfairly harsh, this is because they overlook the ways in which its heirs, the Bobos, embody a version of the traditional values they cherish. When all is said and done, the Bobos "prefer a moral style that doesn't shake things up, but protects the status quo where it is good, and gently tries to forgive and reform the things that are not so good."[166]

Bobo idealism is halfhearted because the Bobos have become conservative in the Burkean sense. They are foremost concerned, not with challenging authority in the name of any totalizing ideals but with establishing "intimate authority," which means "setting up patterns, instilling habits, and creating contexts so that people are most likely to exercise individual responsibility."[167] Intimate authority is "authority as biology, with all members of the ecosystem exerting a gradual and subtle pressure on the others so the whole network can thrive."[168] Many Bobos would vehemently reject the conservative label, but "often the ones in the hemp clogs and ponytails are the most temperamentally conservative of all," observes Brooks. Indeed, "[i]f you go to places like Berkeley and Burlington, you see that this kind of conservatism can emerge directly out of liberalism."[169] This is the real message Brooks is sending liberals. His goal is to subdue liberalism by *exposing its subterranean conservatism*, for which the Bobos' liberalism is a shallow façade, mere stealth and subterfuge.

Burke remarked that "[s]eldom have two ages the same fashion in their pretexts and the same modes of mischief." For the spirit of vice "transmigrates" and "far from losing its principle of life by the change of its appearance, it is renovated in its new organ with the fresh vigour of a juvenile activity."[170] And the upshot of Brooks's observations is that this holds true of conservatism too, which has received "fresh vigour" from liberalism itself, conservatism's newest guise. Liberals' official ideals may not implicate what Jost et al. call "needs for order, structure, closure." But these needs nevertheless circumscribe the official ideals' concrete application and meaning. The adversarial attitudes of the 60s radicals may live on in the ironic detachment of the Bobos. But being ironic with respect to itself as well, that detachment is now safely embedded

[166] Ibid., pg. 250.
[167] Ibid., pg. 265.
[168] Ibid., pgs. 266.
[169] Ibid., pg. 268.
[170] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O' Brien (Penguin Books, 1968), pg. 248

within an essentially conservative ethos that circumscribes the Bobos' actual conduct and attitudes more thoroughly than it circumscribes their self-image—which Brooks seems to regard as a harmless indulgence.

The rising 60s generation detested the old WASP elites for "what was *perceived* to be their conformity, their formality, their traditionalism, their carefully defined gender roles, their ancestor worship, their privilege, their unabashed elitism, their unreflective lives, their self-satisfaction, their reticence, their contented affluence, their coldness."[171] But the Bobo order would give rise to new variants of these old vices, to new forms of self-satisfaction and conformism, new forms of unreflective common sense. The coldness of the WASP order has disappeared, but it resurfaces in the quiet judgmentalism that obtrudes itself on the tennis court of all places. Unabashed elitism has merely been replaced by abashed elitism, and formality has merely been replaced by formalized informality. However unappealing and unfounded the overt social snobbery of the WASPs may have been, it had the virtue of being upfront. Bobo pseudo-honesty has its virtues as well, but these always fall well short of what gets advertised

7. Concluding Remarks and Adumbrations: Conservative Conscientization?

Bobos in Paradise is a far cry from *Liberal Fascism*. Whereas Goldberg excoriates liberals for their crypto-fascism, Brooks credits them for their crypto-conservatism. Whereas Goldberg accuses liberals of conniving to destroy intimate authority through totalitarian centralization, Brooks praises them for having renounced totalizing ideologies in pursuit of just this kind of authority. But while antipodal in their starting assumptions, the two narratives both partake of the same underlying spirit of conservative claims of cultural oppression. Both seek to "subdue liberalism" through "aggressive demystification." They seek to disabuse liberalism, not of its ideas, but of its self-understanding. In both cases as in the others we have examined, it is the conservative who stands outside of liberalism in order to discern an unreflective social ethos where liberals see only emancipated individualism. All these "convoluted stories" are liberating to conservatives because all subdue liberalism in this manner. Whatever the story in question, its purpose is to undercut the asymmetries through which liberals announce their moral and

[171] Brooks. *Bobos in Paradise*, pg. 33.

intellectual superiority, to expose the truth being concealed by liberal projections and thereby delegitimize a social hierarchy that assigns reflectiveness, individuation, egalitarianism, and tolerance to liberals and their opposites to conservatives.

This is why conservatives can in their less theoretical moods casually rotate between warning that liberals are totalitarians bent on social control and dismissing them as effete latté drinkers absorbed in sentimental daydreaming. *How and why* the oppressive dualisms from which conservatives suffer are distorted is of secondary importance. And so any narrative which promises to expose that distortion will resonate with them and become incorporated into their total worldview—in some fashion or other woven into that eclectic, multi-layered, and ever-evolving web of tropes we have come to know as conservative claims of cultural oppression. Convoluted these stories may be, but what liberals see as arbitrary conceptual contortions is for conservatives a direct reflection of liberalism's underlying mendacity, which only their convoluted stories can explain and expose.

The liberal retort is that there *is* indeed an underlying human constant and symmetry between liberals and conservatives. But this merely consists of the fact that humans being human will always be susceptible to all manner of egoism, dogmatism, ambition, hypocrisy, zealotry, blindness, pretension, vanity, and any other vice one cares to think of. That liberals can succumb to these is nothing they have ever denied. In a nation of over three-hundred million people, it is no great feat to expose ample levels of hypocrisy anywhere one looks, and across the entire political spectrum. This is precisely what makes the claimants' efforts to "expose" the vices of liberals disingenuous. These vices are simply the ineluctable backdrop of politics and social life, just part of the world as it is. But conservatives disingenuously elevate this ubiquitous backdrop of all-too-humanness into a self-subsisting political discourse, transforming a banality into a meta-narrative that disguises vacuous ad hominems as insight.

Conservatives allege that liberals are too smug, dogmatic, or haughty to engage them in reasoned and respectful deliberation. But why should their impressions here be credited given their eagerness to reduce liberal argument to the expression of parochial cultural predilections, to mere "tastes and habits" as Codevilla says? This reductionism has already closed off any possibility of respectful debate, liberals will argue. Conservatives can always discover new ways to rationalize this instinctive refusal to take liberals at face value. But this just means ever more

creative ways of arguing that up is down and down is up. This is what makes the conservative narrative so convoluted.

Conservatives cast their ad hominem onslaughts as defensive measures, necessary correctives to the undeserved cultural preeminence of liberal sensibilities. But their characterizations of what these sensibilities consist in are vague, impressionistic, and ultimately unfalsifiable. What can they say to those who fail to recognize the "obsession with organic order" Goldberg attributes to the liberal fascist mind, or to those who do not see liberal rhetoric as "sanctimonious and deadly, deadly serious," as Anderson charges? What is their response to liberals who insist that their criticisms of Walmart have nothing to do with the "masses making messes," as Will alleges, and everything to do with Walmart's anti-union stance? Conservatives have no real grounds for impeaching the self-reporting of liberals who deny that their motivations are religious in nature, or who maintain that their commitment to artistic freedom or consumer rights is something other than aristocratic snobbery in disguise. Conservatives charge that the "new class" of liberal elites harbors an ingrained hostility to the traditional family. But the indisputable truth is that many of these elites form part of such families themselves. And so the conservative accusation seems rather conspiratorial. The list of counter-arguments available to liberals is quite long.

The comic aspect of *Bobos in Paradise* immunizes it from any direct intellectual confrontation. But is it not in this regard a microcosm for conservative claims of cultural oppression and their penchant for strategically deployed innuendo whose real upshot can never be quite pinned down? Conservatives would characterize liberalism as a surreptitiously parochial creed, the lifestyle preference of a privileged minority. But there is no serious attempt to explain just why. Rather than explaining how liberalism is parochial vis-à-vis conservatism in the way that one religion is parochial vis-à-vis another, conservatives drown the intellectual stakes in a posture of seen-it-all-before exasperation that seems to lack any real theoretical content. Liberalism may be parochial in an anthropological sense. It can be statistically correlated with certain kinds of backgrounds, socializations, and cultural proclivities, which is what Brooks succeeds in highlighting. But this does not distinguish liberalism from any other creed, and nor does it establish that liberalism is parochial in the more robust sense suggested by conservative claims of cultural oppression.

To the extent the nefariousness imputed to liberals is not suspiciously convoluted and downright unfalsifiable, it seems to consist in tautologies and banalities. Conservatives bemoans that the liberal elites "think they know better than you." But to the extent we believe our views to be correct, we must as a logical corollary see incompatible views as in error. And to the degree we see these as in error, there is indeed a sense in which we think we "know better" than those who hold them, who are to this degree "benighted." But since when has the law of non-contradiction become elitist? Liberals believe they possess an insight that conservatives lack, just as conservatives believe the opposite. Such is merely the corollary of their believing the things they do. The sins of liberals, then, seem to consist only in their failure be conservative, and this is to beg a very big question. The issue is not, following Sowell, whether the anointed seek to pre-empt the decisions of others—which is in the nature of politics—but whether they are rationally justified in doing so. And this question is not answered by impressionistic depictions of the zeal or single-mindedness with which the anointed pursue some hidden agenda.

Sowell and other conservatives insist that liberal policy preferences are epiphenomena of liberal self-righteousness. But reducing a political ideology to the psychological satisfactions it affords its followers is an ever-present rhetorical possibility. These satisfactions are real. But egos become invested in ideas across the entire political spectrum. This investments of ideological antagonists are usually obvious while our own are invisible. This is exactly what someone like Sowell fails to see. He writes:

> If you happen to believe in free markets, judicial restraint, traditional values and other features of the tragic vision [of conservatives], then you are just someone who believes in free markets, judicial restraint and traditional values. There is no personal exaltation inherent in those beliefs. But to be for "social justice" and "saving the environment" or to be "anti-war" is more than just a set of hypotheses about empirical facts. This vision puts you on a higher moral plane as someone concerned and compassionate, someone who is for peace in the world, a defender of the downtrodden, and someone who wants to preserve the beauty of nature and save the planet from being polluted by others less caring.[172]
>
> Because the vision of the anointed is a vision of themselves as well as a vision of the world, when they are defending that vision they are not simply defending a set of hypotheses about external events, they are in a sense defending their souls—and the zeal and even ruthlessness with which they may defend their visions are not surprising under these circumstances. But for people with opposite views, who may for example believe that most things work out better if left to such systematic processes as free markets, families, and traditional values, these are just a set of hypotheses about external events, rather than badges of moral superiority, so there is no such huge personal ego stakes in whether or not those hypotheses are confirmed by empirical evidence. Obviously, everyone would prefer

[172] Thomas Sowell, *Intellectuals and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), pg. 98.

> to be proved right rather than proved wrong, but the point here is that there are no such comparable ego stakes involved among believers in the tragic vision.[173]

But this conclusion is foreordained by the way in which Sowell has framed the motivations of conservatives, which liberals will surely dispute. Sowell would dismiss the anointed's solicitude for criminals and other social outcasts as a gambit through which to advertise their special insight and compassion. But one could as easily argue that conservatives' tough-on-crime attitudes rest on cheap, self-indulgent self-righteousness, to which their "set of hypotheses about external events" are secondary. Those who oppose "judicial restraint" may have their egos invested in their ability to discover some higher philosophical meaning in the penumbras and emanations of enumerated constitutional protections. But those who urge "judicial restraint" may have their own egos invested in what they feel is their abiding loyalty to some special dispensation handed down to them for safekeeping by a founding generation of titans. The preening of liberals may be more individuated, and so more noticeable, than the preening of conservatives. But this distinction does not make for the asymmetries that Sowell believes he detects.

We all approach dialogue and evidence from within an established framework that has become psychologically satisfying, and this will sometimes produce intellectual arrogance or obtuseness. Such is evident in the fact that conservatives are no less than liberals prepared to denigrate the convictions of ideological foes as epiphenomena of forces that bypass awareness. The liberal elites see traditionalist sensibilities as derivative upon unacknowledged bigotry, ignorance, or economic frustration. But in like fashion, conservatives insist that liberalism is the political expression of cultural alienation and moral decadence. It is human nature to attribute deep ideological differences to irrational factors. To the extent we cannot give these differences a rational construal—which we cannot when the rifts are deep—we are left to resort to uncharitable ad hominems. And this universal fact undercuts conservatives' claims to an oppressed status. Shapiro contends that there is always a "patina of character assassination" in the undertones of liberal arguments. But this is just how most human beings think most of the time, and not some special effort by a coterie of elites to promote what Shapiro calls a "culture of fear and intimidation." Conservative claims of cultural oppression caricature an unremarkable feature of human psychology into a special, fanatical zeal that is supposed to somehow obviate the

[173] Ibid., pg. 141-42.

substantive content of liberalism. Conservatives may imagine they are subduing liberalism. But their caricatures are cheap rhetoric bereft of real argument.

In short, the liberal rebuttal is that while conservatives imagine themselves to be overthrowing some socially entrenched perception of asymmetry that perpetually redounds to their disadvantage, they have in truth projected that perception onto liberals, who have never sought to arrogate any badges of moral or intellectual superiority and have always acknowledged their human limitations. To the extent liberals *do* carry any badges of superiority, this is because the perception of asymmetry has been *forced upon them by conservatives themselves*, whose hallucinatory struggle against the vision of the anointed has mired them in ceaseless vitriol and anti-intellectualism. These are what *elicit* the liberal judgments by which conservatives subsequently feel oppressed. Conservative claims of cultural oppression are therefore a self-fulfilling prophesy. To the extent these claims are true, this is because their expounders' conspiracism has *made* them true, in the process generating fuel for further such claims. And so it is their claims of cultural oppression, not liberalism, that constitute the lifestyle preference!

* * *

Though cogent, the liberal rebuttal only tells half the story, however. Tempting though it may be to dismiss conservative claims of cultural oppression as outlandish, the spirit of intellectual charity requires that we suspend any such reactions and instead strive to make sense of what might initially seem nonsensical. It is easy enough to poke holes in this or that argument. But our investigation has shown that the broad questions these claims raise cannot be dismissed as unserious. They include:

(1) Is liberalism merely a political credo, or can it not be characterized in purely political terms because it expresses a specific understanding of the self? Is liberal discourse pervaded by a certain facile rationalism that impedes this philosophically richer level of description?
(2) What is the boundary between the religious and the secular? Are the lines somehow blurrier than liberals can recognize? How precisely should we understand the relationship between our ostensibly secular present and our ostensibly more religious past?
(3) What of the claim that liberals aggrandize themselves through cultural dominance? Why are liberals persuaded that culture lacks the "tangibility" that attaches to the economic? Might this conviction constitute an ideological stratagem that conceals the cultural oppression of conservatives?
(4) Does liberal discourse rely on a set of background narratives that are always insinuated but never acknowledged in the official framing of liberal argument? Does contemporary liberalism subtly recapitulate forms of hierarchy—like that between "civilization" and "barbarism"—whose cruder, original variants liberals long ago repudiated?

Conservative claims of cultural oppression provide a powerful unifying context in which to ask these and related questions, because they root these questions in a human immediacy in whose absence philosophical analysis becomes arid and disembodied. Notwithstanding what seems like their facial anti-intellectualism and glibness, conservative claims of cultural oppression embed philosophical inquiry in real human anxieties and resentments, and therefore provide a constant reminder of why that inquiry matters. Our question is whether there is a wheat waiting to be separated from the chaff. Is conservatives' Right Eclecticism animated by some intuitive appreciation for a "higher truth" whose significance transcends the ostensible scope of the arguments—and of which the arguments are but partial, distorted articulations? Might there be some general theory that could broadly explain just why conservatives see symmetry where liberals see asymmetry, and vice versa? And might this theory highlight moral and political complexities to which liberals are presently insensitive?

Liberals will dismiss conservative claims of cultural oppression as an enticing victim narrative. But this dismissiveness is fully consistent with these claims' truth. After all, every oppressor group in history was persuaded that the grievances of the oppressed were contrived and unjustified. As Kors observes, "most of us sadly develop the capacity to treat the suffering, oppression, or legal inequality of individuals or groups whom see we see as obstacles to our own goals or visions—or even with whom we merely feel little affinity—as abstractions or exaggerations without concrete human immediacy."[174] Likewise, Aleinikoff observes:

> Dominant groups may have neither the inclination nor the ability to be fully aware of their domination. Dominant groups generally do not consider themselves to be oppressive, particularly in a society in which tolerance for diversity is valued, and they can provide descriptions of themselves and the disadvantaged that explain inequality as either justified or natural. To the extent that these descriptions effectively absolve dominant groups of responsibility for inequality, and therefore from bearing any of the costs of ameliorating inequality, there is little motivation for the dominant culture to question them. [175]

Liberals hold themselves out as egalitarians who demand only universal human dignity. But every dominant class in history has attempted to legitimate itself through some idealistic framework or another. The feudal lord maintained his dominion for the benefit of the serfs, just as the priest exercised his own special prerogatives for the betterment of penitents. Indeed, the lords and priests need not have even viewed themselves as a dominant class, as they were no less than the peasantry

[174]Alan Charles Kors and Harvey A. Silvergate, *The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's Campuses* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1999), pg. 98.
[175] T. Alexander Aleinikoff, *A Case for Race Consciousness*, 91 Colum. L. Rev. 1060, 1084 (1991).

subordinated to the divine order in which everyone was only playing their small role. Might liberals be engaging a similar sleight-of-hand by way of their loyalty to their own highest ideals? The thoughtful liberal may be genuinely incapable of conceiving of himself as the oppressor he stands accused of being. But he can still appreciate the historical record, which tells us that *this very inability* may itself be an expression of his dominant position, and that oppressed groups can often perceive the exercise of power as those who actually hold it cannot. Naturally, the latter do not notice that to which they are accustomed and from which they benefit.

If conservative claims of cultural oppression are easily dismissed as ad hoc contrivances that are either false, tautological, or impressionistic and unfalsifiable, the explanation may lie in liberal domination itself, the "Stockholm Syndrome" it has instilled in conservatives. Enjoying the power to define reality as such, liberalism may have deprived conservatives of the language and conceptions needed to claim cultural oppression persuasively. If their claims seem like "irritable mental gestures seeking to resemble ideas," this could be because the hegemony of the liberal culture has *reduced* them to that status, leaving conservatives unable to cogently articulate what they know viscerally. Peter Berger writes:

> Conscientization now means the entire transformation of the consciousness of people that would make them understand the political parameters of their existence and the possibilities of changing their situation by political action. Conscientization is a precondition of liberation. People will be able to liberate themselves from social and political oppression only if they first liberate themselves from the patterns of thought imposed by their oppressors.[176]

The question is whether all the ostensible confusion, contradiction, arbitrariness, and bad faith that liberals discern in conservative claims of cultural oppression can be reinterpreted as part and parcel of a general process of conscientization. With conservatives themselves having internalized liberalism to a great degree, their claims of cultural oppression may themselves be contaminated by the very thought patterns from which they seek liberation. And so it is only to be expected that their arguments will often be confused, contradictory, and convoluted, because the critical theory of the Right is in the process of seeking, without having as yet discovered, a language that is not compromised by liberal categories and assumptions.

Conservative claims of cultural oppression are indeed convoluted. But this convolutedness must be approached in a spirit of intellectual charity. Drew Weston writes that the conservative

[176] Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pg. 176.

narrative is foremost vitiated by its "failure to explain the *intent* of the villain, who seems to be little more than a Manichean, Ann-Coulteresque liberal who does evil for the sheer pleasure of liberal evildoing. On the face of it, it seems rather unlikely that half of Americans wish ill on their own country."[177] But it also seems rather unlikely that so many conservatives would devote such energies to claiming cultural oppression were there truly none there. If liberal evildoing is no explanation, then neither is unhinged conservative paranoia or conspiracism, which could be the *result* of the very oppression being alleged—and *not* its cause.

Liberals do not construe the conspiracy-mongering of some black nationalists—like Louis Farrakhan for example—as conclusive proof that racism is dead. And this is because the underlying reality of racism can be distinguished from what may be implausible characterizations of its nature—for example, as involving genocidal conspiracies to infest inner city communities with AIDS or cocaine. John McWhorter reports a poll in which 29 percent of black college graduates had at one point pegged as true, and 38 percent pegged as possibly true, the claim that "the U.S. government channeled drugs into poor black neighborhoods."[178] One could exploit the apparently widespread credence given to such outlandishness as an excuse to just dismiss all complaints of structural or unconscious racism as obviously hallucinatory. But alternatively and more charitably, one could also interpret the magnitude of this irrationality as an indication of the magnitude of African-American's frustration with persisting racial injustice, which is not illusory just for being poorly articulated.

And likewise, perhaps conservative claimants of cultural oppression are, just like these black poll respondents, *anthropomorphizing* what are very real social forces, which are ill-understood by virtue of the distorting yet understandable resentment that is usually the lot of the oppressed. Most of McWhorter's poll respondents simply lacked the theoretical detachment and sophistication that allows critical race theorists to frame their grievances in more intellectually nuanced terms. And likewise, conservatives may simply lack access to a theoretical framework through which to plausibly articulate their irrepressible intuition that they are culturally oppressed and that the ideals of liberalism can be appropriated to their own cause.

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[177] Drew Westen, *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007), pg. 158-59.
[178] John McWhorter, *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (Harper Perennial, 2001), pg. 31.

John Gray writes that while Americans who espouse creationism, the right to life, and other fundamentalist causes may not repudiate liberal values explicitly, as do their counterparts elsewhere in the world, they are merely engaged in the "strategic deployment of liberal discourse for fundamentalist ends."[179] But whether that deployment is merely strategic or on some level substantive is a question that liberalism itself calls upon us to take seriously. Do conservative claims of culturally oppression just opportunistically swipe leftist tropes, or would a philosophically refined liberalism have to acknowledge these claims as falling within the purview of its own ideals and principles? This would not be the first time in history in which what was previously known as liberalism proved to be an unduly narrow construal of ideals that admitted of a more universalistic application.

Codevilla maintains that his two classes—the Ruling Class and the Country Class—have less in common culturally, dislike each other more, and embody ways of life more different, than nineteenth-century Northerners and Southerners—nearly all of whom, as Lincoln reminded them, "prayed to the same God."[180] This may be hyperbole, but conservative claims of cultural oppression still raise an important question about *how to conceptualize difference*. With conservatives asserting cultural differences that liberals refuse to credit as genuine, liberals and conservatives conceptualize the very nature of their differences very differently. And this is why they seem condemned to speak past one another.

The problem of difference is, as Hunter observes, inextricably bound up with the liberal project itself. As an attempt "to provide a humane solution to the difficulties posed by the coexistence of a plurality of dissimilar communities in shared political order," liberalism was from its beginnings rooted in the challenge of difference: "Time and again, the ideals and habits of liberalism have been tested by communities, traditions, and interests seeking a reconfiguration of existing understandings of legitimate differences."[181] Conservative claims of cultural oppression are the latest attempt at such a reconfiguration, the latest test for the ideals and habits of liberalism. And their plausibility hinges on the human meaning of the differences on whose basis cultural oppression is being claimed. This meaning is a function, not only of the facts, but just as importantly of the background understanding of human nature against we conceptualize the facts'

[179] John Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism* (New York: The New Press, 2000), pg. 14.
[180] Codevilla, *The Ruling Class*, pgs. 6-7.
[181] James Davison Hunter and Alan Wolfe, *Is There A Culture War?: A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life*, eds. E.J. Dionne Jr. and Michael Cromartie (Washington D.C.: Brooking Institution Press, 2006), pg. 11.

significance. Our central question can be put thus: *On what conception of human difference, and therefore also of the shared human nature which contextualizes that difference, would conservative claims of cultural oppression* ***not*** *amount to a set of irritable mental gestures seeking to resemble ideas, but rather constitute intimations of a higher truth*?

Because neither liberals nor conservatives are prepared to accept the other's self-descriptions at face value, we cannot adjudicate their differences directly through ordinary argument. Rather, we must deduce what could be called the arguments' "plausibility-conditions," the particular conception of the human being that would endow them with the greatest plausibility. What would one have to assume about human nature, culture, and the social order for conservative claims of cultural oppression to intimate a higher truth? Conversely, what would we have to assume in order to dismiss them as meritless and disingenuous, as liberals are wont to do?

Westen reduces conservative claims of cultural oppression to accusations of liberal evildoing. But they should be interpreted, not as causal claims about the psychological springs of liberal actors, but as hermeneutic claims about the meaning of liberalism. They are attempts to re-describe liberalism in a language that is philosophically richer than is presently accessible to the liberal self-understanding. As we saw in Chapter Two, Savage accuses that liberals are constantly jerking conservatives' chains and working them over. And liberals are clearly *not* doing these things in any ordinary sense of these terms. But then it may be these ordinary understandings that are inadequate. The meaning of these concepts is a function of the background conception of human nature against which one is operating. And conservative claims of cultural oppression are implicitly invoking a conception that would warrant extending these concepts' semantic boundaries so as to give credence to Savage's recriminations.

We must approach conservative claims of cultural oppression with the intellectual charity of an anthropologist, suspending our prior ontological commitments about what qualifies as a "real" harm and instead articulate a conception of "the real" as it arises within the form of life we are examining. Honestly appraising these claims requires the liberal to undertake a kind of Cartesian disengagement, to suspend his strongest intuitions about reality in order to enter the concrete human immediacy of the conservative experience. It is only this that illuminates the true meaning of the claims that arise from it. Taylor writes:

> Interpretation, in the sense relevant to hermeneutics, is an attempt to make clear, to make sense of, an object of study. The object must therefore be a text, or a text-analogue, which in some way is confused, incomplete, cloudy, seemingly contradictory – in one way or

> another, unclear. The interpretation aims to bring to light an underlying coherence or sense."[182]

When we ask "how could you possibly believe that?," we are not asking for a causal story about the necessary or sufficient conditions of a belief, but attempting to identify the sources of the belief's resonance for its adherents, its "underlying coherence or sense." We are ultimate seeking a *phenomenological*, not causal, account of conservative claims of cultural oppression. And this is achieved by coming to in some way *experience* the oppression being alleged. A purely "external" approach to these claims—which traces them to, say, the combined influence of economic frustration and Republican machinations—cannot provide this kind of understanding. For the very object of our curiosity—what it *means* to feel culturally oppressed by liberalism—simply disappears from view. We must strive to understand the meaning of conservative claims of cultural oppression from within the lived experience of those who issue them, to understand, not only their causal roots, but also the claims themselves. We want to understand them *from the inside*. And this requires that we re-describe both liberalism and conservatism in a language free of all moralism, *beyond good and evil* as Nietzsche says, a language that does not prejudge the ultimate status of conservatives' basic sense of grievance.

Whether conservative claims of cultural oppression can be "rescued" from the liberal rebuttal detailed above depends on whether we can isolate from out of them a set of intuitions that, suitably reformulated and reassembled, can be reconstructed into a cogent theory of cultural oppression. The question is whether there exists some human constant, some *underlying symmetry* between liberals and conservatives

(1) which is irreducible to the ubiquitous, human, all-too-human moral and intellectual vices acknowledged by liberals,
(2) whose existence liberals somehow deny, either directly and expressly or indirectly and tacitly,
(3) whose denial has facilitated the socially entrenched hierarchy that aggrieve conservatives,
(4) which owing to either its very nature or the hegemony of the liberal culture has been rendered recalcitrant to clear and cogent exposition, and

[182] Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Papers Volume 2: Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, University Press, 1985) pg. 15.

(5) which owing to that recalcitrance has been articulated in distorted form in the convoluted stories of Right Eclecticism.

Right Eclecticism would be irreducible to any "curious amassing of petty, unrelated beefs with the world" because these "beefs" would be united by a structural logic which explains them as natural outgrowths of this predicament. This logic may prove exponentially more convoluted than any thus far surveyed. But while parsimony is, other things being equal, a virtue, it may be that only such a story explains the mysterious phenomenon of conservative claims of cultural oppression. It is therefore to the development of *my own* convoluted story that we now turn. Chapter 4 describes this story in its broadest outlines while Chapters 5-9 flesh out the details. Chapter 10 concludes by asking what moral, intellectual, and political lessons may be gathered from it. As I will be arguing, liberals cannot properly understand conservative claims of cultural oppression without first coming to see *themselves* in a new way. And this is the ultimate challenge presented by these claims.

PART TWO
THE THEORY

Chapter Four

A Theory of Cultural Oppression

If conservative claims of cultural oppression take aim, not primarily at liberal ideas, but at the liberal self-understanding, then comprehending these claims requires comprehending the historical and philosophical foundations of that self-understanding. These foundations all involve some version or other of what Charles Taylor calls "subtraction stories." These are

> stories of modernity in general, and secularity in particular, which explain them by human beings having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge. What emerges from this process—modernity or secularity—is to be understood in terms of underlying features of human nature which were there all along, but had been impeded by what is now set aside.[1]

Subtraction stories are familiar to us all. They are the "official" narrative of modernity and secularity, embedded in our language and culture, both high and low. These stories present us with the well-known contrast between a benighted past mired in superstition, ignorance, prejudice, and violence, and an enlightened present that finally sees people and things as they are, without the religious and other illusions that formerly compromised the human understanding. The subtraction account of modernity and secularity is what Michael Allen Gillespie calls "the self-congratulatory story that modernity tells about itself and its own origins."[2] It is the picture of modernity as "a secular realm in which man replaces God as the center of existence," as the "realm of individualism, of representation and subjectivity, of exploration and discovery, of freedom, rights, equality, toleration, liberalism, and the nation state."[3] The heroes of subtraction stories are those courageous free-thinkers and non-conformists, like Copernicus and Galileo who dared to question the dogmas of their day and thereby helped overthrow superstition in the name of reason and hierarchy in the name of freedom and equality. In this way, they cleared the way for new possibilities of thought and action, for a happier, less hidebound way of life in which this-worldly fulfillment would no longer be hampered by the oppressive moral rigorism of a benighted past.

[1] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), pg. 22.
[2] Michael Allen Gillsespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (The University of Chicago Press, 2008), pg. xi.
[3] Ibid., pgs. x-xi.

Someone like Richard Dawkins is a paradigmatic expounder of this "self-congratulatory story," communicating, not only its theoretical content, but also its temper and spirit.

Most people do not give intense consideration to these topics, of course. But as Taylor observes, with very limited knowledge of actual history nevertheless find it natural to describe their world in terms of the historical contrapositions promoted by the subtraction account, distinguishing between the "modern" and the "backward," classifying some ideas as "progressive" and others as "positively mediaeval."[4] The theoretical contents of most subtraction stories are more complicated than this, of course. But their general temper is not, and it is this general temper that informs the self-understanding of liberals, who see themselves as further along the process of subtraction, and thus more "modern," than conservatives still mired in the legacy of a benighted past. It is this judgment lies at the root of the various dualisms by which conservatives feel culturally oppressed.

If conservatives refuse to accept liberals at "face value" and instead detect some fundamental contradiction at the heart of liberalism, this is because they reject the subtraction account of modernity—if not theoretically then at some visceral level that silently informs their judgments. This, I shall be arguing here and in later chapters, is the conceptual core of conservative claims of cultural oppression. Though this starting point is rarely articulated, it is what explains a wide gamut of facially unrelated grievances, endowing Frank's "curious amassing of petty, unrelated beefs with the world" with a coherence they would otherwise lack.

In invoking its crisp contrasts between the modern and the pre-modern, and between the secular and the religious, the subtraction account causes us to see the present in a way which *conceals the human constants* that conservatives believe are being denied by liberals. It is an implicit, under-theorized rejection of the subtraction account of modernity that explains why conservatives perceive symmetry where liberals perceive asymmetry and asymmetry where liberals perceive symmetry, why conservatives believe that liberals have projected all their own sins onto them, and why they regard liberalism as a way of life and not just a political creed. It is because conservatives reject the subtraction account that they see an agenda of systematic inversion where liberals see reasoned policy deliberations. As we will see, their sundry "convoluted stories" are all just varied expressions of this rejection.

[4] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 301.

The subtraction account is not only a historical thesis but also a *lens* through which the meaning of contemporary events is conceptualized. And how we assess conservative claims of cultural oppression depends on whether we are looking at them through that lens. Liberals do so and conservatives do not, and this is what explains their apparently unbridgeable differences. Our task, then, is to elaborate what rejecting the subtraction account of modernity and secularity would involve philosophically, and then to trace the conceptual relationship between our conclusions here and the discourse of conservative claims of cultural oppression, which will then be placed in a new light. To put what will be a very complicated argument in a nutshell, how we assess conservative claims of cultural oppression depends on what it means to be a human agent, which in turn hinges on whether we accept or reject the subtraction account. To reject it is see liberalism as resting, not on liberated human nature, but on a historically and culturally contingent identity. And to understand this is to understand what conservative claims of cultural oppression are really protesting.

1. Modern and Pre-Modern

The pre-modern dispensation which is now understood to have been cast off as a set of "earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge" consisted, not merely in some list of moral, religious, or other tenets, but also in a broader teleological order that informed the basic self-understanding of our pre-modern ancestors. Taylor explains:

> "Fulfillment" is a natural term which comes often to our lips in this connection [in defining the humanly successful life for moderns]. But in the context of the pre-modern identity, to make something of one's life is to realize in one's own person a place in the pattern, well, fully, with éclat.
>
> This by no means implies unselfishness. That is to see it in a modern perspective which distorts. It is rather a matter of a wholly different way of conceiving human satisfaction, including the most egoistic. On one side this can be seen as the fulfillment of desires which inhere in me; on the other, it comes from establishing my position in the order of things. Since the order occupies what is, to occupy a place in it firmly, fully, is to live a full life, one might say; to fail to do so is to sink toward the status of a shadow. A limpid everyday image of one kind of satisfaction is the fulfillment of a felt desire for an object, like hunger or thirst; an image for the other would be rather that of approaching a source of light or warmth, for example getting close to a fire.[5]

Conservatives nostalgic for the moral confidences of an earlier era will sometimes reduce the content of pre-modern teleologies to the prohibitions they presumably levelled against the excesses

[5] Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Papers Volume 2: Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, 1985), pg. 259.

of individual egoism. But this is to understate their significance and overlook their comprehensiveness. Being the total background against which people discovered their most basic aspirations, these teleologies informed the meaning of egoism no less than altruism. Indeed, they informed the very meaning of the self. The pre-modern world was one that inverted the existentialist motto, so that essence precedes existence, a world in which one's power to define the meaning of one's life is shaped and constrained by an objective order of things, the background against which people made sense of themselves as agents. Living a full life meant recognizing one's place within this order, which in turn meant acknowledging one's dependence on it. For the success of one's life was a function of whether it instantiated this order. This pre-modern "order of things" could be rejected rather than embraced. Hence the possibility of sin or dishonor. But it could not be disregarded, because one was then defined by sin or dishonor.

This pre-modern sensibility is why the mature, religiously awakened St. Augustine could conclude that "the true good of every created thing is always to cleave fast lest, in turning away from thee [God], it lose the light it had received in being turned by thee, and so relapse into a life like that of the dark abyss."[6] Though the younger Augustine had dismissed God and his order, he could later recognize that the ensuing alienation from God had all along been an ever-present reality in his consciousness, which had merely been concealed by his youthful dissoluteness. If Augustine could not recognize his sin, this was because he was *living* it, caught in it, defined by it. Being mired in a dark abyss—having sunk toward "the status of a shadow" as Taylor says—he could not access the light that would illuminate the truth of his predicament, his dependence on an order he did not create.

While pre-moderns could choose how to conduct themselves against this background order, they could not have imagined choosing it in order to decide the meaning of their own lives. Operating independently of anyone's personal predilections, this background could *call upon* people to respond appropriately—in accordance with their status as lord or peasant, priest or penitent, etc. If pre-moderns did not hold a "scientific worldview," this is because their world wasn't reducible to its strictly physical features, and rather consisted in demands to be "lived up to." Even at its most egoistic, pre-modern desire implicated a sense of *beholdenness* to meanings not one's own, meanings existing independently of one's tastes and desires, or anyone's tastes and

[6] St. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. Albert C. Outler (Dover 2002), pg. 270.

desires. These were what gave structure to one's very being, supports in whose absence nothing made sense.

This pre-modern "gestalt" had social as well as individual implications. It is what explains pre-moderns' reputed "intolerance." Taylor observes:

> And so realizing one's place in the pattern is bound up with being recognized as having done so, for it is a place in public space. And by the same token, living up to one's place is not just one's own affair; it is everyone's business. For each one of us helps to sustain the order which everyone lives, as essentially public order. Thus the incredible (to us moderns) degree of social control of mores in pre-modern society, and the striking lack of privacy. The wider kin dictated so much of the individual's life pattern, often when and whom he/she married. And the village community exercised an extraordinary surveillance over the lives of its members.[7]

We now believe our freedom ends only at others' noses. But pre-moderns saw things, and *had* to see things, very differently. That deviant conduct created no tangible harms and transpired out of sight was not dispositive because facially private misconduct was a transgression, not only against others' sensibilities, but also against the order of things. Given that everyone's place in this order depended on its continued sustenance, a transgression against it was a transgression against all. If pre-modern satisfaction meant something like approaching a source of light or heat, it was also the case that the appropriate satisfactions *sustained that light or heat for others.* To transgress against the mores of the village was to precipitate disequilibrium in the order of things, and thus to call down powers damaging to others' health and prosperity. Modern notions of privacy simply made no sense in this context.

If we have since become more "liberal," this is because our sense of self is no longer so strongly bound up with our alleged participation in some broader order. Instead, we believe we can *disengage* from any such order. The modern self is, observes MacIntyre, defined by its capacity to "step backwards" from any particular point of view.[8] It understands itself as "liberated from all those outmoded forms of social organization which had imprisoned it simultaneously within a belief in a theistic and teleological world order and within those hierarchical structures which attempt to legitimate themselves as part of such a world order."[9] How did this liberation first become possible?

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[7] Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, pg. 260.
[8] Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), pg. 126.
[9] Ibid., pg. 60.

One important part of the explanation lies in the scientific revolution of the Seventeenth Century, which refuted, not only particular superstitions and misconceptions, but also an entire way of looking at the world. It was a *cosmological* revolution. The tremendous success of the natural sciences, explains Taylor, was premised on recognizing a distinction between the objective characteristics of things and their merely subjective appearance for us as human agents. The scientific revolution called on people to look at their world and themselves "from the outside," as it were, to interpret their experience in what Taylor calls *non-anthropocentric* terms, terms that *do not presuppose the existence of distinctively human capacities and dispositions*.[10]

Hence the reduction of qualitative distinctions, like between solids and liquids or between different colors, to quantitative ones, like differences in the speed of molecular motion or the length of light rays. Unlike their qualitative manifestations in our first-person experience, these quantifiable entities could support scientific prediction. Thus, they qualified as "objective" within this emerging naturalistic outlook. Spatial dimensions were classified as "primary" qualities because they were understood to exist independently of our distinctive capacities and dispositions. A kilometer is a kilometer irrespective of who or what traverses it. By contrast, color cannot exist apart from something like the human eye, which *translates* light-waves into color. Take a differently constituted eye—of a color-blind person or animal—and the light waves will be translated very differently. Color is therefore a "secondary quality," which must be "translated back" into non-anthropocentric terms—the length of light-waves—before becoming scientifically cognizable. That secondary qualities like color, smell, and softness are in some sense "real" was hardly denied by proponents of the new scientific revolution. But their reality was assigned a special ontological status as a feature of our sensibilities alone. The experience of color or smell manifests, not the objective nature of things, but things' interactions with our perceptual apparatus as human organisms, which mediates the impact of objective reality on our consciousness and can itself be studied non-anthropocentrically (through brain science).

This new naturalism therefore had implications for the *inner* world of human beings, which could also be divided as between the subjective and the objective. Beyond raising questions about the ontological status of secondary properties, the new naturalism also stimulated a new skepticism toward a wide range of human emotions that cannot be readily translated into non-anthropocentric terms.

[10] Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Papers Volume 1: Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge, 1985), pg. 46-47.

The emotion of fear appears readily amenable to naturalistic reduction. In fearing for our physical safety, we are responding to a situation that can be described scientifically in terms of causal forces with the potential to impinge on us in specified ways. Fear remains "subjective" inasmuch as it is an element of human experience. Nevertheless, this particular experience can be operationalized into claims about measurable causal forces—that is, translated into non-anthropocentric terms. The injury with which an animal threatens us is a function of the situation's measurable features, not our subjective interpretations.

But Taylor observes that there are other emotions, indeed the distinctively human emotions, like pride and shame, which seem to resist non-anthropocentric translation.[11] To feel shame is to experience the situation as appropriately *calling for shame* by virtue of its objective moral features. This is a function, not of causal laws or personal tastes, but of a background sense of the higher that informs our sense of the situation's intrinsic import. Reacting to this outlook, the new naturalistic outlook disposed early modern thinkers against pride and shame as anachronistic forms of vainglory, relics of an illusory teleological past that blinded people to their "real" interests, interests that do not presuppose any teleological beliefs in some order of things. As Albert Hirschman observes, the early modern theorists saw commercial prosperity as an antidote to the temptations of vainglory. Just as the people would be ruled by the ruler, so the ruler would be ruled by his *interests*—which had now been set in opposition to mere *passions* like honor, with all their arbitrariness, idiosyncrasy, and unpredictability.[12] In a similar vein, Robert Kagan notes that liberalism could have harnessed individual egoism to commercial expansion only by first overcoming an older order grounded in "intangible goods" like the glory of the king, the honor of the nobles, or the republican virtues of pagan antiquity.[13]

The dismissal of "intangible goods" as mere vainglory is part and parcel of the repudiation of anthropocentricity and the rise of the disengaged subject who can "step back" from inherited teleologies. Whereas commercial expansion can be measured non-anthropocentrically, honor and glory presuppose thicker cosmologies, an intuitive sense of things' significance that counts as irredeemably subjective within the modern naturalistic worldview. The older pre-modern

[11] Ibid., pg. 55.
[12] Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), pgs. 32, 48-56, 81-87.
[13] Robert Kagan, "Liberalism and American Foreign Policy," in *The Betrayal of Liberalism: How the Disciples of Freedom and Equality Helped Foster The Illiberal Politics of Coercion and Control*, eds. Hilton Kramer and Roger Kimball (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), pg. 159.

satisfactions were "intangible" because they couldn't be translated into non-anthropocentric terms. Pre-moderns understood human satisfaction on analogy with approaching a source of light or warmth. And analogical light or warmth was seen as no less anthropocentric than the literal kind. On the other hand, fulfillment conceived on analogy with hunger or thirst involves no such distortion. By contrast with the pre-modern imperative "to realize in one's own person a place in the pattern, well, fully, with éclat," modern "fulfillment" doesn't commit us to beliefs that cannot be understood non-anthropocentrically. Though stimulated from without, such fulfillment can be seen as ultimately inhering in us, and not a reflection of the situation's intrinsic meaning. Fulfillment can qualify as "real" because, with its ontological status as a feature of inner sensibility being a given, it does not arrogate any more reality than it actually has. Fulfillment is a subjective experience, to be sure, but it does not involve projecting that subjectivity upon the world itself, which is what pre-moderns were guilty of doing.

The naturalistic revolution of the Seventeenth Century entailed a revised conception, not only of the cosmos, but also of *true human nature*. Having repudiated the pre-modern understanding of the human agent as defined by a distinctively human attunement to some larger order, the naturalistic revolution concluded that the difference between human beings and other animals consists in the superior skill with which humans pursue animal-like goals. The erosion of thick ethical concepts by naturalism had as its corollary a "thinning" of the self into what Taylor calls a "strategic" conception of human agency:

> As long as we think of agents as the subjects of strategic action, then we might be inclined to think that the superiority of persons over animals lies in their ability to envisage a longer time scale, to understand more complex cause-effect relationships, and thus engage in calculations, and the like… What is striking about persons, therefore, is their ability to conceive different possibilities, to calculate how to get them, to choose between them, and thus to plan their lives…The various capacities definitive of a person are understood in terms of the power to plan. Central to this is the power to represent things clearly. We can plan well when we can lay out the possibilities clearly, when we can calculate their value to us in terms of our goals, as well as the probabilities and costs of their attainment. Our choices can then be clear and conscious."[14]

Where pre-moderns saw distinctively human capacity to pursue the good through proper attunement to things' intrinsic significance, the strategic perspective sees a quantitative advantage in the pursuit of purely appetitive desires. Human agents may be exponentially more complex than other animals. But that difference, however great, is one of degree, not kind—just our ability

[14] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, pgs. 101-04.

to envision longer time horizons and understand more complex causal relationships. This reductionist spirit led Hobbes to conclude that

> …delight and annoyance, although they are not called senses, nevertheless differ only in this: that the sense of an object, as external, comes from the reaction or resistance that is made by an organ; and hence it consists in the endeavor of an organ to push outward; delight, however, consists in the passion made by the action of the object, and is an endeavor inwards.[15]

We do not as a matter of psychological fact experience delight as Hobbes describes it, as just a form of sensory impact. The point, however, is that a fully self-transparent agent would feel compelled to reinterpret his experience in these terms. He would have to see the situation's meaning as arising from the interaction of the situation's strictly physical qualities and his own subjective reaction to those qualities, which combine to produce different degrees of delight or annoyance. Gone would be the pre-modern sense that the situation presents demands that exist over and above the interaction of these constituent elements.[16] Presupposing as they do a pre-modern world governed by an order of things, such demands must be dismissed as mere projections. However psychologically compelling they may feel, they are not "objective."[17] For objectivity is now a function of human calculation and representation alone, which are what allow us to pursue "delight" effectively.

The Hobbesian individual is one who achieves what Taylor calls "liberation through objectification."[18] Objectification can be liberating because the naturalistic lucidity of the strategic stance promises to liberate us from any vestiges of the pre-modern cosmology that would otherwise have submerged our will in an illusory order not our own. In objectifying a situation through the non-anthropocentric vantage point, we "overcome a sense of it as what determines for us our paradigm purposes and ends, and can come to see it and function in it as a neutral environment, within which we can effect the purposes which we determine out of ourselves."[19] To extricate ourselves from our pre-theorized, first-person experience of the world, and so understand ourselves "from the outside," is to redeem ourselves from our former absorption in a layer of normativity that cannot truly bear the kind of significance we had attributed to it. In thus extricating ourselves, we penetrate beyond our lived experience to discern the causal forces from

[15] Thomas Hobbes, *Man and Citizen*, trans. C.T. Wood, ed. B Gert (Indianapolis, IN: Hacket Publishing Company, 1991), pg. 45.
[16] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, pg. 55.
[17] Ibid., pg. 106.
[18] Ibid., pg. 5.
[19] Ibid., pg. 4.

which this lived experience originates, bringing these forces under our conscious control. Thus, the psychoanalytic patient will be led to reduce his general sense of shame or inadequacy to a complex of "feelings" sparked by factors that he will come to recognize are not truly shameful. The purpose of this objectification is precisely to undermine the persuasiveness of his pre-reflective "sense of things," to erode the normative power it would otherwise have by restricting his attention to questions of cause and effect.

The success of science in enabling control over external nature had as its corollary a normative ideal of self-transparency and self-control *within* human beings, a new conception of human *virtue*. Pre-modern understandings of human flourishing were replaced, not by moral relativism, but by *the imperative to understand oneself in strategic terms*, the *sine qua non* of the new ideals. Taylor calls this the quintessentially modern ethic "of independence, self-control, self-responsibility… a disengagement which brings control; a stance which requires courage, the refusal of the easy comforts of conformity to authority, of the consolations of an enchanted world, of the surrender to the promptings of the senses."[20] I will dub this the *ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity* for ease of expression. And the courage and self-control it celebrates are the courage and self-control to steadfastly resist those "pre-modern temptations" that had hitherto suppressed the underlying features of human nature that, once liberated, will incline us toward this-worldly human flourishing. These are what subtraction stories contend have been subtracted.

These teleological schemes had blinded people, not only to the world as it is, but to their own agency powers as well. Someone given to shame and glory has, in a sense, compromised his own agency, because these motivations suppress the naturalistic lucidity that would allow him to recognize that only delight and annoyance are at stake and live accordingly. The ideal of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity promised just this lucidity, promised to liberate us from an anachronistic moralism premised on illusory teleologies, what Hume called "useless austerities and rigours."[21] By understanding ourselves non-anthropocentrically, we would also see traditional taboos for what they are—not an eternal order of things but antiquated rules that have outlived their usefulness as natural adaptations to particular environments.

[20] Taylor, A *Secular Age*, pg. 559-60.
[21] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. J.B. Schneewind (Indianapolis, IN: Hacket Publishing Company, 1983), pg. 79.

This has social implications, because this is what enables the individual autonomy that pre-moderns could not have understood or respected. With the order of things having been declared illusory, it can no longer justify the level of social control that was par for the course in pre-modern societies. Naturalistic disengagement, then, is the *sine qua non* not only of psychological autonomy but also of social freedom. Only by recognizing ourselves as strategic agents operating in a neutral environment can we recognize that others are engaged in the same project, and are thus our moral equals. While some conservatives associate the modern order with an unrelenting subjectivism, that subjectivism first emerged in the context of a social ethos, not as an indulgence, but as a *demand* that people began to place on themselves.

2. The Psychological Foundations of Liberalism

This configuration of the relationship between the modern and pre-modern—as the *subtraction* of anthropocentricity—is relevant, not just as intellectual or cultural history, but as an ongoing, albeit largely tacit, feature of our political culture. As we shall now see, it is what informs contemporary liberals' understanding of their relationship to conservatives, whom they see as failing to achieve the psychological liberation of the modern self. This judgment may not be voiced explicitly. But the basic contraposition between the disengaged, non-anthropocentric lucidity of liberals and the unreflective teleological immersion of conservatives is often lying in the background of liberal argument.

Steven Smith observes that the harm-principle—according to which the state may only regulate harmful as opposed to merely immoral conduct—has served as "a trusty weapon in the arsenal of liberalism."[22] Though conservative defenders of liberty-restricting legislation have sometimes acceded to the principle's premises and emphasized the harmful "secondary effects" of facially harmless conduct—e.g., pornography's contribution to urban blight—these arguments have generally been ineffectual, and are also suspected as disingenuous rationalizations for moralistic motivations. Thus, in practice the harm-principle has nearly always yielded liberal prescriptions.

But it isn't obvious, Smith argues, that the harm principle ought to have this "essentially liberal orientation."[23] Even setting aside speculative arguments from secondary effects, the harm-

[22] Steven D. Smith, *Is the Harm Principle Illiberal?*, 51 Am. J. Juris. 1,1 (2006).
[23] Ibid., pg. 2.

principle lends itself theoretically to a conservative agenda. Much of the legislation that liberals would veto under the harm-principle as unduly coercive can be defended as a response to the "psychic harm" and "communal harm" which the targeted conduct obviously causes. After all, "psychic distress is a kind of mental pain" and "is plainly something that people prefer to avoid."[24] There is thus an obvious sense in which conduct that causes it—like the consumption or dissemination of pornography—is "harmful" and falls within the ambit of the harm-principle, irrespective of secondary effects. The same holds true of communal harm: "If people get satisfaction or happiness from living in a particular kind of community, then conduct that subverts that kind of community and thus reduces such happiness inflicts a kind of 'harm.'"[25]

Yet liberals will greet such claims with "peremptory dismissal"[26] and "dismissive indignation,"[27] convinced that psychic and communal harm "are plainly not the kinds of 'harm' that the principle is meant to encompass and hence that can serve to support restrictions on liberty."[28] This dismissive indignation rests on flimsy grounds, however. After all, most people sincerely regard such injuries as genuine harms, and we can all appreciate their logic. Liberals may dismiss this logic as simple-minded, but it fully comports with the everyday understanding of "harm," which encompasses psychic and communal harm just as much as the purportedly more "tangible" physical and economic harms that concern liberals. If they are nevertheless confident in their peremptory dismissals and dismissive indignation, this is because they have illegitimately "commandeer[ed] a principle that is not inherently liberal, and indeed that may well be illiberal in its intrinsic tendencies, and transformed it into a leading instrument of the liberal cause."[29]

The triumph of the harm principle is a merely rhetorical triumph, however. For liberals have by "sleight of hand"[30] engaged in "rampant equivocation, trading on more ordinary senses of 'harm' for rhetorical purposes while importing technical or artificial conceptions of 'harm' in order to secure their desired conclusions."[31] They have "rigged"[32] the concept of harm by exploiting its commonsense "subject-oriented"[33] meaning—which includes psychic and communal harms—in

[24] Ibid., pg. 24.
[25] Ibid., pgs. 24-25.
[26] Ibid., pgs. 14, 15.
[27] Ibid., pg. 2
[28] Ibid., pg. 2.
[29] Ibid. pg., 3.
[30] Ibid., pg. 3.
[31] Ibid., pg. 3.
[32] Ibid., pg. 26.
[33] Ibid., pgs. 25.

order to establish the harm-principle's commonsense rhetorical appeal while then narrowing its application to physical invasions of others' autonomy when dealing with specific controversies, thus securing liberal outcomes.[34] Liberals are thus "like people who insist that an issue should be resolved by democratic vote while working behind the scenes to disenfranchise groups who might be inclined to vote against their cause."[35] Their professions to the contrary notwithstanding, liberals do impose their values on others, because their tendentious conception of harm disguises the "quintessentially illiberal practice of treating some people's ideas of the good life as less worthy,"[36] concealing "how harm principle rhetoric actually works to obfuscate the deeper issues, to conceal real injuries, and to marginalize some conceptions of the good life."[37] Liberalism's culture of "stealth and subterfuge" seems once again at work.

However, what Smith characterizes as liberals' "rigging" or "sleight-of-hand" is hardly arbitrary once we adopt the modern ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. If liberals apply the harm-principle selectively, disregarding the everyday "subject-oriented" meaning of harm, this is because that everyday meaning is anthropocentric, as their "artificial" or "technical" conception of harm is not. Liberals decline to recognize the everyday "subject-oriented" understandings of harm on account of that very subjectivity. For those who claim to have been harmed psychically or communally have been harmed only in consequence of their failure to liberate themselves form the teleological hierarchies whose violation inflicted the psychic or communal harm in the first place.

Psychic and communal harms are indeed "real" in the everyday sense of the term. They are an actual feature of human experience. But this is only because those complaining of them are mired in pre-modern thought patterns, imagining that "each one sustains the order which everyone lives, as essentially public order," as Taylor puts it. At bottom, psychic and communal harm consist in the apprehension that the offending parties have rejected some teleological order, thereby sinking toward the status of a shadow, and threatening us with the same fate. This harm may be entirely "real" as a psychological phenomenon, which is what Smith highlights. But it is otherwise within the non-anthropocentric vantage point from which liberals actually apply the

[34] Ibid., pg. 26.
[35] Ibid., pg. 3.
[36] Ibid., pg. 2.
[37] Ibid., pgs. 3.

harm-principle. Here, only what harms a *strategic* agent qualifies as a genuine harm. This is the hidden premise of liberal rhetoric.

Amy Wax observes that rationalistic liberals are unmoved and unimpressed by social conservatives' "[v]ague premonitions of erosion or unraveling" of the social order, which they dismiss as "an inadequate basis for resisting changes that satisfy immediate needs and urgent desires."[38] And this is because they understand these vague premonitions as symptoms of a lingering pre-modern sensibility, which cannot be allowed interfere with modern "fulfillment." Hence Justice Blackmun's dissent in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, where he argued that homosexuality in and of itself "involves no real interference with the rights of others, for the mere knowledge that other individuals do not adhere to one's value system cannot be a legally cognizable interest."[39] This is how moral opposition to homosexuality must be conceived within a strategic perspective—as mere Hobbesian "annoyance" rather than some disequilibrium in the order of things. Thus understood, the desire to regulate others' unobtrusive personal conduct out of concern for the "moral fiber of society" is a disingenuous gambit to arrogate state power in the service of merely personal preferences.

What Smith condemns as liberals' "equivocation" is no arbitrary expedient for arriving at predetermined conclusions, but rather one expression of the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. Liberals undertake what Smith decries as a sleight-of-hand without compunction because they see it as a *corrective* to the sleight-of-hand that conservatives have already perpetrated in their refusal to repudiate anthropocentricity. Those who would "enforce morality" are seen as meddlesome moralists rather than common sense adherents of the harm-principle because they are sloughing off onto others the costs of their own failure to overcome anachronistic teleological illusion. To the extent liberalism marginalizes some conceptions of the good life, as Smith accuses, this is because those conceptions seem structurally pre-modern, involving notions of human flourishing that resist non-anthropocentric translation. Conservatives are guilty, not merely of some enumerable set of prejudices, but of succumbing to pre-modern temptation. In blurring the subjective and the objective, this surrender compromises their own agency while

[38] Amy L. Wax, *The Conservative's Dilemma: Traditional Institutions, Social Change, and Same-Sex Marriage*, 42 San Diego L. Rev. 1059, 1085 (2005).
[39] *Bowers v. Hardwick*, 478 U.S. 186, 213 (1986) (Brennan, J., dissenting).

propelling them to externalize the costs of that surrender onto others. This is what is happening when they try to enact their moral "convictions" into law.

Liberals cannot abide this. Smith likens liberals to actors who claim to be promoting the democratic vote while working behind the scenes to disenfranchise those who would vote the wrong way. But liberals can take the analogy in a different direction and retort that they are merely excluding those who have failed to reach the age of majority—the half-savage relics of past times. Whatever disingenuousness may be discovered in liberal harm-principle rhetoric is intrinsic to what Chapter Two described as the tension between the foreground and background of a transformative liberalism. Whereas liberalism's foreground is formally egalitarian and deferential toward ordinary sensibilities—Smith's everyday conception of harm—the background works to transform these sensibilities in a more "modern," more non-anthropocentric direction, in order to inculcate a strategic identity. It is to this end that liberalism dispenses its salvos of "dismissive indignation" toward conservative harm-claims, in an effort to socially define these teleologies as just so many sleights-of-hand.

As Macedo observes, liberalism has a "hidden curriculum." And this curriculum is better hidden from its agents than from its targets. Unlike liberals, conservatives do not take the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity for granted as essential human nature, and this allows them to see the ways this ethos is being *enforced* as liberals cannot. Though conservatives may lack a properly philosophical understanding of their afflictions, they cannot but sense some vague "elitism" in the disjunction between foreground and background, between liberals' amorphous celebrations of diversity and the very specific conception of human virtue to which they are in fact committed. This disjunction is at the very origin of conservative claims of cultural oppression, which are all attempts to articulate its nature.

* * *

The same basic contraposition between modern and pre-modern is operative in George Lakoff's *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*. Lakoff argues that liberals have, as heirs to a misbegotten Enlightenment rationalism, misunderstood the underlying nature of their disagreements with conservatives. Though these are often cast as point-by-point policy disputes, Lakoff believes they are better explained as a conflict between opposed systems of moral metaphor originating in different conceptions of the family. These conceptions are then projected onto the

political sphere, where they provide the basic frames through which seemingly unrelated policy issues are conceptualized and argued. When in a philosophical mood, we may articulate the relationship between citizens and government along the lines of social contract theory, and so see government as the creation of its citizens. But Lakoff believes that real-life political reasoning proceeds from the opposite premise that citizens are creations of their government, much as children are creations of their parents.

Our practical political philosophies originate in different understandings of ideal family relations.[40] Whereas conservatives are animated by a "Strict Father" family morality, liberals embrace a "Nurturant Parent" family morality. Nurturant Parent morality promotes a world governed by "bonds of affection, respect, and interdependence" and "encourages people to develop their potential and provides help when necessary," so that "those who are helped feel a responsibility to help others and carry out that responsibility."[41] By contrast, conservatives' Strict Father ethos conceptualizes morality as "the strength—the moral fiber or backbone—to resist evil" and so makes an ideal of moral "uprightness."[42] These opposed ideals of the family generate systems of moral metaphor that crop up in a host of policy disputes—in debates about "family values," certainly, but also in a wide array of contexts that are facially unrelated to the family. In implicitly conceiving of the nation as a kind of family, liberals and conservatives both rely on these metaphorical interpretations of policy stakes.[43] These opposed frameworks of metaphor "explain what unifies the collection of liberal and conservative political positions,"[44] endowing these sometimes random-seeming amalgamations with an ideological coherence that is not apparent from the official arguments.

Liberals and conservatives claim to stand for many of the same values, including tolerance, freedom, and patriotism, which is why they necessarily see each other as hypocritical. But what seems like hypocrisy is in fact the consistent application of the familial metaphors that are always concretizing the actual meaning of our abstract ideals. Thus, if the liberal celebration of tolerance does not extend to tolerance for environmental pollution, this is by virtue of liberals' overarching system of metaphorical family values, according to which nature is a metaphorical mother to be

[40] George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (The University of Chicago Press, 2002), pg. 6.
[41] Ibid., pg. 112.
[42] Ibid., pg. 71.
[43] Ibid., pg. 12.
[44] Ibid., pg. 12.

respected.[45] The apparent contradictions of conservatives are similarly resolved. If they can love their country while hating their government, this is because the Strict Father model causes them to see themselves as children who, having matured and imposed self-discipline on themselves, are not to be meddled with by a Strict Father whose strictures are no longer required.[46] Conservatives' embrace of laissez-faire and small government originates, not in some notion of property rights not ceded to the state in the original social contract, but in an "elaborate mythology" of the "model citizen" who, having worked hard and played by the rules, must be respected by the society he has so greatly benefited.[47] With conservative businessmen having been thus exalted, arguments for heightened regulation or taxation can be dismissed out of hand as a slap in the face to those most deserving of our admiration and gratitude.[48]

There is no inconsistency if conservatives suspend their usual hostility to government whenever it comes to military spending. Given that the military embodies Strict Father values—"hierarchical authority, self-discipline, building strength, and fighting evils"—it can be publicly subsidized without offending those values.[49] Education spending, on the other hand, is wasteful, because educators are mostly nurturers standing in the way of Strict Father morality.[50] Likewise, conservatives support the freedom to own guns while opposing the freedom to abort a fetus because "[g]uns are seen as the individual's form of protection in a hostile world," as "symbolic of the male role as family protector."[51] By contrast, abortion symbolizes corrupting parental indulgence, a child's failure to "learn from her mistakes," or a woman's preference for career above motherhood—all affronts to Strict Father morality.[52] The difference between liberals and conservatives isn't that one party is more true to its professed ideals, but that these ideals' concrete meaning and application is being determined by opposed familial metaphors and moralities. These ordinarily go unacknowledged, but they always lurk in the background.

Lakoff's characterization of conservatism as a "Strict Father" morality falls into a longstanding tradition of academic research—much of it synthesized by Jost et. al.—that diagnoses conservatism as the political manifestation of an authoritarian personality. Being fearful and

[45] Ibid., pgs., 215-16.
[46] Ibid., pg., 272.
[47] Ibid., pg., 170.
[48] Ibid., pg., 211.
[49] Ibid., pg., 193.
[50] Ibid., pg., 232.
[51] Ibid., pg. 199.
[52] Ibid., pgs., 267-68.

anxious before the unknown and untried, conservatives exhibit a higher need for order, closure, and structure, which goes on to express itself in moral puritanism and political authoritarianism. For Strict Father morality, explains Lakoff,

> Someone who moves off sanctioned paths or out of sanctioned territory is doing more than merely acting immorally. He is rejecting the purposes, the goals, the very mode of life of the society he is in. In doing so, he is calling into question the purposes that govern most people's everyday lives. Such "deviation" from social norms goes beyond mere immorality. Actions characterized metaphorically as 'deviant' threaten the very identity of normal people, calling their most common and therefore most sacred values into question.[53]

Give the threat posed by deviation, Strict Father morality requires us "to constantly be on the lookout for signs of moral decay and erosion and to stop them immediately, because once rot sets in or the foundation crumbles, repair may be impossible, immorality will become rampant, and society will be unable to function in its natural moral way."[54] Irreducible to specific transgressions and their consequences, immorality is here analogized to sickness, as a kind of contagion that can spread from person to person. There can therefore be an "outbreak" of immorality, the threat of which requires that the immoral be segregated from the moral, lest the contagion spread. This is, Lakoff argues, "part of the logic behind urban flight, segregated neighborhoods, and strong sentencing guidelines even for nonviolent offenders."[55]

This logic is also the logic of pre-modernity. Contemporary conservatives do not attempt to exercise the level of social surveillance and control that was normal in the pre-modern world. And clearly, many of their values are not pre-modern in their substance. Having arisen with the waning of the old cosmology, the ideal of the industrious "model citizen" is quintessentially modern. Nevertheless, Strict Father morality as described by Lakoff embodies the pre-modern conviction that individual and communal flourishing depend on upholding some wider order of things, and that this dependency can justify action against those threatening that order. The ostensible concerns of conservatives are modern, but the deeper *impetus* behind the concerns is, in a way, pre-modern. The goal isn't just to uphold certain conduct, but to uphold the order that sustains that conduct. This is why deviation "goes beyond mere immorality," as Lakoff says.

The teleological hierarchies of pre-moderns had an ever-present religious foundation. But religion for Lakoff is only one outlet for conservatives' devotion to "Moral Order." And the heart

[53] Ibid., pgs. 84-85.
[54] Ibid., pg. 92.
[55] Ibid., pg. 93.

of that devotion is a belief in differential superiority and inferiority, a framework of thought into which "various 'bigoted clauses' specifying who precisely is superior to whom may be inserted." These might include the "racist clause," the "anti-Semitic clause," the "jingoist clause," the "homophobe clause," or the "superpatriot clause." Contemporary conservatives do not necessarily harbor all these historically notorious bigoted clauses. But this just means that their moral hierarchy has open slots available for new ones, like survivalism, which symbolizes "the superiority of man over nature."[56] Whichever bigoted clauses happen to be operative, the priority is not human development, as for Nurturant Parent morality, but the "Principle of Self-Defense," the belief that it is our duty to "defend Strict Father morality above all else," especially against its inveterate opponents in academia and other liberal milieus.[57]

This is why the mythology of the model citizen has as its corollary a demonology, which stigmatizes defenders of the "public good" like environmentalists, consumer advocates, or proponents of affirmative action and government-supported health care. In attempting to constrain the business activities of model citizens, these nurturers threaten the general moral equilibrium on which all depend.[58] The *content* of these apprehensions is modern. But their *structure* is pre-modern. Conservatives' bigoted clauses serve to distinguish between those, like the model citizen, who have realized in their "person a place in the pattern, well, fully, with éclat," and those like the model citizens' liberal adversaries, who have sunk "toward the status of a shadow." In failing to uphold "the order which everyone lives," nurturers threaten the wider society with the same fate, which is why they must be opposed at every turn. The model citizen's various bigoted clauses are simply different ways these pre-modern categories become instantiated at the expense of the concrete human welfare that is the focus of Nurturant Parent morality.

If Lakoff's conservatives are quintessential pre-moderns, so his liberals are quintessential moderns. Liberals can concern themselves with nurturance because nurturance is the corollary of modern "fulfillment." Nurturing strikes liberals as what is obviously called for by the naturalistic disengagement that exposes as illusory the "thicker" conceptions of human flourishing to which conservatives remain beholden. Liberal morality seems to flow naturally from the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, which undermines the teleologies that support Strict

[56] Ibid., pgs. 276-77.
[57] Ibid., pg. 98.
[58] Ibid., pg. 171.

Father morality. If conservatives don't care for nurturance—in either themselves or others—this is because they haven't internalized this ethos, and so are perennially occupied with defending an illusory order against its illusory assailants whose humanity they must deny.

This is the core of Lakoff's attack on Strict Father morality. The problem is that its highest metaphors—moral strength, moral authority, and moral order—"do not keep one in direct touch with human flourishing at the most basic level of experience."[59] Having erected arbitrary good versus evil, us versus them, dichotomies, Strict Father morality breeds a "divisive culture of exclusion and blame." Appealing to the worst human instincts, it encourages us to "stereotype, demonize, and punish the Other—just for being Other."[60] Caring more "that a person is morally weak (lacking in self-discipline and self-reliance) or violating moral authority (a criminal) than that he is poor, sick, physically weak, or uncared for," Strict Father morality "gives priority to forms of metaphorical morality… over experiential morality." In doing so, it loses touch with our common humanity, becoming detached from "the nonmetaphorical, literal, directly experienced foundation of all metaphorical moral systems."[61]

Strict Father morality is no less "experiential" than Nurturant Parent morality in the sense that both are experienced by people. The difference is that *the metaphorical elements of Nurturant Parent morality also admit of a non-anthropocentric interpretation* that accurately tracks the creation of tangible harms and benefits—which is what naturalistic objectification permits us to recognize. By contrast, Strict Father morality by its very nature cannot be purged of its anthropocentric—that is, metaphorical—elements, because its metaphors are by their very nature detached from genuine human flourishing. Conservatives have remained mired in a pre-modern, anthropocentric sensibility. This sensibility blinds them to others' humanity because it blinds them to the human condition as it actually is.

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The subtraction account, says Taylor, tells us "that once religious and metaphysical beliefs fall away, we are left with ordinary human desires and these are the basis of our modern humanism."[62] This is precisely why liberals promote the fulfillment of ordinary human desire in

[59] Ibid., pgs. 382-83.
[60] Ibid., pg. 383.
[61] Ibid., pgs. 382-83.
[62] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 253.

disregard of conservatives' "vague premonitions of erosion or unraveling." For it is these premonitions and the teleological convictions they betray that threaten the nurturance whose focus is ordinary desire. Nurturance becomes possible only once we recognize fulfillment *as* fulfillment—recognize the commensurability of all human desire as the pursuit of "delight" and the evasion of "annoyance." This cannot be recognized without first uprooting all vestigial teleological hierarchies. Hence the eighteenth-century theoreticians of sympathy who described the phenomenon without reference to any idealistic cognition. Hume, for example, characterized sympathy as a kind of "contagion."[63] And this is because to conceptualize sympathy in more idealistic terms, as reflecting some belief in the higher, is to validate the moral hierarchies that can undermine sympathy.

Naturalistic disengagement does not automatically transform people into moral saints, of course. But to abandon the teleological hierarchies of old is also to abandon the *motivation* for presuming differential superiority and inferiority. The basic framework that gives this ranking its sense has been repudiated, after all. Ordinary human desires can involve their own self-centeredness, to be certain. But this is merely self-nurturance, and not the kind of destructive pride that gets spurred on by pre-modern apprehensions about sinking to the status of a shadow. The moral meaning of the naturalistic worldview is captured by Steven Pinker when he remarks that "a philosophy of living based on 'Not Everyone, just me!' falls apart as soon as one sees oneself from an objective standpoint as a person just like others. It is like insisting that 'here,' the place one happens to be occupying at the moment is a special place in the universe."[64] Naturalism reveals to us that the "real world" is incompatible with egoism. Thus, one cannot be simultaneously egoistic and rational, as Kant was arguing. "Nurturance" is not logically necessitated by naturalism, of course, any more than any "ought" can be necessitated by any "is." But nurturance is, in a sense, evidence that one has internalized the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, which is the flipside of naturalism, evidence that one has overthrown the pre-modern temptations that blind others to the interchangeability of all "heres."

Hence Taylor's observation that post-modernists' commitment to human rights is unmotivated by any traditional moral realism, and is instead "plainly powered by a sense of

[63] Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, pg. 61.
[64] Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate* (New York: Viking Press, 2002), pg. 187.

dignity, the sense of a demand laid on us by our very lucidity."[65] This sense that lucidity as such lays a moral claim on us is the reason why liberals aren't haunted by the specter of relativism, as are conservatives. George Nash notes that whereas post-war conservatives believed that totalitarianism originated in "corrosive, skeptical relativism," liberals traced it to the "militant reaffirmation of traditional 'absolutes.'"[66] This disagreement is explained by liberals' faith in the *moral power of naturalism*, their faith that non-anthropocentricity as such offers a moral substitute for whatever "absolutes" it corrodes, because the ensuing lucidity is in itself a wellspring of moral meaning. It is this assumption, and not mere sentimentalism, that guides liberal optimism about liberated human nature.

Liberalism's faith in the moral power of naturalism informs Martha Nussbaum's opposition to shame and disgust as bases for social policy. She writes:

> What inspires disgust is typically the male thought of the male homosexual, imagined as anally penetrable. The idea of semen and feces mixing together inside the body of a male is one of the most disgusting ideas imaginable—to males, for whom the idea of nonpenetrability is a sacred boundary against stickiness, ooze, and death. The presence of a homosexual male in the neighborhood inspires the thought that one might oneself lose one's clean safeness, become the receptacle for those animal products. Thus disgust is ultimately disgust at one's own imagined penetrability and ooziness, and this is why the male homosexual is both regarded with disgust and viewed with fear as a predator who might make everyone else disgusting.[67]

While all emotions carry the potential to distort our grasp of reality, Nussbaum argues that disgust is distorting in its essence.[68] For moralized disgust involves externalizing our primal sense of animal vulnerability onto social outsiders, turning them into embodiments of the human frailty we would like to deny in ourselves. Whereas anger can in principle track real danger in a reliable way, disgust is intrinsically unreasonable, embodying "magical ideas of contamination, and impossible aspirations to purity, immortality, and non-animality, that are just not in line with human life as we know it."[69] The attempt to control or contain what become seen as contaminated persons is a form of magical, atavistic thinking and feeling that pursues an unrealistic sense of

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[65] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 695.
[66] George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006), pg. 61.
[67] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton University Press, 2004), pg. 113.
[68] Ibid., pg. 13.
[69] Ibid., pg. 14.

invulnerability before life's contingencies. Disgust is inherently distortive because it represents "an aspiration to be a kind of being that one is not."[70]

So too is shame. Whereas guilt focuses on the wrongfulness of particular conduct, and so can track real harm, shame extends to the entirety of a person's being, adjudicating him inadequate in light of some unrealistic ideal of human perfection and omnipotence.[71] To shame is to externalize one's own sense of inadequacy before such an ideal and thereby announce oneself as an uncorrupted "normal" who is not susceptible to shame. The flipside of shame isn't self-respect but normalcy, and normalcy functions "like a surrogate womb, blotting out intrusive stimuli from the world of difference," creating a "type of surrogate bliss" that satisfies an "infantile wish for control and invulnerability."[72] Though the sense of shame is always anchored in specific social norms, it also presupposes a sense of inadequacy that precedes these. And this inadequacy is premised on an unreal ideal. Just like disgust, shame implicitly posits an ideal that is just out of line with life as it is.[73]

In seeking to expel the language of shame and disgust from the public sphere, Nussbaum is urging a certain kind of human self-recognition, which she calls the "psychological foundations of liberalism." These foundations, she writes, which would be fully realized in

> a society that acknowledges its own humanity, and neither hides us from it nor it from us; a society of citizens who admit they are needy and vulnerable, and who discard the grandiose demands for omnipotence and completeness that have been at the heart of so much human misery, both public and private.[74]

Here too is an implicit contraposition between the naturalistic lucidity of the strategic agent and the teleological illusion of those still mired in pre-modern temptation, which Nussbaum like other liberals understands as the root of much human misery. The psychological foundations of liberalism aren't good intentions, but the overcoming of this temptation. They consist in a certain kind of *discipline* imposed on our emotional lives, a discipline that subdues symbolic or ideational elements that do not reliably track the kinds of harms cognized from a non-anthropocentric standpoint. Liberalism presupposes the self-discipline to transcend anthropocentricity, to transcend the all-too-human need to embed oneself within a larger order and thereby lift oneself

[70] Ibid., pg. 74.
[71] Ibid., pg. 207.
[72] Ibid., pg. 219.
[73] Ibid., pg. 185.
[74] Ibid., pg. 17.

above mere animality toward a greater fullness of being. Citizens who have overcome or subdued this need are psychologically ready to acknowledge the reality of their animal vulnerability. In doing so, they repudiate the culturally sustained hierarchies of the pure and impure, or the normal and abnormal, on which the denial of vulnerability depends. Having rejected these hierarchies, they can see society naturalistically, as an agglomeration of vulnerable organisms just making their way about in the world.

It is this stance of naturalistic disengagement that allows us to understand disgust non-anthropocentrically—for example, as an evolved mechanism that might have once served as a reliable indicator of bacteria but now functions as a highly unreliable indicator of real threats to human welfare. Nussbaum's liberal citizens recognize that, unlike fear and anger, shame and disgust are unfortunate atavisms that cannot be translated into non-anthropocentric terms. They can understand these emotions as the products of irrational forces that impede the self-possessed lucidity of the strategic agent. No longer aspiring to some position within a larger order, such agents instead pursue secular fulfillment and help others achieve the same. If the anointed call upon the benighted to "grow" and become "aware," as Sowell says, it is with precisely this end in mind.

One important reason why conservatives and liberals talk past one another is that conservatives believe it is *they* who stand in opposition to anthropocentricity, which they associate with the hedonic license of mass-bohemianization. D'Souza explains that whereas conservatives embrace the traditional morality of "external commands," liberals celebrate a new morality of the "inner self," a morality of personal autonomy and self-fulfillment. Whereas conservative morality is "out there," liberal morality is "in here."[75] Seen in another way, however, the "in here" morality of liberalism is a form of submission before a higher imperative, the product of external command and the mark of *self-discipline* rather than self-indulgence. This morality presupposes the discipline to overcome the anthropocentricity that would otherwise becloud any clear distinctions between the "in here" and the "out there," between the world of human meaning and the world as it exists in itself. This overcoming may eliminate the stigma from certain behaviors, and so legitimate conduct that conservatives consider self-indulgent. But as liberals see it, this self-indulgence is *derivative* upon a prior act of self-control vis-à-vis the "consolations of the enchanted

[75] Dinesh D'Souza, *The Enemy at Home: The Cultural Left and its Responsibility for 9/11* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), pg. 20.

world," which conservatives appear to indulge without restraint. It is therefore conservatives, and not their enemies, who are the actual libertines succumbing to all-too-human temptation. Conservatives may not be hedonic libertines. But they are as liberals see them *teleological libertines*. They indulge their urge to "realize in one's own person a place in the pattern, well, fully, with éclat" in just the way they accuse sexual libertines of indulging in merely sensuous desire—yet another respect in which the Left is the Right and the Right is the Left.

3. A Learned Blindness

If conservative claims of cultural oppression refuse to accept liberalism at face value, this is because they refuse to accept this self-discipline at face value, and rather suspect the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity as just another ideological weapon in the arsenal of liberalism. Though they may be unable to articulate this conviction theoretically, conservatives sense that the contraposition between disciplined moderns and teleologically self-indulgent pre-moderns isn't bedrock natural reality, but rather a social construction of liberalism that distorts an underlying truth that, properly understood, redounds to the conservative cause. We will now begin to examine what this truth might be.

Explaining why Jehovah's Witness schoolchildren have the constitutional right to decline to recite the Pledge of Allegiance, Justice Jackson famously declared in *West Virginia v. Barnette* that if there is one "fixed star" in the Constitution, it is that "no official, whether high or low, is entitled to prescribe what is orthodox.[76] The proposition is compelling in its sheer majesty. But Lawrence Lessig asks how "an idea so plainly false--both as a description of our constitutional past and as a prescription about the proper role of government--can come to appear as foundational truth."[77] Justice Jackson's principle seems workable enough when we consider only constitutional prohibitions against censorship or coerced oaths. But it becomes most implausible once we veer our attention away from these central preoccupations of First Amendment law and consider what Lessig calls the "regulation of social meaning." We would then see that statecraft always involves creating or maintaining background webs of meaning through which we understand ourselves as

[76] *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 642 (1943).
[77] Lawrence Lessig, *The Regulation of Social Meaning*, 62 U. Chi. L. Rev. 943 (1995).

both citizens and private actors. In regulating these meanings, government is prescribing what shall be orthodox notwithstanding that it is neither censoring nor coercing speech.[78]

The regulation of social meaning was why many in the military resisted the open inclusion of gays in their ranks. That inclusion threatened to impose an orthodoxy by ambiguating the social meaning of being a military man. With this status having been defined historically in terms of certain "unambiguously male" virtues—strong, disciplined, emotionless, and, of course, heterosexual—the inclusion of gays, who are stereotyped as effeminate, weak, and irresolute, cannot but alter the social meaning of military membership, depriving it of its traditional connotations.[79] Even if no one is compelled to affirm that gays belong in the military or kept from opining the contrary, the open inclusion of gays established an orthodoxy. For this inclusion alone suffices to alter the social meanings in response to which opinions are shaped. An individual might continue to proclaim that the military enterprise is essentially heterosexual, but this judgment is no longer as it were "built into" the intrinsic meaning of military life, the way ideals of discipline and obedience continue to be.

We cannot strictly speaking believe whatever we will. For the strength of our own convictions is very much a function of whether the social meanings that support them are contested as contingent or accepted as natural. Lessig explains:

> When these understandings or expectations become uncontested and invisible, social meanings derived from them appear natural, or necessary. The more they appear natural, or necessary, or uncontested, or invisible, the more powerful or unavoidable or natural social meanings drawn from them appear to be. The converse is also true: the more contested or contingent, the less powerful meanings appear to be.[80]

Social meanings may all be "arbitrary" from a cosmic perspective. But it is a basic desideratum of social life that their arbitrariness be misrecognized as part of ineluctable nature. The force of social meanings depends on their *not* appearing constructed—that is, not as products of mere opinion—and instead operating as the "uncontested, or taken-for-granted, background of thought or expectation."[81] Given that this background cannot be ignored, social meanings "empower or constrain individuals, whether or not the individual chooses the power or constraints." They are "'forces to be reckoned with,' by the weakest as well as the strong," observes Lessig.[82] This ideal

[78] Ibid., pg. 945-46.
[79] Ibid., pgs. 987-89.
[80] Ibid., pgs. 955-61.
[81] Ibid., pg. 951.
[82] Ibid., pg. 955.

is captured by John Searle's characterization of social reality as simultaneously "epistemically objective" and "ontologically subjective."[83] It is ontologically subjective in that, unlike natural reality, social reality is causally dependent on the shared social practices that generate and sustain it. However, social reality is epistemically objective in that the lone individual is powerless to alter the social meanings he encounters, which impress themselves upon him with the same force as physical reality. Social meanings are "out there" and not just "in the mind."

Social meanings cannot be readily altered by even the strongest of lone individuals because the lone individual is powerless to alter the laws, norms, and practices that determine whether a social meaning is contested as a human creation or taken for granted as natural. This is a function of collective action, which is constrained by a collective action problem. Individuals' whose self-esteem is premised on extant social meanings have little incentive to attempt to change them, which requires proselytizing similarly reluctant others. Though a change in these norms might establish a new foundation for their self-esteem, rationally self-interested actors will not go out on a limb and make an individual sacrifice that can only be compensated by collective success.[84] This prisoner's dilemma gives the government, with its ability to incentivize far-reaching changes in human conduct, a special power that the lone individual lacks, no matter how vocal or courageous he may be. The government represents, not merely one viewpoint among others, but a special power to impinge on the social meanings that give resonance to some viewpoints to the exclusion of others. A democratic government cannot regulate what we can say, but it has great leverage over what we can "take seriously." This is why government is necessarily in the business of establishing orthodoxies, and why Justice Jackson's announcement would, if taken literally, call the legitimacy of most government functions into doubt.[85]

Lessig traces the mystery of Barnette to a "learned blindness" to the idea of the social construction of meaning. Though the idea is commonplace in social theory, it has been routinely ignored in much of law.[86] But this learned blindness cannot be explained as a peculiarity of ephemeral academic fashions. For the dissonance between Justice Jackson's "fixed star" proclamation and what we can all upon reflection recognize is and must be the case is the effect of the hold which the subtraction account and the ideal of disengaged strategic agency have over our

[83] John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), pgs. 12-13.
[84] Lawrence Lessig, *The Regulation of Social Meaning*, 62 U. Chi. L. Rev. 943, 993 (1995).
[85] Ibid., pg. 955.
[86] Ibid., pg. 946.

cultural self-understanding. On the one hand, we can recognize with Lessig that government is always involved in the construction and deconstruction of social meanings, and hence in the creation of orthodoxy. But on the other, the idea that human beings are first and foremost strategic agents *prevents us from taking the very idea of social meaning seriously*, as a "force to be reckoned with."

Social meanings thus conceived could exercise no real power over disengaged strategic agents, who inhabit a neutral, naturalistically describable environment in which ideological coercion has to take the form of direct injunctions. A strategic agent can be prevented from saying or hearing certain things. But being non-anthropocentric through and through, his basic "sense of things" cannot be similarly meddled with. Social meanings might have to be "reckoned with" by pre-moderns aspiring to realize in their own person "a place in the pattern, well, fully, with éclat." After all, it is the need to preserve social meanings that motivates today's pre-moderns, conservative model citizens, to stigmatize those who veer off the sanctioned path. But genuine moderns, we believe, have cast off these illusions and seek only "fulfillment"—only to satisfy a "felt desire for an object." And so they do not need to preserve social meanings. Lessig's "learned blindness" is broadly cultural rather than narrowly disciplinary because it reflects an understanding of human beings that prevents us from accepting social meanings as genuinely social, as "forces to be reckoned with," and instead reduces them to subjective states.

In blinding us to the regulation of social meaning, the subtraction account of secular modernity conceals the existence of what anthropologist Ernest Becker calls *hero-systems*:

> The fact is that this is what society is and always has been: a symbolic action system, a structure of statuses and roles, customs and rules of behavior, designed to serve as a vehicle for earthly heroism. Each script is somewhat unique, each culture has a different hero system. What the anthropologists call "cultural relativity" is thus really the relativity of hero-systems the world over. But each cultural system cuts out roles for earthly heroics; each system cuts out roles for performances of various degrees of heroism: from the "high" heroism of a Churchill, a Mao, or a Buddha, to the "low" heroism of the coal miner, the peasant, the simple priest, the plain, everyday, earthy heroism wrought by gnarled working hands guiding a family through hunger and disease.
>
> It doesn't matter whether the cultural hero-system is frankly magical, religious, and primitive or secular, scientific, and civilized. It is still a mythical hero-system in which people serve in order to earn a feeling of primary value, of cosmic specialness, of ultimate usefulness to creation, of unshakable meaning. They earn this feeling by carving out a place in nature, by building an edifice that reflects human value: a temple, a cathedral, a totem pole, a skyscraper, a family that lasts three generations. The hope and belief is that the things that man creates in society are of lasting worth and meaning, that they outlive or outshine death and decay, that man and his products count. When Norman O. Brown said that Western society since Newton, no matter how scientific or secular it claims to be, is

> still as "religious" as any other, this is what he meant: "civilized" society is a hopeful belief and protest that science, money and goods *make man count* for more than any other animal. In this sense everything that man does is religious and heroic, and yet in danger of being fictitious and fallible.[87]

The proposition that society consists in "a symbolic action system, a structure of statuses and roles, customs and rules of behavior" seems rather banal. And yet this banality is obscured by the subtraction account. For the latter relegates man's need to "count," to "earn a feeling of cosmic specialness" to a pre-modern past now transcended by strategic agents. Having been liberated from the illusory teleologies that once stimulated such aspirations, these agents simply maneuver through various coefficients of adversity toward their desired ends, dismissing any urges toward cosmic significance as illusion and vainglory. By contrast, Becker's facially banal observations posit a certain *symmetry and continuity* between the pre-modern and the modern, as well as between the religious and the secular, which the subtraction account cannot acknowledge.

Becker's observations speak to well-documented human experience. As he observes, the military leader who "after a short, whispered outline plan of attack, shouts, 'Let's go men!' with proper gravity and conviction, says much more than simply that. He implies that of all times and all places, this is the situation that man should want most to be in; and that 'to go' into the attack is unquestionably the greatest, most meaningful act that one could hope to perform."[88] Culture, says Becker, "creates us"[89] as agents. For it provides the language and symbols that allow situations to "call us to action." Culture is what *facilitates individual conviction*, and therefore action, because it imbues the world with a significance that would *justify* action. And justification is what human beings want and need. Though attested to by common human experience, these dynamics are fundamentally incongruous with the subtraction account, and correspondingly with our sense of ourselves as disengaged strategic agents whose ends are not determined for them from without, by "forces to be reckoned with." Strategic agents operate in a neutral environment where they determine their ends for themselves. The do not need to be somehow *convinced from without* that these are meaningful and justified. This may hold true of conservative "model citizens." But liberals believe they have transcended this condition.

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[87] Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), pg. 5.
[88] Ernest Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning* (New York: The Free Press, 1971), pg. 98.
[89] Ibid., pg. 98.

They have *not* in fact transcended it, however. They may dismiss the imperative to safeguard some order of things as a primitive atavism. But as Lessig and Becker both illustrate in their own ways, there is a level of human experience on which the pre-modern conviction in an "order of things" is *a human constant*, and not just a contingent social illusion of the fearful and anxious. Peter Berger observers:

> [I]t may be assumed that a musician in the making in contemporary America must commit himself to music with an emotional intensity that was unnecessary in nineteenth century Vienna, precisely because in the American situation there is powerful competition from what will subjectively appear as the 'materialistic' and 'mass culture' world of the 'rat race.' Similarly, religious training in a pluralistic situation posits the need for 'artificial' techniques of reality-accentuation that are unnecessary in a situation dominated by religious monopoly. It is still 'natural' to become a Catholic priest in Rome in a way that it is not in America. Consequently, American theological seminaries must cope with the problem of 'reality-slippage' and devise techniques for 'making stick' the same reality.[90]

Whereas pre-moderns struggled between living a full life with éclat and sinking toward the status of a shadow, we deploy techniques of "reality-accentuation" in the hopes of preempting "reality-slippage." But these are just two different vocabularies for describing what is one and the same phenomenon. If reality-accentuation is in order, this is because the meanings that sustain our identities cannot continue to do so while being recognized as mere fictions of the mind, and must rather be upheld as transcendent demands immune to the vagaries of human predilection—"forces to be reckoned with." The sense that others have a hand in either upholding or undermining an order of things upon which all depend may sound downright mystical. But framed in another way, it becomes commonsensical. Human beings have a sense, not only of "what individuals may reasonably expect of one another," but also of "what is to be done." Our relations are mediated, not only by contractual or quasi-contractual agreements, but also by a shared sense of things' significance that we sustain collectively.

This is why Berger can observe that the "objectivity of the institutional world 'thickens' and 'hardens'" as social meanings are transmitted from one generation to the next, accruing power "by the sheer force of their facticity."[91] If we require such thickening and hardening, this is because our identities are intelligible only as *responses* to meanings that *resist* our will, for this is what makes our will meaningful. The particular shape the resistance assumes can vary greatly. It

[90] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchorage/Doubleday, 1967), pgs. 145-56.
[91] Ibid., pg. 59-60.

can be, as Becker says, magical, primitive, and religious or else secular, scientific, and civilized. But in its essence, it is a human constant. We might deconstruct the thickening facticity of social meaning as a collective illusion when in a theoretical mood. But this facticity will impinge on us all the same, as it must if we are to function. Berger writes that consciousness is held together by a "plausibility structure" that in turn presupposes particular social conditions.[92] And this is because our self-understandings refer not only to the self, but also to a world of social meanings in which that self *makes sense*.

Seen in this light, the intolerance that liberals detect in conservatives is not the residue of certain outdated cosmological illusions, but a function of culture as such. Deviant voices may not actually upset the order of things—as pre-moderns and model citizens believe. But they can sometimes upset our conviction that this order is what we take it to be and, correspondingly, that we are who we thought we were. Our identities presuppose particular social narratives. And others' failure to satisfactorily play their parts in the story can upend our efforts to play our own. They can cause "reality-slippage" because their decision to go off-script will upset the plausibility of the narrative against which our identities are plausible. Just like a movie, identities can suspend disbelief only insofar as their narrative coherence is preserved. Whether we call this narrative coherence "moral order" or something else, we can all be threatened by conduct that calls it into question. What Justice Blackmun calls the "mere knowledge that other individuals do not adhere to one's value system" can present such just a threat, not as an isolated piece of information, but as a set of data points that cumulatively upset the narrative that grounds our identities. Deviant behavior contaminates the data set, and so impacts the narrative that may be extrapolated from it.

This is why liberals draw too sharp a contrast between conservative psychology and their own. Liberals believe they have cast aside pre-modern illusion. But what Berger calls a "plausibility structure" is simply a secularized, scientifically neutralized translation of the pre-modern "public order" which "everyone lives." The intolerance that liberals would associate with special features of the conservative personality is in fact intrinsic to cultural membership as such. This involves upholding, not just certain rules, but also the taken-for-granted status of social meanings, which is always precarious and threatened. Becker observes that "[o]ne culture is always a potential menace to another because it is a living example that life can go on heroically

[92] Ibid., pg. 16.

within a value framework totally alien to one' own."[93] Cultures can undermine one another because, despite their great variety, "they all ask and answer the same basic questions."[94] In revealing the fictional nature of a culture's answers to these questions, another culture can undermine the necessary precondition of a hero-system, and thus reduce its followers to the status of animals among animals.

The identity-preserving function of culture goes largely unnoticed in everyday life. But we become acutely aware of it in our responses to whatever threatens the social meanings that sustain our identities. Berger defines *nihilation* as the attempt to neutralize threats to the objectivity of certain social meanings through "conceptual liquidation," which assigns these threats "an inferior ontological status, and thereby a not-to-be-taken-seriously cognitive status." By "translating" what threatens a symbolic universe into concepts derived from that universe, "the negation of one's universe is subtly changed into an affirmation of it."[95] Thus, critics who criticize the fairness or legitimacy of an institution will be conceptually liquidated with the counter-charge that their criticisms are just sour-grapes resentment over their failure to gain entry into what they claim to despise. What had been a threat to institutional legitimacy is thereby translated into an affirmation of institutional legitimacy, because the social meaning of the critics' attacks now resides in the "chip on their shoulder," which highlights the desirability of the very thing being attacked.

These translations of negations into affirmations would be unnecessary were we really just strategic agents navigating from point A to B in a neutral, purely physical environment. This environment would consist in nothing beyond a set of instrumental relations that require no such affirmation. Its reality would not have to be "accentuated" because there could be no danger that it might "slip." Strategic agents represent, plan, calculate, and expedite, but they do not nihilate, because they aren't dependent on anything that needs to be thus defended. The *success* of their activities might be threatened from without, but their activities' *meaning* cannot be. Human beings *do* nihilate, however. And this suggests that liberals' self-image as strategic agents is fundamentally untenable, a distortion of what human beings are actually like. Liberals may react to conservatives' claims of psychic or communal harm with dismissive indignation, as Smith

[93] Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning*, pg. 140.
[94] Ibid., pg. 113.
[95] Berger and Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality*, pgs. 114-15.

observes. But our vulnerability to such harms is built into the structure of our agency, and it is only liberals' devotion to the subtraction account that blinds them to this human constant.

* * *

Dissenting from the Supreme Court's decision in *Yoder v. Wisconsin* affirming the religious freedom of Amish parents to withdraw their children from school at the age of fourteen, Justice Douglas argued that the decision failed to consider the children's own best interests. The parents wanted to withdraw their children from school at an early age in order to more effectively inculcate them with the Amish religion. Being embedded in the Amish way of life, Amish religion could be undermined by excessive contacts with the modern world. But these parents' designs, argued Douglas, risked forever barring the children's "entry into the new and amazing world of diversity that we have today." The children may aspire to become pianists, astronauts or oceanographers. But if a child "is harnessed to the Amish way of life by those in authority over him and if his education is truncated, his entire life may be stunted and deformed."[96] This worry was echoed many years later by Justice Stevens in his concurrence in *Kiryas Joel v. Grummet*, which invalidated a New York law that would have allowed the Satmar, an insular ultra-orthodox Jewish sect, to draw the boundaries of its public school district in a way that provided its children with a culturally homogenous environment. Stevens conceded that this might have spared their children the panic, fear, and trauma of finding themselves in integrated situations—the reason the Satmar were pursuing their own school district. But it also increased the likelihood that they would "remain within the fold, faithful adherents of their parents' religious faith." The state would then be providing "official support to cement the attachment of young adherents to a particular faith."[97]

In both cases, the objection wasn't to the religion's substance, but only to the danger that children might become "harnessed" or "cemented" to that substance. Both Justices were suggesting that religious upbringings hold unique dangers on this front that are absent in mainstream secular upbringings. Barack Obama was invoking the same idea when he notoriously assessed that working-class voters in Pennsylvania **"**get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy toward people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment

[96] *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205, 246 (1972) (Douglas, J., dissenting).
[97] *Board of Education of Kiryas Joel School District v. Grumet*, 512 U.S. 687, 749 (Stevens, J., concurring).

as a way to explain their frustrations."[98] Liberals *have* values, but it is conservatives who *cling* to their values. The truth, however, is that we have *all* been "cemented" or "harnessed" to a particular way of life. Becker explains why:

> You get a good feeling for what the self "looks like" in its extensions if you imagine the person to be a cylinder with a hollow inside, in which is lodged the self. Out of this cylinder the self overflows and extends into the surroundings, as a kind of huge amoeba, pushing its pseudopods to a wife, a car, a flag, a crushed flower in a secret book. The picture you get is of a huge invisible amoeba spread out over the landscape, with boundaries very far from its own center or home base. Tear and burn the flag, find and destroy the flower in the book, and the amoeba screams with soul-searing pain.
>
> Usually we extend these pseudopods not only to things we hold dear, but also to silly things; our selves are cluttered up with things we don't need, artificial things, debilitating ones. For example, if you extend a pseudopod to your house, as most people do, you might also extend it to the inventory of an interior decorating program. And so you get vitally upset by a piece of wallpaper that bulges, a shelf that does not join, a light fixture that "isn't right." Often you see the grotesque spectacle of a marvelous human organism breaking into violent arguments, or even crying, over a panel that doesn't match. Interior decorators confide that many people have somatic symptoms or actual nervous breakdowns when they are redecorating. And I have seen a grown and silver-templed Italian crying in the street in his mother's arms over a small dent in the bumper of his Ferrari.
>
> We call precisely those people "strong" who can withdraw a pseudopod at will from trifling parts of their identity, or especially from important ones. Someone who can say "it is only a scratch on a Ferrari," "the uneven wall is not me, the wood crack is not me," and so on. They disentangle themselves easily and flexibly from the little damages and ravages to their self-extensions….[99]

The passage illustrates what is once again a wide discrepancy between our actual lived experience and our cultural self-understanding as disengaged strategic agents maneuvering within a neutral environment denuded of cosmic significance. The *contents* of these preoccupations—bulging wallpaper, disjointed shelves—are quintessentially modern. But their *structure* is akin to the pre-modern sense of inhabiting a larger order that shapes our identities. People may *describe* themselves as pursuing modern fulfillment. But in the tissue of their lived experience, they cleave to what they feel is such an order. Failure here means more than mere frustration or disappointment, and rather involves the vague sense that they are somehow sinking toward the status of a shadow, losing the conditions under which they can be themselves. This is why we have such difficulty withdrawing our pseudopods from what *look* like mere trifles from the outside.

[98] http://www.politico.com/blogs/ben-smith/2008/04/obama-on-small-town-pa-clinging-to-religion-guns-xenophobia-007737

[99] Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaing*, pg. 34.

Disengagement is a *possibility*, of course, as when we with naturalistic lucidity recognizes that "it is only a scratch on a Ferrari." But as Becker illustrates, disengagement is something that may or may not be precipitated by a contingent confluence of factors. It is *not* the perennial fabric of our lived experience. It is not something that accrues to us by virtue of having once and for all overthrown the confining horizons of a benighted teleological past. We are not strategic agents in actual life because our planning and calculation must reckon with a background webs of significance that are antecedent to planning and calculation, delimiting the directions they can take. This is exactly what Becker describes in harrowing detail.

Very few people, then, inhabit Justice Douglas's "amazing world of diversity." And yet liberals often speak as though secular commitments are somehow resistant to the pseudopodic ossification described by Becker. Secularism is believed to enable our Beckerean amoebas to retreat back into their cylinders at will, to make contact with the world without submitting to its solicitations—that is, without the risk of harnessing or cementing. Liberals can recognize the "cemented" layer of our experience as a human constant once it is artificially placed in relief. But in the political context, they treat this constant as a special disability that uniquely afflicts certain religious believers and other conservatives, the product of constraining horizons from which free-thinkers are emancipated. This conviction originates in the cultural allure of the subtraction account and the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, which requires liberals to see themselves in this artificial way.

The strategic self-understanding expresses what Taylor calls "that recurrent figure which our civilization aspires to realize, the disembodied ego, the subject who can objectify all being, including his own," and thereby achieve "total self-possession."[100] Such self-possession is an impossible aspiration, however. William Barrett explains why:

> …man does not look out upon an external world through windows, from the isolation of his ego: he is already out-of-doors. He is in the world because, existing, he is involved in it totally. Existence itself, according to Heidegger, means to stand outside oneself, to be beyond oneself. My Being is not something that takes place inside my skin (or inside an immaterial substance inside that skin); my Being, rather, is spread over a field or region which is the world of its care and concern. Heidegger's theory of man (and of Being) might be called the Field Theory of Man….[101]
>
> To be sure, this existence is always *mine*; it is not an impersonal fact, as the existence of a table is merely to be an individual case of the class table. Nevertheless, the mineness of

[100] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, pg. 35.
[101] William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1958), pg. 217.

> my existence does not consist in the fact that there is an I-substance at the center of my field, but rather in that this mine-ness permeates the whole field of my Being.[102]

We are always "already out of doors" because even the most psychically versatile modern is, as Heidegger says, *thrown* into the world, thrown into a pre-reflective, pre-theorized "understanding-of-Being." This primordial sense of what the situation "calls for" can never be fully articulated because it forms the silent backdrop of reflective articulation. This is what the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity *conceals* from us. For this pre-reflective layer of experience is incongruous with the self-possession upon which liberalism premises our peculiarly human dignity. To preserve this dignity is to maintain a clear view of our "I-substance" and distinguish it sharply from what lies outside it. Secularism and liberal values are understood to promote this clarity, which is why conservatives are seen to lack the full agency powers enjoyed by liberals.

But this conception of human dignity and the identity it expresses *distort* our view of ourselves, which cannot be disentangled from the social world into which we are always already thrown. We do not, in everyday experience, encounter the world as would a strategic agent, as an enumerable set of "things" each of whose "properties" might or might not be useful to our ends. Quite the contrary, the significance of things inheres *in* them *prior* to reflection on "our" ends. Heidegger explains:

> When, for example, we walk along the edge of a field but 'outside it', the field shows itself as belonging to such-and-such a person, and decently kept up by him; the book we have used was bought at So-and-so's shop and given by such-and-such a person, and so forth. The boat anchored at the shore is assigned in its Being-in-itself to an acquaintance who undertakes voyages with it; but even if it is a 'boat which is strange to us', it still is indicative of Others. The Others who are thus 'encountered' in a ready-to-hand, environmental context of equipment, are not somehow added on in thought to some Thing which is just present-at-hand; such 'Things' are encountered from out of the world in which they are ready-to-hand for Others—a world which is always mine too in advance.[103]

Heidegger is arguing in opposition to the Cartesian tradition according to which our everyday consciousness is theoretical and proto-scientific. On this view, everyday consciousness is simply a cruder, more error-prone version of the stance which science actualizes with greater rigor. As "minds," we encounter a world constituted by discrete objects with self-contained qualities and quantifiable relations. And it is the purpose of rational thought, our distinctively human capacity, to determine what these qualities and relations are. But Heidegger is arguing that this view of the

[102] Ibid. pg. 219.
[103] Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (HarperSanFrancisco, 1962), pgs. 153-54.

human agent is fundamentally wrongheaded. Everyday consciousness encounters the world primordially not as "present-at-hand" but as "ready-to-hand," not as a set of qualities but as a set of *uses*. The world first reveals itself to us, not as a collection of things, but as a totality of *equipment*, which refers us, not to our "inner" desires and stratagems, but to a *public* world, an interrelated web of shared social understandings designating the purposes and uses of what we encounter. Only subsequently do these understandings become appropriated and individualized as "our own."

As Charles Guignon explains, in "roads, streets, bridges, buildings, our concern discovers nature as having some definite direction."[104] Implicit in this "definite direction" is a set of communal objectives and understandings in relation to which our identities are what they are. What Barrett calls our "mine-ness" can "permeate" the whole "field" of our being because it is by way of these social understandings—and *not* any disengaged and disembodied inner self—that our identities are first revealed to us. Since these understandings embody shared social relations, they ultimately refer us to our *place* within a larger order, without which we cannot be ourselves. If individuals cannot readily alter social meanings at will, this is because that very will originates from out of those meanings. The total self-possession of the strategic agent is illusory because our "mine-ness" and the field of significances toward which it is always "opened out" each permeate the other. The "ready-to-hand" and its "definite direction" *possesses us no less than we possess it*.

The strategic categories through which we ordinarily explain ourselves—the language of choice, relationships, individual projects and individual affect—therefore *misdescribe* the nature of our pre-reflective, pre-articulated experience, misdescribe how we actually encounter the world *prior* to explaining ourselves. Heidegger, writes Guignon, does not believe that "there is at first a subject with intentions, needs, and goals, which later comes to realize its aims in the world." For "I can come to discover myself as an agent with beliefs and intentions only derivatively from the more primordial situations in which there is no clear distinction between agency and context of action."[105] The language of subjectivism artificially dissolves what primordially is a unitary phenomenon into the dualism of merely "subjective" preferences confronting an "objective" world of cause and effect, with cognizance of the latter being the means of satisfying the former.

[104] Charles B. Guignon, *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge* (Indianapolis, IN: Hacket Publishing Company, 1983), pg. 71.
[105] Ibid., pgs. 98-99.

This dualism is now integral to the modern Western self-understanding. But the language of subjectivism doesn't *eliminate* a more primordial layer of experience or its role in structuring what our ostensibly subjective preferences turn out to be. This is why we can never truly rise to a non-anthropocentric standpoint, a standpoint that distinguishes human meanings existing in the mind from the world as it exists in itself. The concept of the "mind" as understood in our culture obscures that our projects are *responsive* to a life-world, to a pre-reflective layer of experience that structures all of our subsequent reflections. Taylor calls this our sense of the "original significance of things."[106] And this form of holistic cognition isn't acknowledged by the language of strategic action. Consciousness is not merely the capacity to frame representations and plan actions but, prior to this, the process of responding to the world's "solicitations," the silent backdrop of what we later reflect upon as "inner" desires.

Becker would distinguish between the human amoeba's various pseudopodic attachments and its "home base." But Heidegger's argument is that *there is no home base* in Becker's sense. The sense of innerness that Becker discerns originates, not in the self-assertion of a central command center, but in a situation where an individual's pseudopods—or field of "mine-ness" as Barrett says—have been fortuitously configured so as to *create* a home base. They create a stable frame of reference on whose basis *some* pseudopodic attachments can be scrutinized *as* mere attachments rather unthinkingly acquiesced in as the taken-for-granted context of action. This background is never fully escaped, however, because we are, as Barret says, always outside of ourselves out of doors. Becker believes that strong people can withdraw "a pseudopod at will from trifling parts of their identity." But doing so requires that they first see those parts *as trifling*, and this assumes that their field of meaning has shifted in a way that permits this distance. Meaning is first encountered in the *world*, not in our disembodied interiority, which has itself been created by a social world that "calls on us" to think and act as individuals.

Even the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity *constitutes a form of engagement*. For its actual contours are always precipitated and structured by shifts within our pre-reflective level of experience, whose reality will either "slip" or be "accentuated" in reflection of chance and circumstance. The disengaged reflexivity of the strategic agent may produce the

[106] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pg. 99.

sensation that the self resides somewhere inside our skin. But this sensation presupposes as its unspoken backdrop a particular way of being *outside* our skin.

It could not be otherwise. Becker's notion of a "homebase" requires us to see ourselves as embarked on a struggle toward ever greater psychic autonomy, until we are no longer subservient to any pseudopodic extensions, and therefore to the shared social understandings that underpin them. But this picture is both psychologically unrealistic and conceptually incoherent. As K. Anthony Appiah observes, people's "conception of the good or well-lived life would be undermined by their imagining it to be a wholly volitional affair, chosen among equally qualified candidates."[107] To have complete independence of mind would ultimately mean "not to be 'minded' at all," as one would lack any fixed horizons of decision-making.[108] Being "minded" involves a sense of submitting to the world's solicitations, the sense that we are being called upon to act by some kind of transcended power, whatever it be called. Our desires can feel like expressions of an underlying will only to the extent they are responsive to these solicitations, which in exerting their hold on us also assure us that we will not second-guess our values the next instant. Absent such horizons, deliberation would become a brute competition of impulses each seizing us by surprise.

Becker's ideal calls upon our amoeba to achieve complete disentanglement from its prior identifications in order to assume subsequent ones voluntarily. But on what basis could these subsequent identifications then be chosen? Having extricated itself from its earlier identifications, our amoeba will have deprived itself of any criteria by which to choose new ones. A choice to embrace certain "values" which does not itself express a more basic antecedent commitment would be a choice for which we could provide no reasons. Such a choice would not be humanly meaningful.

To the extent genuine desires can be distinguished from arbitrary impulses, this is only because we are encumbered by something outside of us that effectuates this distinction, *weighed down* by social meanings, by the thickening objectivity of the institutional world. Social meanings can constrain us because they ground our identities. To preserve identity is to contain freedom—to limit the range of possibilities that one can *seriously* contemplate. This narrowness is the *sine qua non* of taking *oneself* seriously, which is what social meanings allow us to do. A field of social

[107] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton University Press, 2005), pg. 47.
[108] Ibid., pg. 53.

meanings not only confronts us as a force to be reckoned with, but moreover *permeates* us as the unspoken substratum of our very agency.

This doesn't mean that we always enjoy a powerful sense of our actions meaningfulness. The Field Theory of Man describes, not the presence of particular psychological states, but the structure of human agency, which is what gives our psychological states their meaning. We may not always feel strongly "solicited" toward any particular conduct, but we cannot be indifferent to what is a felt absence. The naturalistic stance, where subjective and objective are rigorously distinguished, is simply incongruous with our agency as we live it—or rather, as we *need* to live it. Hence existentialist invocations of angst and nausea, which are harrowing accounts of people who by virtue of their disengagement can no longer accept the usual culturally-sanctioned answers to the problem of human identity. Their selfhood has been compromised by its very "open-mindedness."

* * *

The philosophical upshot of all these observations is that *there exists a layer of universal human experience which is structurally pre-modern*. The particular *contents* of pre-modern cosmologies have been rejected in favor of modern scientific discovery. Nevertheless, the *structure* of the pre-modern self-understanding reflected greater attunement to a perennial feature of human agency, which is covertly retained by moderns despite being denied in their official self-conceptions.

In arguing that the ancients possessed a superior "understanding of Being" than do moderns, Heidegger was describing the historical development of the modern consciousness as the gradual *impoverishment* of our intuitive attunement to what Barret calls the Field Theory of Man. As Guignon notes, the sense that the self is a kind of placeholder within a broader social structure was articulated by the Greeks in the idea of the *oikos* and later the *polis*, and then by medieval Christianity through the idea of a divinely ordained hierarchy.[109] *Officially*, this sense of embeddedness has been replaced by the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. But what pre-moderns articulated explicitly remains with us implicitly in our pre-reflective everyday engagement with the world, whose true structure is papered over by our culture's subjectivist bent. This modern inwardness is not "unreal," but it is *derivative*. And the cultural distortion is

[109] Guignon, *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge*, pg. 108.

mistaking it for a primary phenomenon, which is what the subtraction account reinforces. Far from being "subtracted," the pre-modern imperative to "realize in one's own person a place in the pattern, well, fully, with éclat" has merely *receded* into the unnoticed background of consciousness. The self-possessed strategic agent—"that recurrent figure which our civilization aspires to realize"—has simply been *superimposed* on a more primordial layer of experience that it cannot supplant but refuses to acknowledge.

The strategic conception of the human agent is naturalistic inasmuch as it seems to free us from any untenably anthropocentric teleological commitments. But it is also in tension with naturalism inasmuch as it conceals the culturally *embodied* nature of human consciousness. Becker writes:

> We must realize simply that this is how this animal must act if he is to function as this animal. Man's fictions are not superfluous creations that could be "put aside" so that the "more serious" business of life could continue. The flesh-and-blood action of lower animals is no more infused with seriousness than is the ethereal symbolic conduct with which man organizes his dominion over nature. We may deal with flimsier coin, but, like the abstractness of high finance, the business is even more serious for it.[110]

It is precisely the ideal of the disengaged, self-possessed strategic agent which motivates liberals' conviction that hero-systems are somehow "intangible," "merely symbolic," or lacking the "seriousness" of hard-nosed utilitarian rationality. But this assessment is at odds with a genuinely sophisticated naturalism that approaches the mind, not as a disembodied homunculus or "soul," but as the outgrowth of natural processes, including social processes, without which we would not be recognizably human. Our "pre-modern" layer of experience is an ineluctable human constant because human beings are instinctually impoverished by comparison with other animals, and therefore rely on culture to do much that other animals do instinctively. Human beings must become "symbolically re-instinctivized" by culture just as other animals are "physio-chemically instinctivized" by nature, observes Becker.[111] The pre-modern "order of things" is merely the conscious manifestation of this instinctivization.

Berger observes that, with their instinctual poverty depriving humans of any "species-specific environment," they find themselves in a condition of "world-openness," and this is compensated for by a social reality that gives our biological substratum a structure that nature

[110] Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning*, pg. 139.
[111] Ibid., pg. 184.

alone does not provide it.[112] In the same vein, Clifford Geertz writes that the extreme, generality, diffuseness, and variability of our innate, genetically endowed response capacities makes the assistance of cultural patterns indispensable. Without this assistance, we would be but formless monsters, "with neither sense of direction nor power of self-control, a chaos of spasmodic impulses and vague emotions."[113] However the point is put, the upshot is that the pre-modern layer of experience—a sense of oneself as operating against a background order in relation to which one must remain satisfactorily positioned—is only superficially vainglorious self-delusion. A genuine naturalism reveals it as integral to our organismic functioning, as integral to "flesh-and-blood" action. Human agency is necessarily extended over a field of social meanings because it is only by means of this that what lies "inside" our skins becomes ordered and integrated. Seen in this light, hero-systems are not idle "symbolic" luxuries, intangible "cultural" concerns, but rather a biological necessity.

4. The Symbolic and the Substantive

The mystery is why liberals can readily recognize these human constants in their capacity as philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, and legal theorists at the same time as they downplay them in their capacity as political actors. Here, they will rather sharply dichotomize the psychologies of liberals and conservatives and conclude that conservatives are uniquely benighted, beset by irrational compulsions from which they are free. Declaring his "opposition" to gay marriage, satirist Stephen Colbert explained:

> Marriage is the basic building block of society. And if gay men get married, that threatens my marriage immediately because I only got married as a taunt toward gay men because they couldn't… I just don't know else—why I got married other than to rub it in gay people's faces.[114]

Warn though they may that same-sex marriage threatens the very institution of marriage as such, conservatives have always been at a loss to explain how so. How can the presence of a same-sex couple next door in any way impinge on the stability of one's own marriage, liberals will ask. The liberal reflex has always been to dismiss these apprehensions as thinly disguised bigotry, inner conflicts that are being arbitrarily "taken out" on the target group. The celebration of traditional

[112] Berger and Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality*, pgs. 47-51.
[113] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (Fontana Press, 1993), pg.99.
[114] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAPPnv6BpsU.

values is merely a disguise for this agenda. Hence the anointed's demand that the benighted "grow" and become "aware."

But many on the Left have in more sophisticated terms *acknowledged* that the destruction of the family is precisely their aim, and that same sex-marriage is tactically useful to this end. Lesbian activist Masha Gessen told a sympathetic audience:

> Gay marriage is a lie. Fighting for gay marriage generally involves lying about what we're going to do with marriage when we get there. It's a no-brainer that the institution of marriage should not exist. … 'Marriage equality' becomes 'marriage elasticity,' with the ultimate goal of 'marriage extinction.'

She explained that

> I have three kids who have five parents, more or less, and I don't see why they shouldn't have five parents legally… I met my new partner, and she had just had a baby, and that baby's biological father is my brother, and my daughter's biological father is a man who lives in Russia, and my adopted son also considers him his father. So the five parents break down into two groups of three… And really, I would like to live in a legal system that is capable of reflecting that reality, and I don't think that's compatible with the institution of marriage.[115]

If "marriage elasticity" has "marriage extinction" as its ultimate aim, the reason isn't that the traditional 1950s-style nuclear family would become somehow outlawed, but that such elasticity would erode the hero-system that previously supported this family, depriving the institution of its traditional social meaning. The "family" being targeted by the "homosexual agenda" is not the bare practices of cohabitation, financial interdependence, and child rearing by two legally bound adults, but the hero-system of social conservatives, that thick structure of aspirational roles invoked by talk of traditional family values. This is exactly what conservatives are referring to in their warnings that the family is under attack.

Same-sex marriage can carry implications for heterosexual couples insofar as "traditional marriage" thereby becomes but one possible interpretation of a civil institution, rather than its intrinsic and uncontested meaning. Gay marriage isn't only an expansion of rights, but also an exercise in the regulation of social meaning. As such, it can upset the social plausibility, and therefore the personal resonance, of the traditional interpretation of marriage notwithstanding that no one is being physically disabled in their marital activities. To the extent marriage becomes socially understood as just another agreement rather than a sacrament, its value will be seen to

[115] http://www.inquisitr.com/641413/gay-marriage-is-a-lie-lesbian-masha-gessen-and-glenn-beck-agree/

inhere in individual sentiments rather than in a divine commandment that ratifies these sentiments. Traditionalists are thereby threatened with a different interpretation of themselves, confronted with the possibility that the sacredness they believed they saw in their marriages was a projection of their own emotions. They remain free to argue that, whatever the legal status of same-sex marriage, it is only marriages like their own that truly count in the eyes of God. But given (1) that this interpretation is now contested and (2) that social meanings are "forces to be reckoned with," traditionalists may be unable to actually imbue their marriages with this kind of meaning. Placed in Lessig's framework, conservative complaints about liberals' "attack on the family" are less paranoid and more sophisticated than liberals will acknowledge. And this is because that framework puts the strategic conception of agency out of play, allowing us to see what it ordinarily conceals.

Certainly, one reason why liberals greet warnings about threats to "traditional values" with "dismissive indignation," belittling these as "vague premonitions of erosion or unraveling," is that they do not accept the "pre-modern" dynamics that engender them at face value. Pre-moderns failed to recognize what Searle calls the "ontological subjectivity" of social meanings. But modern liberals do recognize it and so seek to articulate "the thickening objectivity of the institutional world" naturalistically and sociologically rather than metaphysically, as the product of human practices rather than the emanation of some transcendent dispensation. Whilst traditionalists are fixated on the "epistemic objectivity" of their social meanings—the fact that they are "forces to be reckoned with"—the liberals who attack these meanings emphasize their ontological subjectivity. In "relativizing" the epistemically objective as the ontologically subjective, they seek to dissolve the power of heretofore taken-for-granted social meanings by highlighting their origins in contingent social practices—so as to compel people to take these meanings less "seriously."

However, the issue here isn't whether conservatives' "pre-modern" social dynamics must be taken at face value, or whether the political demands they generate are justified, but rather the "dismissive indignation" with which these demands are ordinarily greeted by liberals. Liberals' outraged incredulity expresses, not mere moral disagreement, but the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity and a corresponding hostility toward those who seem to reject it. The dismissiveness is intended to signal, not just a different vision of the good, but the naturalistic lucidity of the disengaged subject, who isn't "taken in" by the unreflective social meanings that

beguile conservatives. Liberals' dismissive indignation toward the social meanings of conservatives thus has a distinct social meaning of its own.

This is what makes the dismissive indignation disingenuous. For just like shame and disgust for Nussbaum, this dismissiveness reflects "an aspiration to be the kind of being one is not," an aspiration that is "just not in line with life as we know it." The subtext of liberals' outrage is that we can subtract the pre-modern layer of human experience and that conservatives have culpably failed to do so. But this subtraction is impossible, we saw, merely a cultural fiction. And this means that conservatives' "vague premonitions of erosion or unraveling" signal the erosion and unraveling of something *real*, something on which people genuinely depend and which they do truly confront as forces "to be reckoned with." Yet this is precisely what liberals' outraged incredulity is intended to deny. The purpose of this denial isn't simply to condemn conservatives morally, but to impugn their competence as human agents, to highlight their failure to realize their human essence as strategic agents liberated from the confining horizons of a benighted teleological past.

Same-sex marriage is a "lie," as Gessen says, because implementing it required implementing social meanings that call on us to *lie about the very fact of social meaning*. The campaign for same-sex marriage delegitimized a certain range of social meanings, not by disputing their substantive content, but by portraying their adherents, traditionalists, as compromised by a unique heteronomy from which liberals are free. Lessig's "learned blindness" to social meaning is also a politically expedient blindness. It is not only an unconscious habit, but also a rhetorical tactic. By implicitly invoking the subtraction contrast between liberated strategic agents and hidebound pre-moderns, it places traditionalists at a rhetorical disadvantage they do not deserve, reducing them to Stephen Colberts pleading for their right to rub their marriages in gay people's faces.

Intolerance becomes downright mysterious once we conceive of people as strategic agents—perhaps self-interested contractors maximizing their utility. But it is more intelligible and less gratuitous in the context of hero-systems. For intolerance is what safeguards hero-systems against whatever threatens to reveal their arbitrariness, contingency, or socially constructed character. The Left can recognize this in many contexts. Where the benighted traditionalist speaks of some ethereal "social fiber," the post-modern sophisticate speaks of "social constructions." But *the underlying referent is the same*, a hero-system, the socially sustained meanings that fortify

individuals in their identities. This is what conservatives defend and what liberals attack. Which side of the culture wars, then, is the disingenuous one? Whether the destruction of the "traditional family" is morally desirable is a separate question, of course. But even if this is a "no-brainer," as Gessen believes, conservative claims of cultural oppression are not any more disingenuous than the outraged incredulity with which they are customarily greeted by liberals.

Following Nussbaum, liberals will dismiss opposition to same-sex marriage as a symptom "narcissistic fear and aggression" awoken by "anxiety about change that eludes control, and the loss of control over cherished values."[116] But this human weakness is not unique to social conservatives opposing the "gay agenda." On the contrary, it is a human constant that plays itself out in a great many ways, either crudely or subtly, and with or without any overtly religious or moralistic trappings. Liberals understand this in theoretical contexts like Gessen's speech. Yet it is quickly forgotten in more heated political ones, where conservatives are held to standards that cannot be applied consistently. Conservatives' visceral conviction that the liberal culture is holding them down through oppressive dualisms and double-standards originates in precisely this disingenuousness. And this is why conservatives urge us to recognize the human constants that would undermine these dualisms, revealing the *symmetries* that liberalism will not acknowledge.

* * *

Gay rights are merely one of many fronts on which liberals chide conservatives for having irrationally fetishized merely "symbolic" interests at the expense of genuinely "substantive" ones. Republicans, writes Nunberg, have demonstrated an "ability to change the political subject," to divert "resentments that have their roots in economic inequalities into debates over 'values.'"[117] Voters' "apparent willingness to subordinate substantive interests to symbolic ones" has been the decisive factor since the Nixon years, when Republicans first began invoking symbolic interests in an appeal to Southern and working-class voters.[118] But Nunberg's diagnosis springs from the very cultural distortions we have been examining. Liberals' exasperation over conservatives' preoccupation with "intangible" or "merely symbolic" goods like national honor, the moral fiber

[116] Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, pg. 260.
[117] Geoffrey Nunberg, *Talking Right: How Conservatives Turned Liberalism into a Tax-Raising, Latte-Drinking, Sushi-Eating, Volvo-Driving, New York Times-Reading, Body-Piercing, Hollywood-Loving, Left Wing Freak Show* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007), pg. 15.
[118] Ibid., pg. 7.

of society, and so forth is merely the latest iteration of the social ideals by which the modern age has always set itself against a benighted teleological past. The sharp dichotomization between the "symbolic" and the "substantive" is simply one way of articulating the subtraction account-driven contraposition between superstitious pre-moderns self-indulgently succumbing to the allure of inherited teleological regimes and self-critical moderns with the discipline to resist these temptations. To borrow from Hirschman, where conservatives are governed by the passions, liberals are governed by the interests.

However, the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity is not invoked when it comes to liberals' own "merely cultural" preoccupations. Liberals have no difficulty recognizing the *seriousness* of the symbolic in the context of multiculturalism, for example. Here, it is conservatives who dismiss symbolic interests as diverted socio-economic frustration, free-floating, self-indulgent identitarian obsession oblivious to the harsh truths of the real world. Sowell observes:

> The world of the anointed is a very tidy place—or, put differently, every deviation of the real world from the tidiness of their vision is considered to be someone's fault… Unfulfilled yearnings or chafing inhibitions have no place in this tidy world of the anointed, where even an inadequate supply of group heroes and historic group achievements is someone else's fault, presumably the historians'. It is a world where reality is 'socially constructed' and can therefore be 'deconstructed' and then reassembled to one's heart's desires.[119]

Multiculturalists believe that the number of black scientists and inventors acknowledged in high school history textbooks is of vital importance to the self-esteem and life-prospects of black students, and so see themselves as promoting substantive rather than symbolic interests. But how, then, can the question of whether America was at its inception a "Christian nation" be dismissed as a "distraction" from the bona fide "substantive" interests of religious conservatives? There is a double-standard at work here, because the boundary between the symbolic and the substantive appears drawn selectively in the service of liberal ideology.

D'Souza asks "Why are many liberals obsessed with whether there is prayer at a school graduation or whether the local town hall has a Christmas crèche? What possible harm is being done by such things?"[120] If the desire to place a crèche on public property is a purely symbolic aspiration, then so too is the desire to remove it. And yet this symmetry is papered over by liberals.

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[119] Thomas Sowell, *The Vision of the Anointed: Self-Congratulation as a Basis for Social Policy* (New York: Basic Books 1995), pg. 244-45.
[120] D'Souza, *The Enemy at Home*, pg. 200.

They may argue that even a minor erosion of the wall of church-state separation bring us one step closer to theocracy and new wars of religion, which is surely a substantive worry. But given the speculative character of this slippery slope forecast, it may be suspected as the symbolic expression of the Left's cultural aversion to religion, which is being *disguised* as a substantive concern. Liberals typically reject the "broken windows" approach to crime prevention and dispute the suggestion that petty crime must be harshly punished lest these infractions become gateways to more serious lawlessness. Why, then, do liberals treat minor infractions against church-state separation as the beginnings of fundamentalist theocracy?

Can *What's the Matter with Kansas?* be explained by the theory of human nature that guides its diagnosis of working-class conservatives? Did Thomas Frank embark on his career as a political writer in order to maximize his economic utility, or was he prepared to sacrifice this for a higher ideal, irrespective of whether it bore fruit? Liberals do not typically accuse that starving artists in Brooklyn have been "distracted" from their "real" interests by the bohemian culture, which can't provide the tangible rewards of an MBA. Nor do they thus judge all the left-leaning academics in the humanities who forfeited higher salaries in the private sector in order to construct and deconstruct reality, as Sowell says. Nunberg charges that conservatives divert resentments originating in economic inequality into debates about values. But radical academics in the humanities would reject the analogous charge that their theories arise from diverted socio-economic resentment, functioning as psychic compensation for subpar salaries and subpar prestige. These are not the kinds of people who find themselves accused by liberals of self-deludingly sacrificing the substantive to the symbolic, of cultivating of vague cultural grievances that can never be appeased.

The Left does not consistently elevate the economic over the cultural as such. What is dismissed as "merely symbolic" is really the particular range of cultural preoccupations associated with conservative claims of cultural oppression. It is these, not the sphere of the symbolic per se—whatever its precise boundaries—that are dismissed as somehow ethereal and subjective by comparison with the ostensibly more tangible sphere of the economic. Wherever we look, the line between the symbolic and the substantive will fluctuate according to liberal priorities. As Goldberg observes, only when "conservatives have the upper hand on a cultural issue" do liberals insist that only bread and butter issues are "serious." But when liberals are "on offense," then "it's all about racial quotas, mainstreaming gay culture, scrubbing the public square of Christianity, and

a host of explicitly cultural ambitions."[121] Symbolic cultural grievances are dismissed as intangible or unreal when expressed in the less eloquent voice of the ordinary American but celebrated as "idealism" and "insight" when conveyed in the professionalized lingo of credentialed academic elites. In *this* context, the suggestion that cultural preoccupations lack the seriousness of bona fide economic productivity will be dismissed as old-fashioned anti-intellectualism.

These observations provide the beginnings of an answer to the questions with which we concluded Chapter Three. If liberals have been projecting their own vices onto conservatives, foremost among these vices is their own status as symbolic animals seeking cosmic specialness through a socially-sustained hero-system. Liberals may concede that they share in normal human folly. But whereas they chalk up their own zeal and arrogance to generic human imperfection, they trace those of conservatives to the latter's blind immersion in a hero-system—which liberals have in their superior cognitive and emotional maturity transcended. Liberals can thereby identify conservatives with animal-like symbolic re-instinctivizations while seeing themselves as a self-possessed consciousness having objectified all being. Liberals are serious and mature but conservatives are frivolous and immature, still mired in the teleological past from which liberals have freed themselves. Once this is accepted, dismissive indignation becomes the only sensible response to conservatism.

5. Deceptive and Self-Deceptive Histrionic Mimicry

The subtraction account of modernity and secularity would lead one to expect strategic disengagement to constitute the perennial fabric of our experience, because what had impeded it has now been eliminated. But it does *not* as a matter of fact constitute the perennial fabric of our experience, which remains structured by a socially sustained sense of transcendence. As we have seen, the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity can only be deployed selectively, to undermine what is merely a certain range of symbolic aspirations, and not symbolic aspiration as such. Thus, what the subtraction account of modernity holds out as an underlying feature of human nature—the self-possessed innerness of the strategic agent—represents a distortion of some kind. This is what an alternative theory of modernity would have to explain. In doing so, it would also

[121] Jonah Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), pg. 358.

be explaining conservative claims of cultural oppression, which are *reactions* to this selectivity and disingenuousness.

I will term this alternative theory of modernity the "mutation counter-narrative," and will expound it in greater detail next chapter. But the crucial idea for present purposes is that what the subtraction account mischaracterizes as underlying features of human nature that remain after certain earlier, confining horizons have been eliminated are in truth *mutations of what we mistakenly believe has been eliminated*. The modern, strategic agent is not the categorical overcoming of earlier cultures' hero-systems, but merely a mutation thereof. Hegel's gives us part of this idea here:

> The realization first arose in religion, in the innermost region of spirit; but to introduce it into the secular world was a further task which could only be solved and fulfilled by a long and severe effort of civilization. Thus slavery did not cease immediately with the acceptance of the Christian religion. Liberty did not suddenly predominate in states nor reason in governments and constitutions. The application of the principle to secular conditions, the thorough molding and interpenetration of the secular world by it, is precisely the long process of history. I have already drawn attention to this distinction between a principle as such and its application, its introduction and execution in the actuality of life and spirit. This is a fundamental fact in our science and must be kept constantly in mind. Just as we noted it in the Christian principle of self-consciousness and freedom, so it shows itself in the principle of self-consciousness and freedom in general. World history is progress of the consciousness of freedom.[122]

"Secularization," on the mutation counter-narrative, is not the lopping off of religion, but the "thorough molding and interpenetration of the secular world" by religion. The secular is necessarily the secularization *of* something that is not itself secular, the reinterpretation and internalization of religious ideals whose origins are now obscured. The subtraction account associates the secular, naturalistic consciousness with psychological and epistemic liberation from pre-modern religious illusions. But the mutation counter-narrative sees it as the final fruition of the very impulses that once drove those illusions.

In this vein, Taylor observes that the "ideal of the modern free subject, capable of objectifying the world, and reasoning about it in a detached, instrumental way" is a "novel variant of a very old aspiration to spiritual freedom" with Greek and Christian roots, an aspiration whose "motive force… is closely akin to the traditional drive to spiritual purity."[123] The disengaged strategic agent liberated from anthropocentricity through naturalistic objectification isn't a brute

[122] G.W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History*, trans. Robert S. Hartman (Macmillan Publishing Company, 1953), pg 24.
[123] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, pgs. 112-13.

casting aside of religious illusion, but a mutation and secularization of an old tradition of religious asceticism, which has simply been secularized into the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. In its traditional form, the asceticism meant the aspiration to transcend the merely human ambitions of pagan antiquity to achieve the vantage point of a larger cosmic order—to rise above the City of Man toward the City of God. In its modern, secularized iteration, the aspiration is to transcend any such cosmic order and achieve the vantage point of a privileged naturalistic lucidity that sees the world in non-anthropocentric terms. As different as these projects seem, both are attempts to rise above what Taylor calls the "peculiarly human emotions"[124] in pursuit of a higher spiritual state.

This is why the development of the modern is already implicit in the pre-modern. Secularization turns *against* religion the very ideals that were originally marshaled *by* religion against the values of pagan antiquity. In insisting that we distinguish "between a principle as such and its application, its introduction and execution in the actuality of life and spirit" Hegel is arguing that while secularization is a discarding of traditional Christian *beliefs*, it is also the development of a form of *consciousness* that was first inculcated through Christianity and the cultural practices it spawned. The "principle" may no longer be accepted, or even contemplated. But its real-world "application" is so taken-for-granted as to go unnoticed.

The subtraction account holds that ordinary human desire is what naturally remains upon discarding traditional religious and metaphysical beliefs. But the mutation counter-narrative posits that what we have come to think of as ordinary human desire has a distinctive structure that originated in this ostensibly discarded past. Nietzsche writes:

> You are still burdened with those estimates of things that have their origin in the passions and loves of former centuries. Your sobriety still contains a secret and inextinguishable drunkenness. Your love of "reality," for example—oh, that is a primeval "love." Every feeling and sensation contains a piece of this old love; and some fantasy, some prejudice, some unreason, some ignorance, some fear, and ever so much else has contributed to it and worked on it.[125]

What Nietzsche calls our 'inextinguishable drunkenness" on "old loves" can be understood as a "pre-modern residuum," a "field" of historically bequeathed social meanings atop of which the disengaged strategic subject has merely been superimposed. This ongoing legacy is the reason why the modern liberal identity is "thicker" than liberals can recognize. This identity's putative

[124] Ibid., pg. 112.
[125] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Vintage Books, 1974), pg. 121 (Sec. 57).

sobriety and "realism" is silently guided by old loves that liberals in their rationalism cannot see. The naturalistic disengagement by which liberalism defines itself is thoroughly structured by subtle, taken-for-granted cultural understandings that give concrete shape to abstractions like freedom, equality, religious neutrality, and even Lakoffian nurturance. This is why what liberals take to be the basic asymmetries between liberalism and conservatism cannot be accepted at face value. Given its religious origins, the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity is itself a kind "sanctioned path" from which one may not deviate. And this is what liberals impose in imposing their liberalism.

The subtraction account motivates what Taylor calls our culture's tendency to "'naturalize the features of the modern liberal identity" and thus overlook that it is "one, historically constructed understanding of human agency among others."[126] To naturalize the modern liberal identity is to see it, not as the product of historically contingent cultural developments, but as timeless human nature, which was always there even as it was being suppressed. Historical development is here relevant only inasmuch as it is what was required to liberate the underlying features of human nature from earlier, confining illusions and limitations—and *not* because those developments have actually generated, and *remain expressed* in, those features. But this is exactly what the mutation counter-narrative tells us is the case. It posits the historically constructed character of the modern liberal identity in the stronger sense that would actually *explain the selectivity* of liberals' exhortations to disengage from the merely cultural or symbolic, showing how this selectivity betrays spiritual drives that are at odds with liberalism's ostensible secularism.

The mutation counter-narrative can reveal this because it reveals the disengaged strategic agent, not as the transcendence of all hero-systems, but as a hero-system in its own right. If its ideals are invoked only selectively, this is because they work in the service of a hero-system, which arrogates the prestige of naturalistic disengagement without ever delivering it. Being bound up with a host of undeclared cultural understandings, the ideal is something that will be invoked in certain contexts and not others, in certain ways and not others, by certain individuals and not others, on behalf of certain causes and not others. This selectivity isn't gratuitous personal hypocrisy, but the residue of the past living on within us, the direct manifestation of old loves, the "inextinguishable drunkenness" that lies not far underneath our pretenses to sober self-possession. Moderns may articulate their motivations in the language of "fulfillment," in hedonic, utilitarian

[126] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 571.

or quasi-utilitarian terms. But this operates in continuous interaction with the pre-modern residuum, the imperative to "realize in one's own person a place in the pattern, well, fully, with éclat." And it is this interaction that shapes the concrete meaning of our ostensibly hedonic aspirations.

This is the Enlightenment contradiction that conservatives discern intuitively in liberals. MacIntyre observes that the philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries believed that human affairs could be governed by managerial expertise based on value-neutrality and the manipulative power granted by a mechanistic understanding of human behavior.[127] But being intellectually confused from the outset, this goal could never be achieved. Instead, it has been translated into a "social performance which disguises itself as such an achievement," a "deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry" of the value-neutrality and scientific detachment which the performance advertises.[128] With modern social life having turned out "in key part to be the concrete and dramatic re-enactment of eighteenth-century philosophy," it is now "histrionic success which gives power and authority in our culture," permitting us to disguise arbitrary will and preference as "hard-headed practical pragmatic no-nonsense realism."[129]

It is forward-thinking, enlightened liberals who are at the vanguard of these histrionics. What MacIntyre describes as hard-nosed no-nonsense realism is the naturalistic lucidity of the disengaged subject, and what he calls the realm of arbitrary will and power is the pre-modern residuum—the spiritual aspirations that covertly inform the deeper motivations of this naturalistic lucidity. If our culture is now defined by "deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry," by a social performance masquerading as scientific seriousness, this is because the modern liberal identity is a hero-system in disguise, a hero-system that must *histrionically mimic the transcendence of all hero-systems*. With its specific historical pedigree as a form of secularized asceticism having been shrouded over by the subtraction account, liberalism must overlook the specific social mechanisms through which this pedigree is preserved into the present. The mutation counter-narrative uncovers just this, we will see. It enables us to understand liberalism, not as the bona fide achievement of some neutral perspective, but as a social practice that celebrates certain identities while denigrating others. This is precisely what the histrionic mimicry facilitates,

[127] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pg. 86.
[128] Ibid., pg. 85.
[129] Ibid., pg. 107.

and why conservative claims of cultural oppression are always trying to expose this mimicry as mimicry.

* * *

Some preliminary illustrations are in order. Conservatives sometimes oppose the right of transgendered people to access public restrooms designated for the opposite biological sex. And liberals typically dismiss this opposition as just another narrow bigotry. But it need not rest on bigotry, and conservatives could make the following case: A biological male is within his rights to self-identify as a female and attach more importance to this inner self-conception than to his biological sex. But he cannot reasonably expect others—for whom any such disjunction between biology and identity is foreign—do the same and recognize him as a female. His sexual self-identification is a private matter, but his biological sexuality is a public one, and others will respond to what they can see and hear. His perspective is legitimate, but so too is theirs. Both express equal but ultimately incommensurable frameworks of identity. He is on the losing end of this conflict, not because he is morally inferior, but because of a utilitarian calculus resting on 1) a social consensus that the sexes should use separate restrooms, 2) the fact that he is in the minority and 3) the fact that the resources available for the construction of public restrooms are finite. Someone is going to be left feeling uncomfortable, and it is the greatest good of the greatest number that determines who this will be. If the primary purpose of public restrooms was to serve as forums for authentic self-expression, then the charge of bigotry would hold, because restrictions on transgendered people's freedom would then be a denial of their basic dignity. But this is plainly not their purpose, which is why a utilitarian calculus is in order.

If liberals dismiss this utilitarian calculus as narrow prejudice, the reason is that conservatives' resistance to transgendered rights reflects their failure to *rise above* the "peculiarly human emotions," to rise above the natural equation of biological sexuality and ultimate identity. Conservatives' preferences cannot be permitted to enter into the utilitarian calculus because these preferences reflect what a *failure of virtue*, a failure of *discipline*, a failure to resist reflexive "common sense." In assigning some deep meaning to human anatomy, conservatives are indulging in pre-modern temptation, once more surrendering to teleological libertinism, anthropocentrically attributing to sexual anatomy a significance it does not truly have. Liberals will characterize the prejudice of conservatives as a failure of "enlightenment," the symptom of irrational animus. But

what is called "prejudice" is more primordially a failure to transcend ordinary embodied perception toward a higher state of spiritual purity and freedom, a failure to adopt the sort of emotional asceticism that would enable this transcendence. What liberals present as mere opposition to prejudice is in fact an "old love," their positive promotion of a spiritual ideal, opposition to which must be *socially defined* as prejudice.

This social definition can become a self-fulfilling prophesy. Sensing what is the disingenuous imposition of a hero-system, conservatives will predictably be driven to resent the transgendered persons through whom that imposition is taking place. And so what was originally liberals' deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry of a detached non-sectarianism becomes socially vindicated as the genuine article, because it has created at least part of the irrational animus in opposition to which it can define itself. The anointed need the benighted in order to see themselves as anointed and may for this reason cultivate the very benightedness against which they will subsequently rail.

This histrionic mimicry is also apparent in the liberal writing of history. Historian Rick Perlstein argues:

> Liberalism is rooted in this notion of the Enlightenment, the idea that we can use our reason, and we can use empiricism, and we can sort out facts, and using something like the scientific method—although history is not like nuclear physics—to arrive at consensus views of the truth that have a much more solid standing, epistemologically, than what the right wing view of the truth is: which is much more mythic, which is much more based on tribal identification, which is much more based on intuition and tradition. And there's always been history writing in that mode too. But within the academy, and within the canons of expertise, and within the canons of professionalism, that kind of history has been superseded by a much more empirical, Enlightenment-based history.[130]

But what liberals see as scientific rigor, conservatives see as the liberal elites' primordial anti-American hostility, discussed in Chapter Two, the elites' foundational conviction that American patriotism is somehow vulgar, pedestrian, or uncivilized. Illustrating the vision of the anointed, Sowell relates:

> An internal memorandum of the Smithsonian Institution warned that an exhibit being put together on a leading American fighter plane of World War II should "avoid an overly heroic/cheer-leading/patriotic tone (the same goes for the music)." Those who objected to various other examples of the trashing of American achievements were dismissed by another Smithsonian official as people who don't like exhibits which "undermine their

[130] Qt in Chris Mooney, *The Republican Brain: The Science of Why They Deny Science—and Reality* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), pg. 207.

> fantasies" and who don't want to be "educated," but prefer instead a museum where they can be "distracted for a moment from the dailiness, the tedium, the fear of their lives."[131]

The memorandum's proponents saw themselves as defending a liberal, Enlightenment-based conception of history in opposition to the mythical, tribal one promoted by the Right. But the narrow requirements of empirical accuracy have no logical bearing on whether the fighter plane should have been surrounded by a "heroic/cheer-leading/patriotic tone," let alone what music was to be played. In the strict scientific sense, whether an exhibit undermines or encourages "fantasies" is a function of the facts being presented, not the enthusiasms being elicited. It might qualify as a tribalistic distortion were the Smithsonian to employ an overly heroic, cheer-leading tone to minimize the plane's role in malicious attacks against defenseless civilians. But absent such an episode, the demand for factual accuracy cannot prescribe the atmospherics. What, then, was it that made the preferred atmospherics of the anointed more "sophisticated" than those of the benighted?

The memorandum is not an example of actual historical writing. But it illustrates how the deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry of scientific detachment can be deployed to surround certain value preferences with an aura of dispassionate objectivity. The memorandum's backers believed they were standing up for scientific sobriety. But scientific sobriety can tell us nothing about the esteem in which we should hold military virtue. The memorandum's backers were marshalling the ideal of scientific sobriety, not to expose genuine falsehoods, but in opposition to the "peculiarly human emotions" that would be elicited by an "overly heroic/cheer-leading/patriotic tone." The histrionic mimicry of dispassionate objectivity disguises the workings of a hero-system, an age-old drive to spiritual purity for which military virtue is anathema. Seen from another perspective, what Sowell condemns as the perverse "trashing" of American achievements is the sense of oneself as rising "above" ordinary human enthusiasms toward a higher consciousness—just as earlier ascetics sought to rise above the City of Man toward the City of God.

To borrow from Nietzsche, an inextinguishable drunkenness is being concealed behind what gets passed off as a mere love of reality. It is a particular form of *spirituality*, not disembodied intellectual rigor, that impels liberals to highlight America's historical moral failings at the expense of its moral achievements, to judge America's record by a standard higher than is applied to other

[131] Sowell, *The Vision of the Anointed*, pg. 121.

nations, and higher than the history of the human race indicates is reasonable. This is why conservatives feel, with Kahane, that the Left has "made America's entire history hostage to the legacy of slavery"[132] and highlights America's failings in order to "invalidate any aspect of your culture" whenever it chooses.[133] That culture must be invalidated because it is incompatible with the secularized asceticism which the elites seek to institutionalize as "thoughtfulness," which is yet another weapon in the arsenal of liberal ideology.

Why, asks Horowitz, did Temple University's incoming freshman reading assignment emphasize the internment of Japanese-Americans during WW II while ignoring the impressive moral achievements of "the greatest generation," like "rescuing Asia from the horrors of Japanese imperialism and military occupation, establishing democracy in Japan"? Aren't these victories just as important as Japanese internment when it comes to "understanding citizenship," the ostensible purpose of the reading requirement?[134] Scientific honesty and Enlightenment alone cannot answer this question. The canons of academic professionalism can dictate the historian's standards of evidence. But they cannot dictate whether these standards are applied to hitherto undocumented chapters in the mistreatment of Japanese-American internees or hitherto undocumented chapters in the heroism of American marines. The latter can be disparaged as "tribalistic," but this is a value judgment which does not directly follow from any canons of expertise or professionalism except insofar as these have become imbued with an ideological meaning—which conservatives believe has happened.

An emphasis on the mistreatment of Japanese-Americans might qualify as the scientifically objective approach to American history if we first assumed that most Americans are still living in a John Wayne movie, that they are half-savage relics of past time who must, in their ignorance and parochialism, be enlightened about things like slavery, segregation, or the theft of Native American lands. Highlighting these dark chapters of American history could then be defended as necessary for a more complete view of history. But if most Americans are well aware of these chapters, then the principles of scientific honesty by which this emphasis is defended are only the deceptive and

[132] David Kahane, *Rules for Radical Conservatives: Beating the Left at Its Own Game to Take Back America* (Ballantine Books, 2010), pg. 132.
[133] Ibid., pg. 104.
[134] David Horowitz and Jacob Laskin, *One-Party Classroom: How Radical Professors at America's Top Colleges Indoctrinate Students and Undermine Our Democracy* (New York: Crown Forum, 2009), pg. 172.

self-deceptive histrionic mimicry of that honesty, a deceptive veneer through which to push anti-American sentiment under the pretext of sober realism.

As with the Smithsonian memorandum, this realism serves as a *posture*. What presents itself as mere realism, sober reconciliation to the facts, disguises the "inextinguishable drunkenness" of a hero-system premised on hostility to a certain range of human virtues—like military virtues—that are incongruous with the secularized asceticism of the modern liberal identity. A more "critical" view of American history is being advanced, not to remedy ignorance, but to delegitimize a certain range of all-too-human enthusiasms, which are discounted as mere escapism, a failure to achieve a "higher consciousness" that overcomes the "peculiarly human emotions." Liberals may position themselves as Galilean truth-seekers compelled by conscience to expose truths from which others shrink. But the guise of opposing all mythology is merely the deceptive and self-deceptive mimicry of that opposition, the mechanism by which a *spiritual* ideal is being promoted. Sowell writes that those who hold the vision of the anointed are "defending their souls." But understood within the mutation counter-narrative, what they are defending is a particular kind of *consciousness*, not a generic ego-investment but a *specific historical legacy* to which liberalism is covertly devoted. As in our first example, the deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry of scientific disengagement can beget a self-fulfilling prophesy, as the surreptitious imposition of a hero-system provokes a "tribalistic" reaction by contraposition with which liberals' claims to disengaged objectivity seems socially vindicated. In this way does liberalism *create* the very realities it purports to describe—as all hero-systems must.

* * *

Most conservatives do not have any articulate philosophies of modernity. Nevertheless, their claims of cultural oppression evince their *intuitive* sense that the stance of dispassionate scientific disengagement through which liberals announce their moral and cognitive superiority is a kind of social performance, a deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry of that dispassionate disengagement. If Goldberg is infuriated by liberals' "smug assertions that they are simply pragmatists, fact finders, and empiricists who are clearheaded as to 'what works,'" this is in reaction to liberals' claims to strategic agency, their presumption that they have by virtue of this achievement transcended the hero-systems in which the benighted remain imprisoned. The liberal elites see themselves as liberated from "certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or

limitations of knowledge," that continue to compromise conservatives. But conservatives sense that what liberals *mistake for their rationalistic transcendence of all hero-systems is in fact the covert expression of a particular hero-system,* and that this disingenuousness has enabled liberalism to arrogate an undeserved social prestige. In striving to expose the truth underneath the lies, conservative claims of cultural oppression seek *to expose liberals' ideal of disengagement as a covert form of engagement,* to expose how this ideal's concrete application is being silently guided by a hero-system.

Nunberg writes that "[o]n the face of things, the contention that radical secularists have a 'secret plan' to eradicate Christianity so they can 'pass secular progressive programs like legalization of narcotics, euthanasia, abortion at will [and] gay marriage"—as Bill O'Reilly believes—is "on a par with the black-U.N. helicopter fantasies of the fruitcake right."[135] And indeed, conservative claims of cultural oppression sometimes blur the line between mainstream conservatism and the lunatic fringe. But while this "black U.N. helicopter interpretation" of these claims is easily discredited, they can also be interpreted as *attacks on the dominant self-understanding of modernity* and, through this, on the self-understanding of liberals, the vanguards of modernity.

Coulter charges that liberals "masquerade as rationalists, adopting a sneering tone of scientific sophistication, which is a little like being condescended to by a tarot card reader."[136] Liberals will reflexively dismiss this as an empty ad hominem. And this is what it is when taken on its own terms. But seen in the broader intellectual context I've now outlined, Coulter is translating MacIntyre's thesis about deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry into a language suitable for popular consumption. If liberals are not innocents but guilty, as she insists, then this is precisely what they are guilty of. There is, we might say, a literalist or "fundamentalist" interpretation of conservative claims of cultural oppression that seems utterly delusional. But these claims also admit of a more sophisticated hermeneutic. Understood on this deeper level, they are *symbols* for truths revealed by the mutation counter-narrative.

Conservative claims of cultural oppression seek to *expose liberalism as a hero-system.* This explains, not only attacks on the "secular counter-church of liberalism," but also a whole gamut of grievances that are ostensibly unrelated to religion. It is this imperative that unifies what

[135] Nunberg, *Talking Right*, pg. 161.
[136] Ann Coulter, *Godless: The Church of Liberalism* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007), pg. 3.

Frank dismisses as a "curious amassing of petty, unrelated beefs about the world" and imbues what Nunberg calls the right's "overlapping set of stories" with the narrative coherence it enjoys. Whatever the ostensible grievance, conservative claims of cultural oppression attempt to articulate liberalism as a self-contradiction, as a heroic repudiation of the heroic that avails itself of the very satisfactions it official disclaims and would withhold from others. These claims all seek to in one way or another recast liberals' presumption to moral and intellectual superiority as manifestations of a system of meaning-preservation by means of which liberals accrue the feelings of cosmic specialness they forbid conservatives and ordinary Americans. Dismiss the unreflective mores of conservatives though they will, liberals are beholden to their own analogues thereof, which are merely concealed from view.

Conservatives see symmetry where liberals see asymmetry because they are, as relative pre-moderns, more attuned to the pre-modern residuum than are liberals. They see sectarian allegiance where liberals see dispassionate objectivity because they sense intuitively that human agency is extended over and permeated by a field of social meanings. And so what liberals hold out as the superior empirical lucidity of an autonomous intellect, conservatives see as the outgrowth, not of individual courage, but of a particular culture that is just as "closed off" as their own. The charges of crypto-fascism, racism, aristocracy, and so forth are all varied articulations of this basic intuition, conservatives' visceral sense that the naturalistic disengagement of liberals conceals something more primordial. What conservative and their Right Eclecticism ultimately seek to "subdue" in liberalism is its presumptions to the transcendence of all hero-systems—the one big lie from which the smaller ones emanate.

Selya Benhabib writes that contemporary Western liberal democracies "are being challenged by groups who insist upon their unassimilatable difference and who want to use their experience of alterity to demystify the rationalist and identitary illusions of these liberal democracies."[137] And my argument here is that conservative claims of cultural oppression belong to precisely this tradition. The Right has become the Left in order to accuse the Left of becoming the Right because the challenge issued by conservative claims of cultural oppression essentially mirrors the challenge that multiculturalists have always leveled against the "bourgeois West." The claimants' challenge is not to liberal democracy as such but to the Left's interpretation of it, which

[137] Selya Benhabib, "Introduction," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pg. 5.

conservatives believe rests on a parochial ideal of fully realized human nature to which they will never assimilate.

These claims' ad hominem flavor should come as no surprise, and would indeed possess a latent theoretical content, if their ultimate subject matter is *human agency*; if they are, at their base, *animated by resentment toward liberals' presumptions to a superior, more self-transparent and more self-regulating form of that agency*. These are the "rationalist and identitary illusions" that forever grate against conservative "alterity." Conservatives' conviction that Left and Right are divided by "indelible psychological differences," as we saw with Nunberg, reflects just these intuitions, conservatives' bedrock conviction that liberal ideas manifest a distinctively liberal *way of being*. If liberal conservaphobia bears a legitimate analogy to the more widely recognized bigotries of racism, sexism, and homophobia, this is because the stakes of political disagreement are something more primordial than mere ideas. And this is the level of human agency which political antagonists will recognize in one another.

Beyond being a form of social commentary, conservative claims of cultural oppression are also a social practice. They are not simply a response to social reality, but also an effort to forge it. While these claims will be articulated through whatever facts and arguments are available, their ultimate objective is not to *describe* external reality but to *transform* it, by compelling liberals to relinquish their claims to a superior, more self-transparent and self-regulating form agency. This is why Codevilla exhorts that the "Country Class" of ordinary Americans has been left with no choice but "to attack the Ruling Class' fundamental claims to its superior intellect and morality in ways that dispirit the target and hearten one's own."[138] If conservatives must "dispirit" liberals, this is in an effort to regulate social meaning in their own favor, to erode the social plausibility of a hero-system that threatens theirs. The culture wars are not a clash of ideas but a Nietzschean struggle between different ways of being, each of which uses ideas to perpetuate the social meanings that sustain it.

Goldberg can accuse liberals of trying to have their "metaphysics confirmed in every human interaction and encounter" because the metaphysics in question consists in the secularized asceticism that begat the modern liberal identity. Conservatives' often conspiratorial-sounding allegations about the cunning machinations of an all-powerful liberal elite working "behind the

[138] Angelo M. Codevilla, *The Ruling Class: How They Corrupted America and What We Can Do About It* (Beauford Books, 2010), pg. 78.

scenes" to strip them of their very agency are the *anthropomorphization* of what is really a metaphysical and existential problem. The ideal of the modern free subject is covertly embedded in a hero-system that liberalism will not acknowledge. And this means that to embrace liberalism is to embrace more than a set of policies. If some African-Americans anthropomorphized structural racism as a government conspiracy to infest inner city neighborhoods with narcotics, so conservative claims of cultural oppression anthropomorphize *the spiritual dimension of the modern self* as the sundry depredations of the liberal elites. As I shall later detail, not only the discourse of crypto-theocracy, but also that of crypto-fascism, crypto-aristocracy, crypto-conservatism, and so on all represent partial frameworks for the articulation of this spiritual dimension.

Conservatives' "convoluted stories" may seem unhinged. But this impression is the predictable outcome of the conservatives' historical predicament, which allows them to sense deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry without illuminating its essential nature. Like Kafka's K. in *The Trial*, they can only access an assortment of partial "leaks" concerning the true nature of their oppression—like the Smithsonian memorandum—without ever receiving a more general accounting. It is this dilemma, itself a feature of their cultural oppression, that yields the conspiratorial flights of fancy. And this is why even these flights of fancy have a social meaning and philosophical significance. Though generally inaccurate as accounts of the actual present-day intentions of identifiable liberals, conservative claims of cultural oppression are meaningful as symbolic references to the "old loves" that liberals will not acknowledge, to the structural forces that may portend as yet greater cultural oppression in the future. These endlessly convoluted stories are at their core distorted articulations of these old loves, and so distortions with a heretofore undiscovered logic.

It is only by ascending to this kind of "high theory" that the ostensible contradictions of conservative claims of cultural oppression become resolved. And just as the high theory adds intellectual depth to facially vapid grievances, so the grievances provide the tangible human immediacy that concretizes the high theory. Certainly, conservative claims of cultural oppression do not have to be subsumed within the all-encompassing theoretical framework I am proposing. And given their sheer variety, a less ambitious approach might seem in order. But while these claims can be addressed on their own terms without reference to any theories of human nature or history, the stupefaction with which liberals greet them seems to be of a very general nature,

signaling bemusement and incredulity before an entire mindset rather than local disagreement with specific arguments. It is therefore appropriate to address that stupefaction at the highest level of generality, whatever the intellectual risks of such an enterprise.

6. The Meta-Equal Protection Problem

A fuller development of this high theory will have to await a more comprehensive exposition of the mutation counter-narrative, which I shall initiate in the next chapter. But we can already take some preliminary glances at its implications. As we shall now see, this theory illuminates conservatives' visceral sense that the liberal elites do not play by the same rules as they, that the elites level demands on others that they are unprepared to impose on themselves. In every case, it is the ethos of self-control and self-reflexivity that allows liberals to engage in the deceptive and self-deceptive mimicry of the transcendence of all hero-systems. In every case, conservative claimants of cultural oppression seek to expose this and thereby erode the prestige of the liberal culture that holds them down.

Lakoff argues that conservatives could have succeeded in moving the general mood of the country to the Right because most Americans are "biconceptuals" who are not wholly dominated by either Strict Father or Nurturant Parent morality. In these cases, the two moralities act upon each other through the mechanism of "mutual inhibition," so that each succeeds in becoming neurally activated in some realms of life but not others, where it is neurally inhibited by the competition.[139] Progressive and conservative thought are general synaptic structures that compete to be concretely instantiated in particular spheres of concern and realize this end to the extent they neurally bind a sphere to the general conceptual scaffolding they provide.[140] This is why one can be a foreign policy hawk yet accept the welfare state. There is no "centrist" morality because a centrist is merely a biconceptual in whom the two systems have established themselves in roughly equal proportion, or in whom the two systems operate only on a general level without having securely colonized the synaptic connections associated with particular spheres. This is why centrists can find themselves going "back and forth" on issues.[141] It is this indeterminacy, argues Lakoff, that allowed conservatives to develop a set of political metaphors that strengthen

[139] George Lakoff: *The Political Mind: Why You Can't Understand 21st-Century American Politics with an 18th-Century Brain* (Viking, 2008), pg. 70-71.
[140] Ibid., pg. 113.
[141] Ibid., pg. 109.

conservative neural bindings while weakening liberal ones, gradually nudging biconceptuals to the Right until Strict Father morality came to feel natural.

Just as one might be biconceptual as between different spheres of political contention, so one might also be biconceptual as between politics in general and other areas of life. Someone might embrace a liberal "Nurturant Parent" morality in his politics and yet be a Strict father in private family life, or vice versa. He might also be a Nurturant Parent politically and yet be a conservative Strict Father in his professional life. This constellation of attitudes, notes Lakoff, describe many academics, who are politically liberal but for whom "academic scholarship is conceptualized metaphorically as a version of Strict Father morality."[142] With scholarly life having been neurally bound by that morality, it follows that "[t]here are intellectual authorities who maintain strict standards for the conduct of scholarly research and for reporting on such research," that "[i]t is unscholarly for someone to violate those standards," and, therefore, that "[y]oung scholars require a rigorous training to learn to meet those scholarly standards."[143]

So much seems like common sense. But Lakoff's suggestion is that scholarship moralizes intellectual life much as Strict Father system moralizes political life. This moralization expresses itself metaphorically in unstated precepts like "Mature Scholars Are Strict Fathers," "Intellectual Authority is Moral Authority," "Scholarliness is Morality," "Unscholarliness is Immorality," "Scholarly Rigor is Moral Strength," "Lack of Scholarly Rigor is Moral Weakness," "Scholarly Discipline is Moral Discipline," and "Scholarly Standards are Moral Standards."[144] Thus, scholarliness would assume a different form were it instead guided by Nurturant Parent morality, which would be more concerned to nurture the intellect than to discipline it. As it stands, these temperamentally conservative academics are just as beholden to "Moral Order" in their professional lives as conservatives are in their politics. They are both "pre-modern" in this sense, only in different spheres.

Lakoff's intuition is illustrated in Bourdieu's deconstruction of academic respectability, which he likens to medieval ordinances regulating guilds:

> There is no acknowledged master who does not recognize a master and, through him, the intellectual magistrature of the sacred college of masters who acknowledge him. In short, there is no master who does not recognize the value of the institution and institutional values which are all rooted in the institutionalized refusal of any non-institutional thought,

[142] Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, pg. 297.
[143] Ibid., pg. 296.
[144] Ibid., pg. 297.

> in the exaltation of academic 'reliability', that instrument of normalization which has all appearances on its side, those of learning and those of morality, although it is often only the instrument of the transformation of individual and collective limits into the choice of scientific virtuousness.[145]

"Reliability" is to the scholar what "moral order" is to the conservative model citizen, an ideological rather than empirical concept. Like moral order writ large, the ideology of scholarship marks out a "sanctioned path," departure from which is felt to be the beginnings of a slippery slope into moral and spiritual dissoluteness. Bourdieu explains:

> In fact, since the positions of power are hierarchized and separated in time, reproduction of the hierarchy presupposes a respect for distances, that is respect for the *order of succession*. It is this very order which threatens the *celeritas* of those who want to 'cut corners' (for example, by importing into the university field properties or powers acquired on other terrains), as against *gravitas*, the healthy slowness which people like to feel is in itself a guarantee of reliability (in writing a thesis, for instance) and which is really the most authentic proof of *obsequium*, unconditional respect for the fundamental principles of the established order.[146]

Gravitas will be defended as a desideratum of academic professionalism, and there is indeed something appealing about that "healthy slowness which people like to feel is in itself a guarantee of reliability." But Bourdieu's suggestion is that the *gravitas* through which this conviction gets signaled is a culturally parochial ethos whose dictates cannot be accepted at face value. *Gravitas* is in fact the affirmation of the academic model citizen's own "bigoted clause"—proof that he will not fall off the sanctioned path into *celeritas* and call the accepted purposes governing other academics' lives into question. Put another way, "the fundamental principles of the established order" express a hero-system. It is not considered reflection on the timeless essence of intellectual rigor that yields scholarly *gravitas* but, on the contrary, the role played by *gravitas* in upholding scholarly identities that yields an ideologized conception of intellectual rigor. If *gravitas* is "really the most authentic proof of *obsequium*," this is because it is by virtue of, and in exchange for, that *obsequium* that the scholar earns her "feeling of primary value, of cosmic specialness, of ultimate usefulness to creation, of unshakable meaning."

Scholarly norms of reliability are political not only in that they bear a structural analogy to the Strict Father morality of conservatives, but also in that this analogy engenders a certain *inequality* between conservatives and liberals who are so constituted as to be "right-wing" in their

[145] Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, trans. Peter Collier (Stanford University Press, 1988), pg. 95.
[146] Ibid., pg. 87.

professional endeavors but not elsewhere. This is precisely what describes the liberal elites, who can indulge their own authoritarian hierarchies in ways forbidden to conservatives.

Remarking on Duke's success in establishing itself as the leader of literary deconstruction, one English professor there proclaimed that "[w]e are hot and everyone knows that." No one else in the country "can boast of the line-up of home run hitters that we've now got here." Another professor observed "We are the mainstream—what we are doing here is what most of the best colleges do, or aspire to do."[147] And Stanley Fish, the movement's standard-bearer, noted that, with the literary critic no longer being subordinated to his text as its humble servant, "[p]erhaps the greatest gain that falls to us… is a greatly enhanced sense of the importance of our activities."[148]

But this greatly enhanced sense of self-importance is precisely what the liberal elites deny to conservatives. Secure in their professional enclaves, the liberal elites are free to define their own "mainstream" and sanctify the model citizens who uphold it. But conservatives whose Strict Father morality must be expressed through the usual public channels will find themselves accused of intolerance and bigotry when they attempt the very same in the only way their particular neural bindings permit. Those whose Strict Father morality is synaptically encoded in the conventional way, through allegiance to traditional morality, the free market, or law and order find themselves the targets of cultural assault and possibly legal intervention. But those whose neural bindings instantiate the very same morality in a less public fashion are insulated from these threats. Their "bigoted clauses" and the accompanying fears of social contagion pass under the cultural radar screen undetected, giving them an unearned sense of moral superiority over conservatives, whose bigoted clauses are on full public display.

As we saw in Chapter Two, Justice Scalia argued in *Romer v. Evans* that the Court's decision to invalidate Colorado's Amendment 2—designed to preempt local laws forbidding anti-gay discrimination—betrayed the "law-school view of what 'prejudices' must be stamped out." The ruling ratified a state of affairs in which the "Templars," or liberal elites, can indulge their own arbitrary prejudices in employment decisions while preventing the "villeins," or ordinary Americans, from doing the same. Seen in this light, the equal protection problem posed by *Romer* wasn't between gays and straights, but between Templars and villeins. It concerned, not protection

[147] Qt. in Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: The Free, 1991), pg. 159.
[148] Qt. in Ibid., pg. 180.

against prejudice, but protection of the right to indulge in prejudice. I shall designate this *the meta-equal protection problem*, addressing as it does, not the victims of prejudice but its bearers. Liberals oppose prejudice. But conservatives protest the prejudicial privileging of some prejudices over others. And the meta-equal protection violation they protest is a situation in which liberals wield the power of the state and powerful cultural institutions to attack *other people's* illiberal hierarchies while their own remain hidden from view, insulated from what would be analogous forms of criticism, regulation, and interference.

This is the *actual* difference between "modern" liberals and "pre-modern" conservatives. Nietzsche writes that "[a]lmost everything we call 'higher culture' is based on the spiritualization of *cruelty*, on its becoming more profound."[149] Cruelty has merely "become more refined." Though its older forms "offend the new taste," the "art of wounding and torturing others with words and looks reaches its supreme development in times of corruption."[150] The mutation counter-narrative reveals liberalism as such a "higher culture," where human malice and self-aggrandizement become exceedingly subtle and hence deniable. The mutation counter-narrative tracks the development of this higher culture, which is what enables liberals to *sublimate, intellectualize, and etherealize* the authoritarian impulses that conservatives must express more crudely, in ways more visible to the naked eye. Borrowing from anthropologist Robert Lowrie, Becker remarks that while "primitive man was a natural peacock, so open was he in self-display and self-glorification," we "play the same game, only not as openly."[151] Liberals and conservatives also "play the same game." If conservatives are somehow "primitive," as liberals accuse, the half-savage relics of past times, this is because their hero-systems are less subtle, and therefore less disguised, than those of the Left. This disguising is precisely what the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity achieves. It allows liberals to *spiritualize* all the impulses they would prefer to associate with conservatives and thereby indulge them under a veneer of liberal sophistication.

Hence Shelby Steele's thesis that affirmative action serves as an absolution ritual whereby white liberals beseech militant black leaders to expiate America's original sin of racism. These leaders have positioned themselves as father-confessors imbued with the power to confer

[149] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), pg. 158 (Sec. 229).
[150] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, pg. 97 (Sec. 23).
[151] Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning*, pg. 70.

redemption in exchange for suitable political concessions, which liberals are eager to offer. These rituals, explains Steele, are to be expected when "[r]ace is an area in which Americans have been conditioned by a history of painful conflict into a rigid and unforgiving propriety."[152] Since the 1950s, "[r]ace simply replaced sex as the primary focus of America's moral seriousness."[153]

Steele's suggestion is that liberals' "moral seriousness" is the mirror image of what liberals oppose as conservatives' moral seriousness about sex. The Victorians are reputed to have feared that reference to a table leg risked provoking the thought of the female limb and thus male lust. But if moral traditionalists have sexual hang-ups, then enlightened liberals have racial hang-ups. Liberal race policy—multiculturalism, affirmative action, etc.—has become a "sanctioned path," as Lakoff says, any deviation from which is seen as an invitation to racist contagion. This is the moral seriousness detected by Steele. With "social justice" being a secularized morality of sin and redemption, any opinion that might so much as resonate with racists (like opposition to affirmative action) will be treated as a violation of sacred taboo, even when it is defensible on non-racist grounds. Liberalism being a hero-system and sanctioned path, even minor violations of anti-racist mores can initiate a downward spiral of sin, which must therefore be cut off at its roots. Liberals too are susceptible to "vague premonitions or erosion or unraveling," which might be provoked by the slightest perceived softening of anti-racist inhibition. If conservatives refuse to accept liberal race discourse at face value, this is because they sense that the specter of "unconscious racism" is being used to rationalize this liberal race-puritanism as sociological sophistication. Kimball accuses that liberal race discourse offers opportunities to "indulge in… ecstasies of intellectualized liberal shame."[154] And this is because that discourse is an invitation to bask in emotions that would be decried as unsophisticated and retrograde if expressed in less intellectual contexts on behalf of other causes.

Conservatives are "anti-intellectual" because intellectualism helps perpetuate the meta-equal protection problem, allowing liberals to indulge in the very vices for which they castigate conservatives. Kimball notes the irony that deconstructionist radicals should hold themselves out as anti-traditionalist and anti-bourgeois while also "judg[ing] every product of the human spirit by

[152] Shelby Steele, *The Content of Our Character* (St. Martin's Press, 1990), pg. x.
[153] Shelby Steele, *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era* (HarperCollins, 2006), pg. 6.
[154] Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998), pg. 36.

the degree of 'virtue' it exhibits,"—virtue having been defined by Marxism, feminism, or whatever the current fashion. This "extraordinary, if perverted, moralism" permits the radicals a high sense of purpose. But it is nothing for which they are ever held to account, because the "jargon of deconstruction, post-structuralism, and kindred Continental imports" allows "cutting edge" academics "to indulge their moralism to the hilt while at the same time appearing to be intellectually sophisticated."[155] As with liberals' anti-American reading of history, some very primordial emotions are being indulged under the cover of epistemic rigor.

The liberal elites believe they have cast off the illusory teleologies of a benighted past. But borrowing from philosopher David Stone, Kimball observes that supposedly "'transgressive academics" have succumbed to "cognitive Calvinism": "Just as Calvinists, convinced of the total depravity of human nature, believe that 'if an impulse is one of ours, it is bad *because* it is one of ours,' so anti-foundationalist academics believe that 'any knowledge *we* have could not be the real thing, *because* we have it.'"[156] The meta-equal protection rears its head again. Whatever vestiges of traditional Calvinism continue to inspire the benighted will be condemned as superstition and the symptom of an authoritarian personality. But the "transgressive" academics of the Left can indulge intellectualized iterations of the same superstition while holding themselves out as sophisticated skeptics free of moral and religious dogma. They are "cutting edge," not in their basic sensibilities, but only in the creativity with which they have intellectualized, sublimated, and therefore disguised a certain kind of religiosity.

Not all liberal elites are cognitive Calvinists, of course. But cognitive Calvinism illustrates conservatives' animating suspicion that the elites are repositories for "old loves" whose cruder, more overt analogues the Left dismisses as benighted and retrograde. If conservatives are the half-savage relics of past times, then liberals are what Nietzsche calls the "men of the present":

> Truly, you could wear no better masks than your own faces, you men of the present! Who could – *recognize* you!
>
> Written over with the signs of the past and these signs overdaubed with new signs: thus have you hidden yourselves well from all interpreters of signs!
>
> And if one tests your virility, one finds only sterility! You seem to be baked from colours and scraps of paper glued together.
>
> All ages and all people gaze motley out of your veils; all customs and all beliefs speak motley out of your gestures.[157]

[155] Ibid., pg. xv-xvi.
[156] Ibid., pg. 187-88.
[157] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), pg. 142.

The convolutedness of conservative claims of cultural oppression is merely the mirror-image of this convolutedness, the mirror-image of the motley "signs of the past" that have been chaotically weaved into the tapestry of the modern liberal identity. These signs are not readily discernible by the naked eye because they have been sedimented in, expressing themselves obliquely and covertly through, the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. This ethos sublimates and intellectualizes all the "signs of the past" that liberals detect in conservatives. And this is what allows liberals to be both post-modern and highly moralistic, applying this ethos selectively in order to impugn conservative moralism as psychic immaturity while upholding liberal moralism as intellectual sophistication. Having naturalized liberalism as what remains upon sloughing off all anachronistic moralism, the liberal elites can remain oblivious to this selectivity.

* * *

Rawls's political liberalism calls on us to endorse a political conception of the person based on autonomy in our capacity as public citizens while permitting us to live by communitarian ideals in our non-public identities. But Will Kymlicka argues that this attempt to split the difference between liberalism and communitarianism is untenable. Political liberalism cannot explain "why anyone would accept the ideal of autonomy in political contexts unless they also accepted it more generally." If members of a traditional religious community feel they cannot "step back" from the commitments they feel define their identities, how can they be expected to embrace a political conception of the person that presupposes just this capacity?[158] Put another way, the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity is alien to their private identities, and it seems psychologically unrealistic to expect that they would adopt it in their public ones, in debating legislation, for example, simply to be good liberal citizens.

There is an answer to Kymlicka's challenge, however. These communitarians could accept a political conception of the person defined by autonomy if 1) their own hero-system wasn't undermined by that conception, because it was largely immune to whatever legislation and cultural memes the conception produced, and 2) their hero-system involved the deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry of autonomous self-determination. This mimicry would conceal the working of a hero-system and with it the dissonance between these people's public individualism and private sectarianism. The liberal elites have the privilege of satisfying both these conditions

[158] Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford University Press, 1995), pg. 159-60.

while conservative ordinary Americans do not. And this is the inequality that aggrieves the latter. Liberals can exhort the transcendence of all hero-systems in the name of autonomy. But this is only because liberal autonomy is the disguised expression of a hero-system, the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, which sustains the identities of liberals while undermining those of conservatives.

From a historical perspective, it is liberalism, and not its enemies, that is mysterious. How does liberalism explain the fact that moral and personal eccentricity has only occasionally been tolerated in human societies? "Intolerant" social conservatives are merely carrying forth the historically dominant tradition, after all. Seen in this light, the question isn't how people could have become concerned with "enforcing morality"—when this means regulating unobtrusive conduct that doesn't create tangible harms—but how anyone could have become indifferent to enforcing morality. The subtraction account answers that Western and Western-style liberals have realized in themselves the "psychological foundations of liberalism," overcoming the intolerance, self-righteousness, and superstitions of an earlier age. Having cast off the pre-modern temptations, they have relinquished what Nussbaum calls "grandiose demands for omnipotence and completeness." Resigning themselves to their animal neediness and vulnerability, they need no longer project these onto some designated pariah and scapegoat. The *other* explanation, however, is that liberals can espouse tolerance as a political value only because it doesn't undermine *their* hero-systems, which are lodged in elite institutional enclaves rather than a wider public space. Liberals have not transcended the pre-modern "[public] order which everyone lives" but merely *privatized* it, as the secure anchor from which to assume a stance of naturalistic lucidity vis-à-vis the wider society. Liberal tolerance is facilitated by liberal privilege, not liberal virtue.

Hence the profusion of conservative grievances highlighting the machinations of discrete liberal elite enclaves, like academia, the media, Hollywood, and so forth— all "out of touch" with the feelings of the ordinary American. Lasch writes:

> The culture wars that have convulsed America since the sixties are best understood as a form of class warfare, in which an enlightened elite (as it thinks of itself) seeks not so much to impose its values on the majority (a majority perceived as incorrigibly racist, sexist, provincial, and xenophobic), much less to persuade the majority by means of rational public debate, as to create parallel or 'alternative' institutions in which it will no longer be necessary to confront the unenlightened at all.[159]

[159] Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), pgs. 20-21.

Though Lasch downplays the elites' willingness to impose their values, he correctly emphasizes the origin of the meta-equal protection problem, which is the comparatively self-contained nature of the elites' hero-systems. The elites can be liberal vis-à-vis most social issues, condemning the prejudice and narrowness of others, because their liberalism need never be extended into the specific milieus in which their own identities are rooted. Their hero-systems having become embedded in these milieus, they are immune to the "reality slippage" which liberalism inflicts on the ordinary American. The liberal elites adopt a posture of naturalistic lucidity vis-à-vis issues like gay rights. With Martha Nussbaum, they diagnose opponents of gay rights with "narcissistic fear and aggression" awoken by "anxiety about change that eludes control, and the loss of control over cherished values."[160] But if fear, aggression, and anxiety seem like the features of a distinctively conservative psychology, this is only because liberals' own cherished values are much better insulated from the threats Nussbaum describes, perhaps concealed in Bourdieu's "intellectual magistrature of the sacred college of masters."

Conservatives have lynx eyes for whatever "narcissistic fear and aggression" is betrayed by the liberal elites because what Frank calls liberals' "personal tastes and pretensions" has *political* significance in the context of the meta-equal protection problem. Coulter notes that former Harvard president Larry's Summers's public speculations that men and women might have different innate potentials at the highest levels of scientific achievement "led to fainting spells by women in attendance," with one female biology professor confessing that she had to leave the room because she otherwise "would've either blacked out or thrown up." Can anyone, Coulter asks, "imagine evangelicals behaving this way if someone mentioned evolution?"[161] Academic elites, then, aren't actually more rational and temperate than evangelical Christians. Rather, they have been privileged to inhabit environments that ordinarily shield them from whatever provocations might expose their latent irrationality, might expose the fragility of *their* hero-systems, in this case feminism. Summers was forced to step down as Harvard's president because the social meaning of his remarks was to withdraw this immunity, to deprive feminists of the control which they customarily wield over their cultural environs. In speculating as he did, Summers failed to uphold the order in which everyone lives, provoking the "vague premonitions of erosion or unraveling" that liberals associate with evangelical Christians rather than the Harvard

[160] Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, pg. 260.
[161] Coulter, *Godless*, pgs. 182-83.

professoriate. If this biology professor was on the verge of throwing up or blacking out, this was because she could no longer maintain her histrionic mimicry of the transcendence of all hero-systems.

Notwithstanding their "dismissive indignation" toward conservatives, liberals take psychic and communal harms very seriously when they bear on their own identities, as the Summers affair proved. This is why they "accentuate" some social meanings and "nihilate" others. Notwithstanding their self-image, liberals offer only in the deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry of the psychological self-possession which conservatives are alleged to lack. The outraged incredulity with which they greet conservatives' "merely symbolic" grievances is the cultural propaganda by which this mimicry is concealed.

* * *

Susan Jacoby observes that the "slick, media-savvy right-wingers" who promote intelligent design at the Discovery Institute "constantly compare their contrarian faith-based researchers with once scorned geniuses like Copernicus and Galileo—a contention conveniently ignoring the fact that the Catholic Church, not other seekers of scientific truth, was the source of opposition to the heliocentric theory of the solar system."[162] But for conservatives, this picture of a perennial struggle between small-minded religious dogmatists and courageous secular truth-seekers is the self-serving mythology of the liberal elites. Rejecting the conventional wisdom that Galileo was the target of religious hostility to secular enlightenment, Goldberg endorses Robert Nisbet's revisionary analysis:

> The principal truth to be drawn from Galileo's story is less dramatic than the myth, but far more in accord with the emotions and institutional conditions that prevail today much as they did in the sixteenth century. Rivalry, jealousy, and vindictiveness from other scientists and philosophers were Galileo's lot, and they are not infrequently the lot of unorthodox minds in modern times. Anyone who believes that inquisitions went out with the triumph of secularism over religion has not paid attention to the records of foundations, federal research agencies, professional societies, and academic institutions, and departments.[163]

The liberal elites uphold secular modernity as a courageous ascent from darkness to light and condemn conservatives as the relics of this dark past. But conservatives reject this oppressive dualism and attribute the dogmatism and vainglory to the liberal elites themselves. Liberals do

[162] Susan Jacoby, *The Age of American Unreason* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), pg. 27.
[163] Qt. in Jonah Goldberg, *The Tyranny of Clichés: How Liberals Cheat in the War of Ideas* (Sentinel, 2012), pg. 11.

not deserve to carry the mantle of Galileo because they are better compared to his secular enemies and rivals, whose ambitions and pretensions pitted them against the uncompromising intellectual freedom for which Galileo has become the preeminent symbol. The Galileo story is just another weapon in the liberal elites' arsenal of cultural propaganda, one more way to obscure liberalism's deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry of the disengaged strategic agent who only plans, deduces, and represents. If rivalry, jealousy, and vindictiveness continue to be the lot of unorthodox minds despite the triumph of secularism, this is because secular values are the veneer through which the sublimated, intellectualized, and etherealized crypto-conservatism of the liberal elites plays itself out.

The membership of Nisbett' foundations, federal research agencies, professional societies, and academic institutions and departments was the subject of Alvin Gouldner's seminal *The Future of the Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*. Gouldner argued that the New Class of professional knowledge workers is a progressive force in some ways. It has no truck with traditional hierarchies, including all the privileges of the old class of bourgeois capitalists.[164] The New Class furthermore promotes a linguistic culture, the "culture of careful and critical discourse" (CCD), that de-authorizes "all speech grounded in traditional societal authority."[165] However, Gouldner also stressed that the New Class is not a group of benign technocrats selflessly promoting the public good.[166] Rather, it is a morally ambiguous "flawed universal class"[167] that is "elitist and self-seeking and uses its special knowledge to advance its own interests and power,"[168] and so "embod[ies] the collective interest but partially and transiently."[169] While the New Class is hostile to traditional bourgeois interests and values, it is itself a *cultural* bourgeoisie whose commitment to freedom is qualified by its interest in maintaining its cultural capital. It may be egalitarian when attacking the privileges of the old class, bourgeois conservatives. But it also seeks to maintain its own guild advantages,[170] to which end it attempts to "control the supply and limit the production of its culture, to oppose any group that restricts its control over its culture, and to remove legal or

[164]Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), pg. 20.
[165] Ibid., pg. 29.
[166] Ibid., pg. 6.
[167] Ibid., pg. 7.
[168] Ibid., pg. 7.
[169] Ibid., pg. 8.
[170] Ibid., pg. 20.

moral restrictions on the uses for which its culture may be purchased."[171] As the defender of free thought and expression, the New Class opposes formal censorship. But as a cultural bourgeoisie, it has its own interests to protect, and practices unofficial censorship by limiting discussion to members of its own elite,[172] dismissing those who have not been properly credentialed as irrelevant. Even as it subverts old inequalities, the New Class "silently inaugurates a new hierarchy of the knowing, the knowledgeable, the reflexive and insightful."[173]

What liberals interpret as conservatives' primordial anti-intellectualism is better understood as a specific reaction to the New Class culture, to the cognitive privileges which that culture affords its liberal membership. The New Class's cultural capital is ostensibly founded on the culture of careful and critical discourse, which is laudable if taken at face value. But *as a culture*, CCD must *take on a life of its own* in order to fulfill its cultural function as a hero-system, to which end its libertarian features will be compromised as necessary. Its membership seeks to be recognized, not merely as having been insightful on some particular occasion, but as "the reflexive and insightful." They wish to see themselves as *the kinds of people* who make insightful observations. And this requires that the *concrete meaning and function* of their intellectual ideals be circumscribed accordingly, so that what qualifies as "serious" speech is defined by their identitarian needs—the "mainstream" as the Duke deconstructionist put it. Professionalism, writes Gouldner, is "among the public *ideologies* of the New Class, and is the genteel subversion of the old class by the new."[174]

Horowitz is discerning this genteel subversion when he attacks the American Association of University Professors for announcing that "[i]t is not indoctrination for professors to expect students to comprehend ideas and apply knowledge that is accepted as true within a relevant discipline."[175] It follows that academics who succeed in enforcing a consensus among departmental peers are under no obligation to acknowledge opposing views that fall outside that consensus. They needn't recognize the entire spectrum of serious scholarly, scientific, and intellectual opinion but can, through political control of a discipline, establish as bedrock fact what is really debatable opinion. Thus, radical feminists can treat the "social construction of gender"

[171] Ibid., pg. 26.
[172] Ibid., pg. 82.
[173] Ibid., pg. 85.
[174] Ibid., pg. 19
[175] David Horowitz and Jacob Laskin, *One-Party Classroom: How Radical Professors at America's Top Colleges Indoctrinate Students and Undermine Our Democracy* (New York: Crown Forum, 2009), pg. 282.

as established fact, and need not contend with the neuroscientists across campus who study the biological hard-wiring of sex differences. These scientists are not members of "the relevant discipline." Taken to its logical conclusion, this principle would justify establishing the new field of "Intelligent Design Studies" that treats intelligent design as established fact, because it is universally so accepted "within the relevant discipline."[176]

The suggestion is fanciful, of course. But the reason is that, unlike liberal academics, Christian fundamentalists do not have the privilege of exalting their own echo chambers as respected academic disciplines. Fundamentalists who ignore what scientists say about the evolution of human beings in general are disdained as anti-intellectual. But feminists who ignore what scientists say about the evolution of sex differences in particular are just being professional. Unlike fundamentalists, feminists have been culturally credentialed to disguise their hero-systems as disciplinary rigor. Having embraced the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, they have been credentialed as "the knowing, the knowledgeable, the reflexive and insightful," and so they are allowed to invent their own intellectual rules.

The same is illustrated in Himmelfarb's attack on liberal social science. She observes that as statistics demonstrating the superiority of the traditional family have become more conclusive, "those who support 'diverse' and 'alternative' forms of family life have shifted the grounds of their defense, disputing not the statistics themselves but the very use of statistics." Judith Stacey, a "prominent member of this school" objects to "social science research that suggests the superiority of the 'the 1950s family,'" arguing that the "best antidote to this sort of thing… is not necessarily more social science but an immersion in the lived values of actual families." In the same vein, psychiatrist Robert Coles exhorts that "storytelling" rather than statistics "allows for a spaciousness about our day-to-day existence" and that fictional stories mixing "literal truth and imaginative renderings" are as compelling as real stories.[177]

But conservative Christians who fuse literal truth with imaginative renderings or formulate social policy on the basis of storytelling and immersion in lived values will be quickly tagged as quacks and kooks afraid of inconvenient truths. By contrast, liberals are culturally credentialed to indulge these temptations so long as they frame this indulgence as a special sophistication that

[176] Ibid., pg. 286.
[177] Gertrude Himmelfarb, *One Nation, Two Cultures: A Searching Examination of American Society in the Aftermath of Our Cultural Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), pg. 50.

transcends the blinkered horizons of conventional epistemologies. Those who merely *engage* in storytelling or lived immersion in values lack proper scientific detachment. But those who furthermore *speak* of them, framing these as "antidotes" to a despised moral conventionality, are intellectual trailblazers. This is how the culture of careful and critical discourse functions in actual practice.

One feminist promotes a "five-phase theory of curricular consciousness" as the standard by which to gauge the progress of teachers-in-training toward proper feminist consciousness. And Christina Hoff Sommers observes that this feminist refers to her five phases "as if they were as scientifically established as the phases of the moon."[178] Here is the deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry of scientific disengagement, the purpose of which is to socially define opponents of feminism as benighted science deniers. Whereas conservatives will be confronted with inconvenient facts, liberals are privileged to establish their own facts. Their participation in the New Class culture credentials them to disguise the anthropocentric as the non-anthropocentric and the normative as the empirical. The ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity envelops their pronouncements in a social aura of scientific seriousness, which helpfully intimidates opponents of the New Class hierarchy.

This could also be observed at *Speaking for the Humanities*, a conference convened in the late 1980s in order to respond to the conservative attack on the humanities. The conference announced that "developments in modern thought" have taught academics in the humanities "to ask whether universalist claims do not in fact promote as a norm the concerns of a particular group and set aside as partial or limited those of other groups." But this, observes Kimball, implies that the participants "have some sort of evidence for the highly contentious propositions that they have put forth," when "in fact the only 'development' they could point to is the rise of a politicized view of education."[179] The Left, unlike the Right, is privileged to define its own viewpoints as impersonal "developments." By broadcasting their allegiance to the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, liberals assure that their intellectual constructions are elevated to the status of bedrock reality. Unlike conservatives, they are privileged to direct what Berger calls the "thickening objectivity of the institutional world."

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[178] Christina Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?: How Women Have Betrayed Women* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), pg. 121.
[179] Kimball, *Tenured Radicals*, pg. 56.

This is because they inhabit institutions and cultural spheres that immunize their own crypto-conservatism to the scrutiny they mete out to self-avowed conservatives. Berger explains how:

> The increasing number and complexity of subuniverses make them increasingly inaccessible to outsiders. They become esoteric enclaves, "hermetically sealed"… to all but those who have been properly initiated into their mysteries. The increasing autonomy of subuniverses makes for special problems of legitimation *vis-à-vis* both outsiders and insiders. The outsiders have to be *kept out*, sometimes even kept ignorant of the existence of the subuniverse. If, however, they are not so ignorant, and if the subuniverse requires various special privileges and recognitions from the larger society, there is the problem of keeping out the outsiders and at the same time having them acknowledge the legitimacy of the procedure. This is done through various techniques of intimidation, rational and irrational propaganda (appealing to the outsiders' interests and to their emotions), mystification and, generally, the manipulation of prestige symbols.[180]

The ultimate prestige symbol, propagated as the subtext of all the derivative ones, is the ideal of the disengaged subject—"that recurrent figure which our civilization aspires to realize, the disembodied ego, the subject who can objectify all being, including his own." And what conservatives *really mean* by the "liberal culture" is the civilizational framework in which that figure can make his recurrent appearances. If conservative claimants of cultural oppression are "uncivilized," the "half-savage relics of past times," this is because they seek, not to *realize* the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, but to *expose* it as a cultural pretense—"the manipulation of prestige symbols"—that is untrue to what human beings, including the liberal elites, are actually like.

Whatever the specific controversy, conservatives believe that the difference between themselves and liberals is one of accumulated cultural prestige, not intellectual substance. Whether in academia or elsewhere, liberals are culturally credentialed to pass off their parochialism as intellectual sophistication. Liberal argument is couched in the tone and language of scientific expertise and cumulative research. But close inspection reveals this as empty posturing. The posture of a disengaged subjectivity dispassionately surveying "developments in modern thoughts" or the "five phases" of feminist consciousness is only the deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry of the scientific detachment it advertises, a social performance enacted in the service of a hero-system.

[180] Berger and Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality*, pg. 87.

Sommers observes that feminists compare themselves to once persecuted defenders of the Copernican theory bravely proclaiming truths from which others shrink.[181] And yet this love of truth was nowhere to be found when Sommers charged that the American Association of University Women's sexual harassment surveys were tendentious for failing to distinguish between casual banter, teasing, and genuine harassment. The organization's director could only shake her finger and admonish: "Christina, stop it! Do you want to know something? This is the last time you'll criticize this incredibly prestigious and well-run organization—the American Association of University Women."[182] The New Class arrogates to itself the prestige of the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. But it does not feel compelled to *implement* it. And this is because it has been culturally credentialed to *embody it*—just as bourgeois conservatives were formerly credentialed to embody traditional morality.

The vices of the New Class are just novel, intellectualized variants of the vices liberals routinely condemn in the old class of bourgeois conservatives. Just as participation in the market economy presupposes acceptance of the present distribution of financial capital for the old class of financial bourgeoisie, so the New Class insists that none may acquire new cultural capital without first accepting existing distributions of the old—like the "mainstream" as defined by the Duke deconstructionists—which are unofficially shielded from the scrutiny of CCD. Just as the old class decried any challenge to the economic status quo as incipient socialism or anarchy, so the New Class treats any challenge to its own *cognitive* hierarchy as anti-intellectual hostility to expertise and professionalism. Whereas the financial capital of the old class cannot go unnoticed, the cultural capital of the New Class can be disguised as professionalism and thus shielded from scrutiny.

Liberals are covertly conservative in Lakoff's sense because their illiberal impulses have to go *somewhere*, have to generate some kind of outlet for themselves, however civilized it may appear. This is the fundamental symmetry the vague intuition of which drives conservative claims of cultural oppression inexorably onwards. The ideals of liberalism are always *demarcated*, restricted to certain spheres of concern and precluded from others, where our illiberal impulses will generate novel variants of the of the hierarchy, authoritarianism, and parochialism we believe we have overcome.

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[181] Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?*, pg. 117.
[182] Ibid., pg. 186.

7. Concluding Reflections and Adumbrations

Though other examples could be adduced, the obvious objection is that conservative claims of cultural oppression make a lot of hay out of a few insignificant incidents. Stories like Summer's firing may help boost the self-esteem of fundamentalists and other conservatives, but they tell us little about the overall comparative rationality of liberals. The liberal elites may constitute a "flawed universal class," as Gouldner charges. But just how flawed are they really? Feminists can be criticized for ignoring ideologically inconvenient developments in evolutionary psychology and neuroscience. But this seems like a minor intellectual infraction when compared to the belief that the universe was created in six days about five-thousand years ago. Perhaps "immersion in lived values" of actual families and "imaginative renderings" are just post-hoc stratagems to salvage a failing hypothesis. But those stratagems have at least been openly announced, and this seems to distinguish them from the hidden closed-circuit logic of many conservatives.

Justice Scalia avers that the liberal elites, or "Templars," do not oppose prejudice as such, but merely impose the "law-school view of what 'prejudices' must be stamped out" on ordinary Americans, the "villeins." But whatever left-wing dogmatism and professional wagon-circling there may be—and people are people—liberals will argue that these have been blown wildly out of proportion. Moreover, the villeins' prejudices are exponentially more pernicious than the Templars'. What Duke and other literature departments have established as the "mainstream" is relevant only to academic job-seekers rubbing elbows at the conferences of the Modern Language Association. By contrast, the exclusion of gays and other minorities from vital economic opportunities is exponentially more consequential. Newly minted J.D.s might occasionally lose out on a job because they wear fur or hate the Chicago Cubs, as Justice Scalia notes in *Romer*. But these unfortunates are not the victims of any systematic discrimination, as are gays and lesbians.

This liberal retort misses the point, however. Grievances that conservatives may frame in consequentialist terms—like the deleterious effects of politically correct higher education—are in fact *identitarian at heart*. They are objections to the elites' privileged ability to persevere in their hero-systems even as they impose various disabilities on others' ability to do the same. This is the meta-equal protection problem, which is *intrinsically* oppressive to conservatives.

Rebuking the *Romer* Court for declaring that Amendment 2 was motivated by animus, Justice Scalia argued:

> The Court has mistaken a Kulturkampf for a fit of spite. The constitutional amendment before us here is not the manifestation of a "bare… desire to harm" homosexuals… but is rather a modest attempt by seemingly tolerant Coloradans to preserve traditional sexual mores against the efforts of a politically powerful minority to revise those mores through use of the laws.[183]

Amendment 2 could qualify as a "modest" act of cultural self-defense enacted by the "seemingly tolerant" because the liberal elites routinely engage in their own analogous forms of cultural self-defense, when they unostentatiously but pervasively discriminate against what threatens *their* traditional mores, *their* identities. The villeins' prejudices may be more transparent. But the Templars' prejudices aren't transformed into anything else merely by virtue of being less so. Indeed, the level of social surveillance required to safeguard the academic elites' cultural capital may be far more extensive than the surveillance of old-fashioned moralists defending traditional morality. This is why conservative claimants of cultural oppression are unmoved by charges of bigotry and parochialism—of a "'bare… desire to harm a politically unpopular group"[184] as the *Romer* Court accused. Conservatives understand in their gut, if not necessarily on the level of theory, that their enemies are engaged in an enterprise that mirrors their own on some basic human level. And this is why they will always detect some hypocrisy or other in the moral indignation of liberals.

The irrationality that conservatives detect in liberals is meaningful, not for its actual scope and repercussions, but as *evidence for the operation of a hero-system*, a system of meaning-preservation whose very existence gives the lie to what Codevilla calls the "Ruling Class's fundamental claims to its superior intellect and morality." Conservative claims of cultural oppression are a civilizational rebellion against the culture of careful and critical discourse *qua embodiment of the meta-equal protection problem*. As such, they address themselves, not to deleterious consequences, but to *differential dignity*. Gouldner observes:

> CCD treats the relationship between those who speak it, and others *about whom* they speak, as a relationship between judges and judged. It implies that the established social hierarchy is only a semblance and the deeper, more important distinction is between those who speak and understand truly and those who do not. To participate in the culture of critical discourse, then, is to be emancipated *at once* from lowness in the conventional social hierarchy, and is thus a subversion of that hierarchy. To participate in the culture of critical discourse, then, is a political act.[185]

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[183] *Romer v. Evans*, 517 U.S. 620, 636 (1996) (Scalia, J., dissenting).
[184] *Romer v. Evans*, 517 U.S. 620, 634 (1996) (Scalia, J., dissenting).
[185] Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, pg. 59.

Translated into our framework, this is a hierarchy between those who stand above the "peculiarly human emotions" and those who do not, between those capable of naturalistic disengagement and those whose sensibilities remain anthropocentric or "pre-modern." This is the distinctively liberal "bigoted clause," the distinctively liberal "Moral Order" in relation to which conservatism represents a form of contagion. The New Class may not feel disgust toward homosexuality or go out of their way to shame unwed mothers. But they nevertheless feel themselves emancipated from a certain kind of "lowness," as Gouldner puts it, which they now identify with conservatism. Hence their conservaphobia, which is simply the corollary of the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. Conservaphobia is always couched in a utilitarian façade, as a response to the perniciousness of conservative ideas. But conservatives correctly sense that it is a source of intrinsic identitarian satisfactions, and this is why they claim cultural oppression.

The elitism of the liberal elite is an elitism, not of wealth, status, or even education, but of moral luck, the fact that they have been undeservedly blessed with the capacity to sublimate, intellectualize, and etherealize their illiberalism, and thus be illiberal with comparative impunity. Their illiberalism may be less pernicious by some measures. But this is nothing for which they deserve any credit, because this is a difference of social background and personal constitution, not individual courage or intrinsic virtue. Just like everyone else, they have been, as Heidegger says, *thrown* into a particular field of social meanings. And their good luck on this front is, from the cosmic viewpoint to which they themselves aspire, just as arbitrary as the inherited fortunes of third-generation plutocrats. Hence conservatives' perverse sense that liberal equality taken to its logical conclusion would somehow redound to their cause. Their claims of cultural oppression transpose the categories which liberal discourse applies to *the world* onto that very discourse, because it is here that the sublimated conservatism of liberals can be discovered. These claims' profound, ceaselessly innovative perversity, their ineluctably convoluted character, is the direct outcome of this effort to transpose the ideals of liberalism onto this meta-level. This is the philosophical meaning of what liberals mistake for mere rancor.

The difference between the leftism of the Left and the leftism of the Right is that the latter presupposes a much *higher* level of philosophical abstraction and reflexivity. Hence the rhetorical disadvantage to which conservatives perennially feel subject. This inequality enables liberals to seize upon the irrationality of conservatives as structural features of the conservative mind while chalking up their own irrationality to generic human imperfection—individual idiosyncrasy,

practical exigency, rhetorical license, and so on. The result is that the irrationalities of liberals are quickly forgotten and never assembled together as a totality that would reveal liberalism as a hero-system. Doing so is the still unconscious project of conservative claims of cultural oppression—to systematize the irrationalities of liberals so as to expose the hero-system of which they are symptoms. This would reveal the hidden meaning of conservatives "curious amassing of petty, unrelated beefs about the world." This is the task that now awaits us. The origin and meaning of these beefs is to be found, not in individual or collective contrivance, but in the mutation counter-narrative, the suppressed history of the genesis of the modern liberal identity. It is to this that we now turn.

Chapter Five

The Mutation Counter-Narrative

Drawing on Taylor's *A Secular Age* and Nobert Elias's *The Civilizing Process,* I will now provide a more detailed account of what I've dubbed the "mutation counter-narrative," the alternative theory of modernity that reveals the "higher truth" of conservative claims of cultural oppression. In celebrating the role of scientific enlightenment in debunking sundry myths, the subtraction account explains how one *theory* of things replaced another. But it fails to examine modernity in terms of the *non-theoretical* changes in our sense of ourselves as agents in the world, to address how, as Taylor says, "our sense of things, our cosmic imaginary, in other words, our whole background understanding and feel of the world has been transformed."[1] Elias puts the point this way:

> Civilization, and therefore rationalization, for example, is not a process within a separate sphere of "ideas" or "thought." It does not involve solely changes of "knowledge," transformations of "ideologies," in short alterations of the *content* of consciousness, but changes in the whole human make-up, within which ideas and habits of thought are only a single sector.[2]

It is precisely these "changes in the whole human make-up" that the subtraction account ignores with its emphasis on the sloughing off of religious and metaphysical illusion. These changes are at the core of the mutation counter-narrative, however. This narrative does not deny that we have shed many earlier illusions and limitations of knowledge. But it seeks to contextualize these developments—e.g., the decline of superstition and hierarchy, the rise of science and individualism—within other developments pertaining, not to knowledge, but to our basic experience of self, time, and the social world. It is these changes that made the falling away of superstition possible, and it is against their backdrop that the meaning of our "enlightenment" must be understood. Enlightenment connotes the illumination of something that was there all along. But the mutation counter-narrative reveals this to be an illusion. We have arrived to where we are, not because unthinking tradition has been cast off in favor of timeless human nature, but because tensions and contradictions within those traditions unfolded and resolved themselves in

[1] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), pg. 325.
[2] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), pg. 485.

particular ways, culminating, not merely in the falling away of certain beliefs, but in the production of a new identity, a new configuration of consciousness, for which this falling away was inevitable.

Being insensible to these transformations and mistaking the derivative for the essential, the subtraction account must misrepresent as "underlying features of human nature which were there all along" what are in fact the results of historically contingent and culturally specific developments, of the secularized asceticism that is the taken-for-granted backdrop of the modern order. This history is politically consequential because the subtraction account obscures, not only the origins of the modern liberal identity, but also crucial features of its contemporary *structure*, which is what conservative claims of cultural oppression are implicitly tracking. What these claims decry as liberalism's sundry hypocrisies, double-standards, and subterfuges are *distorted interpretations of something that follows logically from the mutation counter-narrative*, because it is this narrative that imbues the modern liberal identity with the hidden "thickness" that conservatives sense viscerally.

Though I will paint the mutation counter-narrative in broad brushstrokes, this should be adequate to our purposes. These purposes being ultimately psychological, sociological, philosophical, and political rather than historical, they would not be served by the kind of fine parsing that might be appropriate elsewhere. Our objective is not to produce a maximally precise rendition of the past, but to use that past to illuminate the present. Having outlined the mutation counter-narrative in this chapter, I will, in the next, proceed to examine how it imbues conservative claims of cultural oppression with an underlying coherence that is lost on the subtraction account, how it permits us to move beyond the "fundamentalist" interpretation of these claims and access their philosophical substance.

1. Squalor and Coarseness

Whereas the subtraction account begins with a past mired in pervasive ignorance and superstition, the mutation counter-narrative begins with a past beset by rampant personal and social *disorder*. Elias writes that a contemporary westerner who found himself transported back in time to the medieval-feudal period would "depending on his inclinations, be either attracted by the wilder, more unrestrained and adventurous life of the upper classes in this society, or repulsed by

the 'barbaric' customs, the squalor and coarseness that he encountered there."[3] Whereas the subtraction account describes our relationship to our historical past in epistemological terms, as an opposition between enlightenment and ignorance, the relevant opposition for Elias is between the civilized and the uncivilized. The latter is defined, not by deficits of knowledge, but by its higher threshold of repugnance, its greater tolerance for squalor and coarseness, and its greater acceptance of the *merely animal* in human beings.[4]

This acceptance of the animal meant that conduct now considered uncouth and unsanitary was taken for granted in medieval Europe. In eating, for example, "everything is simpler, impulses and inclinations are less restrained."[5] Eating together could mean, not just sitting together, but diners "taking meat with their fingers from the same dish, wine from the same goblet, soup from the same pot or the same plate…"[6] The early modern period saw the beginnings of an effort to raise the shame frontier. But it is telling that admonitions that would today be appropriately directed at *children*—injunctions "not to snatch whatever they want from the table, and not to scratch themselves or touch their noses, ears, eyes, or other parts of their bodies at table" or "not to speak or drink with a full mouth, or to sprawl on the table, and so on"—were addressed unequivocally to *adults*.[7] The average adult of the medieval period was in important respects what we would now call an overgrown child. Bereft of the panoply of automatic inhibitions we associate with normal adulthood, the medieval was defined as much by his innocence as by his ignorance, the absence of a strong felt need to be "dignified." Thus, one etiquette manual instructed that "[i]t is far less proper to hold out the stinking thing for the other to smell, etc." Much that now goes without saying had to be said, and conduct we would now classify as pathological—like the celebratory public display of one's own feces—was a mere misdemeanor, the equivalent of biting one's nails in public today.[8] Absent was what Elias calls "the invisible wall of affects which seems now to rise between one human body and another, repelling and separating…"[9] Absent was a strong sense that a person's dignity is somehow compromised by his "animal side."

[3] Ibid., pg. xi.
[4] Ibid., pg. 47.
[5] Ibid., pg. 50.
[6] Ibid., pg. 55.
[7] Ibid., pg. 115.
[8] Ibid., pg. 116.
[9] Ibid., pg. 55.

The need for privacy was correspondingly lower too. It was unremarkable for men and women, masters and servants, hosts and guests, or adults and children to all sleep in the same room,[10] as well as for strangers, or children and adults, to share a bed.[11] The naked body was less socially problematic than it is today. Knights were waited on by women when bathing, and it was common practice, at least in the towns, for entire families to undress at home before heading off, naked or near-naked, to the public bathhouse.[12] Such were their "traditional family values." Sex too was less problematic. Children knew everything there was to know about it, and there was no attempt to veil the subject in a shroud of secrecy or approach it with special delicacy.[13] It was the norm at weddings for "bride and bridegroom… [to be] taken to bed by the guests, undressed, and given their nightdress."[14] Clearly, the ideal of marital intimacy was not what it would later become, both in our culture generally and in Supreme Court decisions. That "intimacy" was a source of *public* meaning, not "love" in the modern sense. While the Church promoted monogamous marriages, it also accepted that its admonitions would be of limited effect. Monogamy was praised, but adultery did not draw the level of social opprobrium it would in later centuries. Extramarital relationships for men, and sometimes also for women, were par for the course in secular circles.[15] Prostitution was also taken for granted. Elias recounts how "[i]n 1434, the Emperor Sigsimund publicly thanks the city magistrate of Bern for putting the brothel feely at the disposal of himself and his attendants for three days," as "[t]his, like a banquet, formed part of the hospitality offered to high ranking guests."[16] Today's politicians must apologize for their extra-marital dalliances, but Sigsimund's sexual escapades appeared to be very nearly an official duty. Though conservatives bewail the loss of "traditional values," these values are not as traditional as many imagine.

The medieval period was just as tolerant of violence as of sex. "Leaving aside a small elite, rapine, pillage, and murder were standard practice in the warrior society of this time," explains Elias.[17] Moreover, these practices were not confined to the knightly nobility, for whom violence was a profession, as "[r]obbery, fighting, pillage, family feuds—all this played a hardly less

[10] Ibid., pg. 134.
[11] Ibid., pg. 138.
[12] Ibid., pg. 134.
[13] Ibid., pg. 144.
[14] Ibid., pg. 146.
[15] Ibid., pg. 150.
[16] Ibid., pg. 145.
[17] Ibid., pg. 159.

important role in the life of the town population than in that of the warrior class itself."[18] Family vengeance, private feuds, and vendettas being par for the course among townsfolk no less than among the nobility, "[t]he little people, too—the hatters, the tailors, the shepherds, were all quick to draw their knives."[19]

Some degree of vigilante justice was inevitable given that the comparative weakness of the medieval state. But violence was scarcely regretted as just a necessary evil. On the contrary, "cruelty and joy in the destruction and torment of others, like the proof of physical superiority," were viewed as normal human passions,[20] and not as unfortunate malformations. The "pleasure in killing and torturing others was great, and it was a socially permitted pleasure."[21] Especially appealing was the mutilation of prisoners, who were often fodder for eye gouging and amputation.[22] We have prohibited "cruel and unusual punishment," but cruel *was* usual for medievals. Indeed, gratuitous violence could become public spectacle. Elias relates that:

> In Paris during the sixteenth century it was one of the festive pleasures of Midsummer Day to burn alive one or two dozen cats. The ceremony was very famous. The populace assembled. Solemn music was played. Under a kind of scaffold an enormous pyre was erected. Then a sack or basket containing the cats was hung from the scaffold. The sack or basket began to smolder. The cats fell into the fire and were burned to death, while the crowd reveled in their caterwauling. Usually the king and queen were present. Sometimes the king or the dauphin was given the honor of lighting the pyre.[23]

The sadism was undisguised and unabashed. Just as with the care and presentation of the body, behavior that today indicates deep mental disturbance, and would be cause for institutional confinement, was commonplace and normal. Indeed, the sadism of the Midsummer Day was deemed appropriate for kings, princes, and queens, God's representatives on earth, who in this regard at least affirmed a common humanity with their subjects.

This is not to suggest medievals knew only unremitting violence or were incapable of experiencing the full range of human emotions. On the contrary, the difference is that our pre-modern, medieval ancestors experienced that full range much more frequently and violently than is now psychologically normal:

> Not that people were always going around with fierce looks, drawn brows, and martial countenances as the clearly visible symbols of their warlike prowess. On the contrary, a

[18] Ibid., pg. 162.
[19] Ibid., pg. 164.
[20] Ibid., pg. 158.
[21] Ibid., pg. 159.
[22] Ibid., pg. 158.
[23] Ibid., pg. 167.

> moment ago they were joking, now they mock each other, one word leads to another, and suddenly from the midst of laughter they find themselves in the fiercest feud. Much that appears contradictory to us—the intensity of their piety, the violence of their fear of hell, their guilt feelings, their penitence, the immense outbursts of joy and gaiety, the sudden flaring and the uncontrollable force of their hatred and belligerence—all these, like the rapid changes of mood, are in reality symptoms of the same social and personality structure. The instincts, the emotions were vented more freely, more directly, more openly than later. It is only to us, in whom everything is more subdued, moderate, and calculated, and in whom social taboos are built much more deeply into the fabric of instinctual life as self-restraints, that this unveiled intensity of piety, belligerence, or cruelty appears as contradictory.[24]

Medievals were distinguished, not by any generalized amorality or egoism, but by a fundamentally different mental and emotional landscape. They lived in a society where individuals gave way to their impulses and drives with an ease, spontaneity, and openness that is foreign to us today. And so they had emotional lives that were comparatively unregulated and liable to oscillate violently and unpredictably between extremes.[25] The violence, license, and general disorder may have been formally opposed by prevailing social codes. But those codes remained just that, codes, precepts which were known but not at all internalized to the degree to which they are now. No one imagined that they realistically could be. By contrast with the automatic self-control that we now take for granted,

> the incurable unrest, the perpetual proximity of danger, the whole atmosphere of this unpredictable and insecure life, in which there are at most small and transient islands of more protected existence, often engenders even without external cause, sudden switches from the most exuberant pleasure to the deepest despondency and remorse. The personality, if we may put it thus, is incomparably more ready and accustomed to leap with undiminishing intensity from one extreme to the other, and slight impressions, uncontrollable associations are often enough to induce these immense fluctuations."[26]

Human beings were more animal-like, not only in the externals of habit and self-presentation, but also at the deeper levels of their affective-instinctual make-ups. They were much more beholden to whatever random stimuli emanated from their immediate environments, because much less able to step back from them. This was a consequence, not of ignorance, but of their particular human constitutions and the social conditions that made these adaptive. Self-discipline is now a desideratum of social success and respectability. But things were otherwise within an insecure existence that permitted only minimal thought for the future and where an excess of such thought

[24] Ibid., pg. 164.
[25] Ibid., pg. 175.
[26] Ibid., pg. 449.

was maladaptive. One or another form of emotional intensity was always the order of the day, and so "[w]hoever did not love or hate to the utmost in this society, whoever could not stand his ground in the play of passions, could go into a monastery."[27]

2. Pre-Modern Relativism

In this connection, it might be asked just why religion failed to reign in the wantonness described by Elias. After all, we look upon the Middle Ages as a pervasively religious era whose strictures and doctrines brooked no dissent, and this seems incompatible with the kind of license that medievals routinely permitted themselves and tolerated in others. But as Elias explains, "[r]eligion, the belief in the punishing or rewarding omnipotence of God, never has itself a 'civilizing' or affect-subduing effect. On the contrary, religion is always exactly as 'civilized' as the society or class which upholds it."[28] Pre-modern Christianity was not what it would later become. And as we will now see, the pre-modern religious cosmology described in the last chapter served to encourage rather than to counteract the disordered affective-instinctual structure we have just examined.

* * *

The secular is now defined as a sphere that excludes the religious and operates by a self-contained non-religious logic. This is why we believe that church and state can be "separated." But this is possible only because, as Nomi Stolzenberg puts it, "the concept of the secular has itself, ironically, been secularized and modernized."[29] Having yet to secularize the concept of the secular, however, pre-moderns understood the relationship between the secular and the religious very differently than contemporary liberals. Stolzenberg explains:

> The "secular" was, in fact, originally a *religious* concept, a product of traditional religious epistemological frameworks. The concept of the secular always served the function of distinguishing religious from nonreligious domains. But nonreligious domains did not, in the premodern view, exist outside the religious epistemological framework. On the contrary, that framework of meaning was all-encompassing, overarching, comprehending within *every* domain of human (and nonhuman) action and cognition, both the spiritual and the temporal, the holy and the unholy, the ecclesiastical and the secular, the sacred and the profane. In their original usage, oppositions such as the spiritual and the secular, the sacred

[27] Ibid., pg. 164.
[28] Ibid., pg. 164.
[29] Nomi Stolzenberg, "The Profanity of Law," in *Law and the Sacred*, eds. Austin Sarat, Lawrence Douglas, and Martha Merrill Umphrey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007) pg. 30.

> and the profane, did not denote two different mindsets or conceptual systems or frameworks of meaning (as they do today). Rather, they referred to different institutions, different jurisdictions, different functions, and different domains, all of which were located within a single conceptual universe.[30]

The secular's original home within a religious conceptual universe was the reason why medievals could speak of the "secular clergy" without contradiction. The secular clergy, like the parish priests, were here being contrasted with the monastic orders, which were non-secular because they lived closer to the eternal, away from the ordinary time of day-to-day village life.[31] Their secular counterparts were secular, not because they were non-religious, but because they occupied a lower rung within a religious hierarchy. Church and state were separated in that religious and secular spheres were governed by different norms. But this was a functional separation, not one of ultimate purposes or values. Thus, a religious tribunal could be required to hand over a religious heretic to the secular authorities for a secular punishment, not because these authorities were indifferent to religion, but because their lower station in a religiously defined hierarchy suited them for the shedding of blood—which did not similarly befit those stationed higher up it.[32]

We might say that the religious and the secular existed along a continuum, with the significance of secular phenomena being a function of their proximity to or distance from the religious, or eternal. The secular was defined, not by the simple *absence* of religion, but by its *remove* from the higher rungs of religious devotion, and so *presupposed* religion as its broader conceptual backdrop. Taylor observes that the "secular" originally referred to "ordinary as against higher time,"[33] the stretch of time between the Resurrection and the Second Coming, during which Christians would have to patiently endure their fallen state in anticipation of the world's eventual redemption. The secular was the logical byproduct of our spiritual imperfections and thus an essentially *religious* concept.

The religious and secular realms could enter into conflict. But they did so, not, as they do now, as *two incompatible worldviews*, but rather as *two sets of priorities within one worldview*, which have for some reason fallen into disequilibrium. The demands of secular time and eternal time could, Taylor says, "flare into opposition when humans cling to their 'secular' condition as

[30] Ibid., pgs. 30-31.
[31] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 265.
[32] Ibid., pg. 265.
[33] Ibid., pg. 55.

ultimate,"[34] at which point the otherwise "less religious" became anti-religious by overstepping its place and crowding out our connection to the truly higher. The secular was dangerous, not as the theorized denial of God's existence or relevance, but as a realm of experience that threatened to engross us out of proportion to its true importance within God's creation, and so to blind us to the wider order of which it is only a subordinate part. So intertwined were the secular and the religious that we cannot even say that the Catholic Church itself was a purely religious as opposed to secular institution. For it was the institution charged with *mediating* between the religious and the secular, with harmonizing the City of Man with the City of God to the extent possible in a fallen world. As José Casanova observes, the Church was at once *ecclesia invisibilis* and the *ecclesia visibilis*, partaking at once of both spiritual and temporal reality.[35]

Stolzenberg observes that whereas today's fundamentalists view secular law as a competitor to religious law, the medieval Church counted upon secular law to achieve what religious law could not. Given that human beings lacked the perfect omniscience and understanding possessed by God, they could not be relied upon to properly administer religious law without satisfying an unrealistically heavy burden of proof—without which they would falter and condemn the innocent. But since criminals had to be punished and deterred and God could not have willed otherwise, it was necessary to cordon off a sphere of secular law where criminals could be judged without the impractically stringent evidentiary requirements that governed religious law.[36] The secular was at once non-religious and an emanation of the religious, embodying what was a religiously sanctioned compromise with a fallen world, and so as much a part of God's domain as anything else. The medieval Church endorsed secular authority as a matter of religious conviction.

The concept of the religious has also been secularized and modernized. We now see it as a distinct sphere that stands apart from worldly concern and instead speaks to the ultimate truth or meaning of things. But this too is a modern innovation. As Brent Nogbri shows in his *Before Religion*, the concept of "religion" is distinctively modern, and not as is commonly believed a perennial feature of all human cultures. What we now translate as the "religion" of pre-modern

[34] Ibid., pg. 265.
[35] José Casanova, "A Secular Age: Dawn or Twilight," in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, eds. Michael Warner, Jonathan Vanantwerpen, and Craig Calhoun (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), pg. 275.
[36] Stolzenberg, "The Profanity of Law," pgs. 29-90.

societies never referred to any personal beliefs about how to obtain salvation or lead a good life. These connotations are modern projections, because pre-modern "religion" denoted activities more than it did beliefs, and was bound up with civic norms and notions of political order and ethnic community. These things greatly overshadowed what we now identify as the essentially cognitive and private nature of religion as a kind of mental assent to certain tenets.[37] "Religion" wasn't a set of ideas but the total background against which individuals made sense of their lives. This intertwining of the religious and the secular was just a facet of what we already observed to be pre-moderns' total teleological immersion, their inability to disengage from the total background order toward which they strove to position themselves "well, fully, with éclat."

It bears emphasis, however, that while the religious and the secular seem highly "fused" in the medieval world by comparison with the modern one, they were in fact quite *differentiated* by comparison with earlier forms of social life. Robert Bellah notes that kings in archaic societies maintained their prestige by undertaking priestly functions—building temples, making lavish sacrificial offerings, and so forth.[38] While medieval monarchs also believed they had divinely ordained duties, these no longer assumed a priestly form, as they did in archaic societies. The line between the "religious" and the "secular" becomes further blurred in tribal societies, which lack a clear and distinct notion of divinity. The ancestors they venerated were powerful beings, but there was no absolute ontological separation between divinity and "mere mortals."[39] Both existed along a continuum of power and prestige. It would therefore be an anachronism to see tribal societies as engaged in anything like "worship" in the contemporary sense of the term.[40] The ancestors demanded homage and deference, the *sine qua non* of drawing on their powers, but not necessarily prostration or supplication, as would be owed to a "god." Surprisingly, we can discern a remnant of this earlier dispensation as late as the Hebrew Scriptures, when Jacob wrestled all night with God, who is represented, Bellah says, as "a powerful being only marginally stronger than a very strong man."[41] The concept of the secular is on one level indigenous to medieval Christianity, just as the concept of the religious is on one level indigenous to the modern world. But we can also

[37] Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), pgs. 1-6, 27-45, 63, 85-101, 151-52.
[38] Robert N. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2011), pg. 218.
[39] Ibid. pg. 202.
[40] Ibid. pg. 94.
[41] Ibid. pgs. 95-96.

think of their differentiation as existing along a historical continuum, with the medieval dispensation being much more differentiated than earlier "religion" but much less differentiated than our own times.

* * *

The "natural" and the "supernatural" were just as intertwined as the secular and the religious. We now look upon our pre-modern ancestors as "superstitious," believing as they did that evil spirits could impinge on their fortunes in ways that contradict the laws of natural causality. Yet this label understates the magnitude of the chasm that separates us. We now conceive of superstitions as discrete beliefs to the effect that supernatural forces intermittently interfere with the workings of natural causality—e.g., opening an umbrella indoors, the black cat crossing our path, or a ghostly doing mischief in a former dwelling. But as with the secular and the religious, our pre-modern ancestors had not yet marked off the natural and the supernatural as two distinct spheres that might come into contact with one another on special occasions in defiance of the laws of physics. What we now conceptualize as natural regularity temporarily suspended by supernatural irregularity was for pre-moderns irreducible to either of these, and rather consisted in a single overarching order that was neither natural nor supernatural in the contemporary sense of the terms. Nature was understood to be regulated. But this was not the strictly causal regularity studied by natural science, and rather consisted in a set of patterns that embodied God's order. The natural world, and indeed the social world, was seen as *embodying*, and not just as being *caused or affected* by, the divine. Things' essence lied, not in their particularity, but in their "instantiation of the categories of divine reason," as Gillespie puts it.[42] It was in nature that God revealed his order to us.

This meant that natural causality could not be disentangled from the moral or spiritual dimension of things and that natural events could be portents of our moral/spiritual condition. If a community's sin was punished by disease or a poor harvest, the reason was not that God had elected to "veto" natural causality in order to punish moral dereliction, but that this dereliction had in and of itself upset the order of things. Sin could precipitate a poor harvest in the way a rock tossed into a pond can stimulate a ripple, as part and parcel of a general disequilibrium with

[42] Michael Allen Gillsespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), pg. 14.

consequences far and wide. The misfortune was indeed a form of divine retribution, but the divinity in question was *embedded* in the natural world, and not a distant supervisor intervening selectively like the police. "Irregularity" was the result, not of bare fiat, but of some disruption within the forces that would ordinarily maintain regularity. The difference between modern and pre-modern, then, is not simply that we no longer believe in the supernatural, but that modernity has reshaped our understanding of what the supernatural consists in, generating distinctions that were generally *blurred* for pre-moderns.

Hence pre-moderns' belief in the *sacred*, their sense, as Taylor says, that "God's power is somehow concentrated in certain people, times, places or actions."[43] God being understood as embedded in the world, it wasn't a big stretch to imagine that he's more greatly embedded in some places and times than others. Medieval Christians approached the sacred through what Taylor calls *charged objects*—sacred relics, charmed amulets, etc.—contact with which could redound to one's material and spiritual advantage, perhaps with the recitation of the appropriate chants. There could also be charged places, to which one made pilgrimage. And there were charged times, like a religious festival celebrating the Resurrection, which affirmed the dependence of secular time on eternal time so as to infuse the former with the power of the latter. The sacred was not an alternative realm removed from everyday life, but those points in everyday life where the eternal "broke through" into secular space and time.

This blurring of the natural and the supernatural through openness to the sacred meant that the distinction between the mind and the world was also blurred. Taylor explains why the ideal of disengaged strategic agent beholding the world non-anthropocentrically would have been alien to pre-moderns:

> In the enchanted world of 500 years ago, a clear line between the physical and the moral wasn't drawn. But this is just another facet of the basic fact that the boundary around the mind was constitutionally porous. Things and agencies which are clearly extra-human could alter or shape our spiritual and emotional condition, and not just our physical state (and hence mediately our spiritual and emotional condition), but together in one act. These agencies didn't simply operate from outside the "mind," they helped to constitute us emotionally and spiritually.[44]

We can easily recognize how the emotional malevolence of *another human being* might be invasive in this sense, as when his attitude toward us begins to seep into our own self-image. This

[43] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 76.
[44] Ibid., pg. 40.

is because our basic human nature as social beings keeps us from seeing others' conduct non-anthropocentrically, as just the product of morally neutral causal forces. Rather, we encounter it as an expression of human meaning. But being anthropocentric through and through, the enchanted world of pre-modernity did not admit of a clear line between personal agency and impersonal force. And so mere things could induce changes of meanings in people just as other people do. Charged objects had agency. They were supernatural in the way other humans seem supernatural, because not subject to naturalistic objectification.

An "object/agent" in the enchanted world, like a sacred relic or holy site, influenced us, not by awakening certain judgments, but by "bringing us as it were into its field of force,"[45] just like other people can bring us into their field of force. They *imposed* meanings that operated independently of us. The "order of things" wasn't some distant, ethereal realm lying outside of ordinary experience, but something that permeated people's sense of agency on a visceral, physical level. Taylor again explains:

> A modern is feeling depressed, melancholy. He is told: it's just your body chemistry, you're hungry, or there is a hormone malfunctioning, or whatever. Straightaway, he feels relieved. He can take a distance from this feeling, which is ipso facto declared not justified. Things don't really have this meaning; it just feels this way, which is the result of a causal action utterly unrelated to the meanings of things. This step of disengagement depends on our modern mind/body distinction, and the relegation of the physical to being "just" a contingent cause of the psychic.
>
> But a pre-modern may not be helped by learning that his mood comes from black bile. Because this doesn't permit a distancing. Black bile is melancholy. Now he just knows that he's in the grips of the real thing.
>
> Here is the contrast between the modern, bounded self—I want to say "buffered" self—and the "porous" self of the earlier enchanted world…
>
> …for the modern, buffered self, the possibility exists of taking a distance from, disengaging from everything outside the mind. My ultimate purposes are those which arise within me, the crucial meanings of things are those defined in my responses to them.
>
> ---by definition for the porous self, the source of its most powerful and important emotions are outside the "mind"; or better put, the very notion that there is a clear boundary, allowing us to define an inner base area, grounded in which we can disengage from the rest, has no sense.
>
> As a bounded self I can see the boundary as a buffer, such that the things beyond don't need to "get to me", to use the contemporary expression. That's the sense to my use of the term "buffered" here. This self can see itself as invulnerable, as master of the meanings of things for it.[46]

[45] Ibid., pg. 33.
[46] Ibid., pgs. 37-38.

This is why the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity would have been alien to pre-moderns. The latter weren't "buffered" and so they couldn't "step back" from their total teleological immersion into a stance of naturalistic lucidity. The anthropocentricity of pre-moderns was in the first instance a function, not of limited knowledge, but of the nature of their agency—the nature of the *boundary*, or lack thereof, between self and world. The crucial difference between moderns and pre-moderns isn't that the moderns unlike pre-moderns *believe* that their mental states originate in a physiological substratum interacting with the rest of the physical world (producing either "delight" or "annoyance" as Hobbes says), but that moderns unlike pre-moderns have a form of consciousness for which this proposition can make sense.

A pre-modern couldn't seriously contemplate the thought that "it just feels this way," not because he was ignorant of his feelings' causal springs, but because he was *porous rather than buffered*, because his basic, pre-theoretical experience of the world did not permit any clear-cut distinctions between the inner and the outer, between how things feel and how they are. This is a difference, not of beliefs, but of the disposition to "distance" oneself from one's pre-reflective, pre-theorized experience of the world. Lacking this distance, pre-moderns experienced spirit forces as "just unproblematically there, impinging on us."[47] This was in just the same way that the physical environment is something that is "just unproblematically there" for us moderns—something which it is simply impossible to doubt in the course of our day-to-day engagement with the world.

The individual who "believed" himself possessed by a spirit did not maintain this belief as a theoretical proposition, but rather experienced it with the same visceral certainty with which he experienced the physical body in which the spirit had become lodged. He simply lacked the "inner base area" form whose vantage point that experience could be conceptualized as the contents of a "mind," which may or may not correspond to the contents of an "external" world. Hence the idea of possession, here explained by Becker:

> And so we find that auditory hallucinations can be normal in a culture where one is expected to hear periodically the voice of God; visual hallucinations can be normal where, as among the Plains Indians, one's Guardian Spirit manifested itself in a vision; or where, as among South Italian Catholics, the appearance of the Virgin Mary is a blessed event. Spirit possession can be a great talent even though we consider it psychiatrically a form of dissociation. What we call "hysterical symptoms" are thought to be signs of special gifts,

[47] Ibid., pg. 30.

> powers that come to lodge in one's body and show themselves by speaking strange tongues through the mouth of the one who is possessed, and so on.[48]

The difference between the modern, buffered self and the pre-modern, porous self is no mere difference of belief, as per the subtraction account, because it also involves a difference in *what it means to believe*. Pre-moderns did not merely possess different religious beliefs than do we, but were moreover differently *possessed by* those beliefs. These informed, not merely their reflective deliberations, but, more profoundly, their very sense of themselves as agents. Pre-moderns were "opened up" to forces that could, for good or ill, penetrate and mold their own affect-structure from the outside-in. Their teleology was no mere conviction, but the very substrate of their humanity. The order of things, and so the significance of particular things, was not only believed in, but *inhabited*, impinging on people more like the temperature or humidity than as an object of visual perception—to employ an imperfect but hopefully useful analogy. This was what made spirit possession possible.

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This pre-modern cosmology was the reason why pre-modern religion could not suppress the license and disorder of the medieval world. Medieval societies may have held certain unquestioned "dogmas" about what *constitutes* sin. But they were also profoundly modest about the possibility of actually implementing these dogmas. Given our sinful state, "porous" selves simply could not be counted on to exercise the kind of self-control that reigning in disorder would require. The Middle Ages were, Taylor writes, "steeped in the view, which has probably been the way most people in most ages have seen this question, that there are severe limits to the degree in which sin and disorder can be done away with in this world."[49] Berger here illustrates how this sense of limitation and its psychological implications get elided by the subtraction account:

> The individual in most pre-modern societies lives in a world that is much more coherent. It therefore appears to him as firm and possibly inevitable. By contrast, the modern individual's experience of plurality of social worlds relativizes every one of them. Consequently, the institutional order undergoes a certain loss of reality. The 'accent of reality' consequently shifts from the objective order of institutions to the realm of subjectivity. Put differently, the individual's experience of himself becomes more real to him than his experience of the objective social world. Therefore, the individual seeks to find his 'foothold' in reality in himself rather than outside himself. One consequence of this is that the individual's subjective reality (what is commonly regarded as his

[48] Ernest Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning* (New York: The Free Press, 1971), pg. 131.
[49] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 119.

> 'psychology') becomes increasingly differentiated, complex—and 'interesting' to himself. Subjectivity acquires previously unconceived 'depths.'[50]

This subtraction account-inspired picture of the relationship between the modern and pre-modern defines the pre-modern in terms of a religiously-enforced moral and psychological rigidity that was gradually eroded by various liberalizing influences. But this is a tremendous oversimplification that is just as false in some respects as it is true in others. Berger imputes a certain firmness and cohesiveness to the pre-modern world, but the psychological flux of the pre-modern personality structure rendered it less firm and cohesive than he suggests. As we will later see, this places our relationship to our past as well as liberals' relationship to conservatives in the same new light.

Social roles in the pre-modern world were indeed "rigid" in that they were not subject to radical questioning. Berger is also correct that the pre-modern self lacked the "depth" that we associate with the modern one, which presupposes a disengagement of which porous selves were incapable. But this did not make pre-modern social life "firm" in every regard. For the firmness that may have been the ideal was at every turn vitiated by pre-modern porousness, which resigned pre-moderns to disorder as an inescapable feature of human life. Their morality was informed by a sense of what Taylor calls "complementarity," a sense of the "mutual necessity of opposites," the ineluctable co-dependence of both "structure and anti-structure."[51] Pre-moderns were not moral relativists or subjectivists in today's sense. But their acceptance of flux and chaos meant they weren't strict, humorless moralists either. They may have been "dogmatic" in their doctrines. But with sin and disorder having been accepted as givens, part of their doctrine was that "the human code exists within a larger spiritual cosmos, and its opening to anti-structure is what is required to keep society in tune with the cosmos, or to draw on its forces."[52] The social order could not be entirely "firm" because it was only part of the cosmic stage onto which we had been plopped by forces that transcended and relativized that order. Firmness and cohesiveness was possible in the City of God, but not in the City of Man, where anti-structure will disrupt all merely human designs.

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[50] Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pg. 77.
[51] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 47.
[52] Ibid., pg. 50.

Hence pre-moderns' celebration of "carnival." Carnivals are now mere "holidays," respites from the rigors of everyday life. But the respite offered by the medieval carnival was more profound and thoroughgoing. Much more than a public holiday, carnival represented a "ludic interval, in which people played out a condition of reversal of the usual order." During such periods, "[b]oys wore the mitre, or fools were made kings for a day; what was ordinarily revered was mocked, people permitted themselves various forms of license, not just sexually but also in close-to-violent acts, and the like."[53] With pre-moderns being constitutionally porous, the suspension of their daily routine went further than it possibly can for us, extending beyond behavioral norms to the depths of their being.

The social worlds of pre-moderns could be no firmer than the porousness of the selves who made them up. That porousness necessarily vitiated the stability of social forms, which had to surrender to the periodic invasions of supra-social forces. How could society demand any more affective-instinctual self-control from its members than the nature of man's relation to the universe can warrant, or even make intelligible? Being "opened out" to forces that transcended and engulfed him, the individual was scarcely the center of the universe, or even the center of his own universe, and so he could hardly be expected to exercise a level of self-control and self-restraint that presupposes just this. Carnival was a ritual acknowledgment of these limitations. It acknowledged a world of agents perennially subject to evil spirits able to colonize their subjectivities, a world in which an ordered mental life could not be assured by mere will power because that very will power depended on maintaining a proper relationship to a broader cosmic order that was always in flux for temporal beings. Only God himself, the pinnacle of the Great Chain of Being, was absolute and unchanging, and humans could not but fall short of that high standard.

The pre-modern condition was therefore marked by its own kind of relativism and pluralism. Medievals recognized that most people were never going to achieve sainthood and that it was therefore foolish to insist on a single inflexible moral code to govern everyone at all times. While the subtraction account presents tolerance and skepticism as quintessentially modern virtues, the outcome of our quintessentially modern reflectiveness, the mutation counter-narrative reveals that a certain tolerance and skepticism was built into the unreflective impulses of pre-moderns. This *laissez-aller* was sustained, not by critical cosmopolitanism, but by uncritical

[53] Ibid., pg. 46.

humility about self and society. Pre-moderns did not see their inherited norms as "social constructions," as do the critical theorists of today. But these were constructions nonetheless, cosmic constructions we might say, and this tempered pre-modern moralism in a way the subtraction account cannot recognize.

3. Building Renunciation into Everyday Life

The question, then, is how societies whose denizens were susceptible to the invasive machinations of evil spirits and resigned to a ceaseless cycle of order and chaos, of redemption and recurring sin, became transformed into societies whose members see themselves as strategic agents and make ideals of rational self-interest, personal authenticity, and moral progress. The subtraction account answers that such was achieved through the gradual overcoming of the psychological, social, and scientific ignorance that previously impeded it. By contrast, the mutation counter-narrative answers that this social transformation presupposed a more basic *transformation of human beings themselves*. People had to become "buffered" because it was the constitutional porousness of pre-moderns, and not mere ignorance, that had impeded "progress."

One important source of this transformation, I shall now explain, originated in tensions inherent in Christianity itself, tensions whose unfolding gradually paved the way for the worldview of secular modernity. Those tensions arose, most fundamentally, from the conflict between the City of God and the City of Man, between the ideal of other-worldly renunciation and the imperatives of day-to-day existence and worldly desire. During the Middle Ages, this conflict was managed through a division of labor between religious elites who relinquished ordinary fulfillment in favor of religious renunciation and lay persons who would live amidst the travails and corruptions of secular time. And it was an emerging dissatisfaction with this division and dualism that engendered the social and cultural conditions under which the modern identity could develop, under which heretofore porous selves became buffered.

The above is not to say that the lay populace of medieval Europe was "secular" in the contemporary sense of the term. As we saw, the secular and the religious could not be neatly disentangled in pre-modern societies. Whether lay or devout, their members could not but encounter God everywhere they went.[54] Like spirits, God existed within their pre-reflective, pre-

[54] Ibid., pg. 25.

deliberative experience of the world as such, as obviously "there" as time and matter. Far from being the object of discrete convictions, God formed the background of all things, including ostensibly "secular" spheres, whose meaning derived from their place in a religiously-defined cosmos.

The difference between elite and lay religiosity was not so much one of degree as of *form*. It was the difference, as Taylor puts it, "between a faith in which the doctrinal element was more developed, and in which devotional life took to some degree the form of inner prayer, and later even meditative practices" and a faith "where the belief content was very rudimentary, and devotional practice was largely a matter of what one did."[55] People didn't need to devote themselves to learned theology or inner prayer in order to be religious because they still felt the presence of the sacred. Ordinary people could engage the divine through ritual contact with sacred objects, places, and times—the mediums by which God embedded himself in secular time—without concerning themselves with soul-searching Augustinian introspection or the fine points of theological doctrine. An illiterate peasant inhabiting the secular day-to-day world might still be intensely religious. But this would be, not by cultivating inner piety or theological understanding, but through apparitions of the Virgin Mary, to use Becker's example, who could bring him within her "field of force" without requiring much in the way of the formal learning or ascetic renunciation that defined the more self-conscious and sophisticated devotion of the monastic orders and other religious elites. Pre-moderns did not have to go much out of their way to be religious because religion was embedded in the temporal world and therefore *already going out of its way for them.*

* * *

This division of labor was gradually eroded by a movement of Religious Reform—both Protestant and Catholic—driven by what Taylor describes as "a profound dissatisfaction with the hierarchical equilibrium between lay life and the renunciative vocations."[56] Traditional lay religiosity became objectionable once there developed, first in late medieval Catholicism and then especially through the Reformation, "a deep theological objection" to the notion that objects, times, places, and events could be "charged," imbued with a spiritual significance that was absent

[55] Ibid., pg. 63.
[56] Ibid., pg. 61.

elsewhere and could be appropriated to one's private advantage.[57] For a growing number of theologians, this was to presume too much, because "God's power can't be contained like this, controlled as it were, through its confinement in things, and thus 'aimed' by us in one direction or another."[58] To suppose that we can manipulate God by handling relics, supplicating saints, muttering chants, or undertaking pilgrimage was to impliedly deny the full extent of his sovereignty—to sinfully downgrade God in order to sinfully elevate oneself—and therefore to betray true Christianity, whose original mission was to raise human beings above these relics of paganism. Traditional lay devotion, with its focus on sacred sites, objects, and times, became an insult to the unqualified transcendence of a deity who does not deign to embed his divinity where it can be manipulated by mere mortals. And Religious Reform had as its aim to uproot this kind of devotion.

With the older division of labor now unacceptable, Religious Reform looked for new ways to reconcile ordinary life with devotion to God. It did so, not by turning laymen into part-time monks, but by synthesizing both roles in a new ideal of human flourishing that could imbue lay, secular life with a new, more dignified kind of religious significance. This meant *embedding the renunciatory devotion of religious elites in the worldly conduct of laypersons*. Taylor explains that for the Protestant Reformation,

> All valid Christian vocations are those of ordinary life, of production and reproduction in the world. The crucial issue is how you live these vocations. The two spheres are collapsed into each other. Monastic rules disappear, but ordinary lay life is now under more stringent demands. Some of the ascetic norms of monastic life are now transferred to the secular.[59]

Religious Reform aimed to make over the City of Man in the image of the City of God. And it did this through the gradual transmogrification and transplantation of various ascetic attitudes and practices from the province of religious elites, where they were confined during the medieval period, to new secular ones. In rejecting the notion that ordinary life should be renounced in order to give oneself more fully to God, radical Protestantism "abolishes the supposedly higher, renunciative vocations" while also building "renunciation into ordinary life,"[60] demanding that we pursue worldly ends in a self-disciplined renunciatory spirit, without the emotional intensity and oscillation that characterized worldly engagement in the earlier medieval period. The affirmation

[57] Ibid., pg. 72.
[58] Ibid., pg. 72.
[59] Ibid., pg. 266.
[60] Ibid., pg. 81.

of ordinary life and devotion to God could be reconciled by "living in all the practices and institutions of flourishing, but at the same time not [being] fully in them. Being in them but not of them; being in them, but yet at a distance, ready to lose them."[61] This is what God now demands of us. God as reinterpreted by Religious Reform became a deity who involves himself in our lives, not directly through special objects or events, but mediately through the principles according to which he designed the world. His glory is announced, not through his augmented presence at sacred times and places, but by the wisdom and grandeur of this design.[62] Only by conforming to this design do we truly worship him.

Conservatives now see morality and religion as deeply intertwined. But Taylor observes that it was only with the expulsion of the sacred by Religious Reform that Christianity first became *moralized.* We would now access God, not through direct experience, but by adapting to the moral plan he put in place for us.[63] Living a godly life became less and less "a matter of admiring a normative order, in which God has revealed himself through signs and symbols" and more and more a matter of inhabiting this order "as agents of instrumental reason, working the system effectively in order to bring about God's purposes."[64] We might say that the locus of religion shifted from God's presence to us to his purposes for us, with the former becoming incompatible with true divinity. In "expelling the sacred from worship and social life," Protestant spirituality "tends to drive out the enchantment of the world," which becomes "progressively voided of its spirits and meaningful forces," writes Taylor.[65] True religion would now have to make do without these spirits and meaningful forces. Rather than indulging in the spiritual infusions from rituals and charged objects, Christians would have to discipline these impulses away by leading orderly lives in orderly communities—God's true purpose for us. Accordingly, religion became "less and less concerned with sin as a condition we need to be rescued from through some transformation of our being, and more and more with sin as wrong behaviour which we can be persuaded, trained or disciplined to turn our back on."[66] To the extent our being was amenable to transformation, this was to be achieved, not by renouncing the human will before some ineffable intuition of the higher,

[61] Ibid., pg. 81.
[62] Ibid., pg. 446.
[63] Ibid., pg. 312.
[64] Ibid., pg. 98.
[65] Ibid., pg. 83.
[66] Ibid., pg. 225.

but by cultivating and disciplining that will, by coming to see *ourselves* rather than sacred relics as the real instruments of God's teleology.

Though contemporary secularists would dismiss religion as such as pathology and delusion, this charge was in the first instance leveled by the reformers against earlier forms of religiosity. Hence their wariness of "fanaticism" and "enthusiasm," which became despised as relics of an earlier age. Taylor explains:

> 'Fanaticism' designated the kind of religious certainty that seemed to the agent concerned to license going well beyond, and even committing gross violations against the order of mutual benefit. While 'enthusiasm' meant the certainty that one heard the voice of God, without having to rely on external authorities, ecclesiastical or civil.[67]

Fanaticism and enthusiasm became anathema to the true religion because they were reminders of our former porousness, our former openness to forces that penetrated our very being, molding us from without. They became stigmatized because Religious Reform signified a transformation, not only in the formal content of religious belief, but also in the background religious *experience* that gave these beliefs life. In promoting what Taylor calls the "excarnation" of religion, Religious Reform moved us from an era in where religion was more "embodied" or "enfleshed" to one where it becomes more "in the head."[68] As Barrett observes, faith in God was originally experienced as a "concrete mode of being," as "the opening up of one being toward another." Only later in the modern era did it become "propositional," an intellectual assent to statements, creeds, and systems.[69] Only at this point did religion become strongly associated with thinking and acting rightly. And this meant disciplining away people's sense that they were opened out to forces that can suffuse their very being, turning them into vessels of an unpredictable higher power. An earlier Christianity had made its compromises with paganism and its embodied, undisciplined, and unreflective forms of spirituality. But the religious reformers were now demanding a complete break with this past.

And so what was formerly the essence of religion was now condemned as sinful pride. The true faith had become excarnated, propositional religion. And the embodied religious feeling through which the sacred was formerly accessed by Christians and pagans alike became stigmatized as mere sensuality and impulse, a threat to religious clarity. In pursuit of such clarity,

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[67] Ibid., pg. 239.
[68] Ibid., pg. 554.
[69] William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1958), pg. 74.

Religious Reform undercut "the aura of the higher that usually surrounds…[e]mbodied feeling," providing the latter with "a purely naturalistic explanation," so that it longer qualified as "a medium in which we relate to what we recognize as rightly bearing an aura of the higher."[70] Only at this point did "religion" in the modern sense—as a set of propositions about some invisible realm—become possible. Religious Reform did not merely supplant certain religious "opinions" centered on the sacred with other such opinions centered on providential order, but moreover "buffered" hitherto porous selves, as was necessary if they were to understand their religiosity as *consisting in opinions*, rather than a visceral openness to sacred powers. Taylor calls this the "steady disembodying of spiritual life,"[71] and it was by way of it that the "inner base area" of the buffered self gradually developed.

* * *

It was only with these transformations that religion first became empowered to curb the wantonness and license that were par for the course in the Middle Ages. It could now do so, not only by way of its moral precepts, but, more fundamentally, because this new understanding of the self's relationship to God allowed those precepts to resonate in ways previously impossible. Unlike the older, pre-modern religious cosmology, this new dispensation *could* serve to counteract and constrain the wild affective oscillations of the porous self, because this was precisely what God was demanding—because this was precisely what living in "all the practices and institutions of human flourishing" without being "of them" entailed. People would reach out to the divine, not through the mediation of the sacred, but through the mediation of their own efforts, by realizing in their daily lives an asceticism that was previously reserved for the monastery, internalizing a proper attitude toward a transcendent God who will not deign to make his presence felt through sacred sites, objects, and times.

The mutation counter-narrative tells us that it was only by means of a particular conception of divinity that we first emerged from pre-modern porousness and became buffered, more able to distance ourselves from the "slight impressions, uncontrollable associations" and other immediate meanings to which the pre-modern self was susceptible. Selves charged with carefully implementing God's plan rather than viscerally surrendering to his presence could be expected to

[70] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 288.
[71] Ibid., pg. 771.

cultivate greater "personal responsibility" and to more reliably distinguish how things are from how they feel. This, and not "enlightenment," was what created the modern individual. As we saw earlier, people who could not "love and hate to the utmost" and "stand [their] ground in the play of passions" once had no choice but to retreat to the monastery. But with Religious Reform, it was *the monastery that now came to them* through the mediation of secular institutions. By secularizing the asceticism that had once been associated with other-worldly devotion, these institutions created a world in which the innerness and self-reflexivity of the buffered self became adaptive, and indeed a desideratum of social respectability.

These points were famously illustrated by Max Weber in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which traces the origins of the sober, instrumental rationality of the modern industrial order to Calvinist theology. We now understand the essence of capitalism in non-religious terms, as the regulated pursuit of rational self-interest, but Weber argued that capitalism was initially a source of "idealistic satisfactions."[72] The ideal type of the capitalist "gets nothing out of his wealth for himself, except the irrational sense of having done his job well."[73] The reason is that material accumulation was originally celebrated as evidence of a predestined salvation in the next world, and not as a rational means to a happier existence in the present one, as it is now. It expressed a deeper spiritual stance, the Puritan's need to confirm that he was among the elect gratuitously selected to receive a reprieve from the eternal damnation that all deserve. The Calvinist could not hope to actually change his fate here, which had been predestined. But he could look for signs that it was favorable and, in the process, help *produce* those signs through sober devotion to his calling, success in which was seen as a possible harbinger of salvation Unremitting economic activity was "the specific defense against all those temptations which Puritanism united under the name of the unclean life," writes Weber.[74] It was an antidote to the "vain ostentation" and the "danger of relaxation,"[75] portents of the eternal damnation which the Puritan was powerless to prevent but did everything he could to refute.

This new this-worldly asceticism presupposed a new conception of God, because only God could call on us to see the world in a historically unprecedented way. Barrett writes that by "stripping away the wealth of images and symbols from medieval Christianity," Protestantism

[72] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, (Dover, 2003), pg. 76.
[73] Ibid. pg. 71.
[74] Ibid. pg. 158.
[75] Ibid., pg. 157.

unveiled "nature as a realm of objects hostile to the sprit and to be conquered by puritan zeal and industry."[76] Since this de-spiritualization of nature was the corollary of God's unqualified transcendence, one could affirm this transcendence only be approaching nature as de-spiritualized, which was achieved by treating it as a collection of resources and instruments to be zealously exploited. We could say that the process of Religious Reform culminated in a *religious duty to behold the world in non-religious terms*, because this was the only way to properly worship the unqualified transcendence of a deity who would not so abase himself as to embed his divinity in the natural world, where it would be the target of human contrivance. Since the new worship took place through action, it presupposed the inculcation of a more regulated and predicable affect-structure. Hence the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, which emerged as the subjective correlate of a specific understanding of divinity, a sign that one was fulfilling the religious duty to behold the world in non-religious (i.e., non-sacral) terms. Secular, worldly concerns became a fount of intense religious meaning because a certain kind of secular-mindedness had now become a religious duty.

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We sometimes distinguish between religions that have and have not adapted themselves to the norms of Enlightenment rationalism. But the mutation counter-narrative reveals that this rationalism had its own religious predicates. Our modern, secularized outlook cannot be explained as arising straightforwardly from the *erosion of traditional religious belief* because it first developed through a *transformation of religious sensibilities* the building of renunciation into ordinary life.

This is why secular modernity isn't just the casting off of the confining horizons of a benighted past. The subtraction places emphasis on modern skepticism toward the supernatural. But such skepticism presupposes as its precondition that the natural and supernatural be clearly distinguished, and the mutation counter-narrative tells us that *this very distinction had a religious foundation* as an achievement of Latin Christendom. The distinction, writes Taylor, was "originally made to mark clearly the autonomy of the supernatural" and hence the "sovereign power of God."[77] Only because this fully sovereign divinity de-sacralized the world could we

[76] Barrett, *Irrational Man*, pg. 27.
[77] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 542.

come to see ourselves as confronting "the natural world," a world disenchanted of invasive spirits, and only after this could we have proceeded to ask whether the natural world is all there is. Atheism and agnosticism presuppose the capacity to behold the world in a disenchanted fashion, as a place bereft of charged objects, places, and times. And this capacity was first cultivated as a spiritual aspiration, as the *sine qua non* of proper submission before the unqualified transcendence of God.

Taylor thus observes that "[e]xclusive humanism in a sense crept up on us through an intermediate form, Providential Deism; and both the Deism and the humanism were made possible by earlier developments within orthodox Christianity."[78] This "intermediate form" of an impersonal god revealing himself through natural causality alone was necessary, not accidental, because we could not doubt religion as such before religion itself first generated the capacity for such doubt by setting itself against the residual paganism represented by the earlier Christianity of the enchanted world. Mary Midgely observes that while we anachronistically look back upon the Royal Society and the seventeenth-century mechanists as having waged a campaign against religion as such, they actually viewed themselves as advocates of true Christianity. Theirs was a struggle against the *wrong kind* of religion—religion that reeked of pagan nature-worship—undertaken on behalf of the true faith, an intellectual God under whose auspices the physical world could be "scrubbed free from its animist accretions."[79] As Taylor puts it, the fight against the enchanted world proceeded at first, not "because enchantment is totally untrue, but rather because it is necessarily ungodly."[80] This is the *religious* soil in which "secularism" first grew.

Disenchantment, the de-sacralization of nature, did not of itself undermine theistic faith. On the contrary, it originated in a particular form of theistic faith. But disenchantment was what made the receding of religious faith *possible*, and so what indirectly set the stage for pervasive atheism and skepticism. Skepticism is now mistaken for a purely cognitive attitude—part of what Elias calls the "contents of consciousness." But this is because we take for granted what was a "transformation of the whole human make-up," take for granted the *religiously motivated affective renunciation* that first made skepticism possible for the masses of people. Secularization on the mutation counter-narrative is always the secularization *of* something that is not itself secular. And

[78] Ibid., pg. 19.
[79] Mary Midgley, *Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and Its Meaning* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pgs. 81, 93.
[80] Taylor, *A Secular Age*,. pg. 80.

it was this religious renunciation that would eventually become secularized into modern skepticism. It would generate what Taylor calls a new "ethics of belief," a new "view of our ethical predicament" according to which "we are strongly tempted, the more so, the less mature we are, to deviate from this austere principle, and give assent to comforting untruths."[81] This assent became understood as a "sin against the austere principles of belief-formation" that defined this ethic, a new secular religion offering its own secularized variant of sin and apostasy.

The liberal self is the product of a *religious* discipline. The essential features of strategic agency—careful planning, representing, and calculating—aren't timeless human nature liberated from a benighted past, but dispositions that developed historically from this discipline. The buffered identity, and so our sense of ourselves as self-possessed strategic agents, isn't just the logical byproduct of casting off certain mistaken beliefs but rather presupposes a transformation in the fabric of our lived experience. And it was a particular kind of religion that first enabled this by promoting what Taylor calls "the decentering from our lived experience which we have to carry through in order to become disciplined, rational, disengaged subjects."[82] It was religion that first shaped a self defined by its "aware[ness] of the possibility of disengagement,"[83] a self that having a "sense of self-possession, of a secure inner mental realm… is no longer open, vulnerable to a world of spirits and forces which cross the boundary of the mind."[84]

The buffered identity is not what remains upon the subtraction of religion, but rather the medium through which what Hegel calls the "thorough molding and interpenetration" of the secular world by religion takes place. This identity was first conceived as the immanentization in human beings of God's power to impose order on the self and the world[85] before it outgrew its origins and generated "its own sense of dignity and power, its own inner satisfactions."[86] The strategic, instrumentalist stance became possible only after certain religious impulses were set in opposition to others, at which point the strong conceptions of the sacred which informed medieval Christianity could become viewed as a kind of residual paganism with which Christendom had been required to make its compromises but which was no part of the true faith. This is why the

[81] Ibid., pg. 563.
[82] Ibid. pg. 742.
[83] Ibid. pgs. 42.
[84] Ibid., pg. 300-01.
[85] Ibid. pgs. 233-34.
[86] Ibid. pg. 262.

modern, disengaged subject is a novel variant of a very old aspiration to spiritual purity, as we saw with Taylor last chapter.

4. A Peculiarly Courtly Rationality

These religious developments did not transform human beings unaided, however, and were assisted by independent currents at work in secular circles. The work of Religious Reform is supplemented by, and ends up colluding and becoming fused with, new ideals of self-discipline that develop in the great aristocratic and royal courts, where a kindred ethos was being cultivated for different reasons and under different pressures, before being disseminated in conjunction with the work of Reform to other sectors of society.

The early Middle Ages, explains Elias, was marked by an extreme decentralization of power, in which myriad feudal lords enjoyed a comparative self-sufficiency, both economically and militarily. Here was a "wide landscape with its many castles and estates; the degree of integration is slight; the everyday dependence and thus the horizon of the bulk of warriors, like that of the peasants, is restricted to the immediate district."[87] Here "the same living conditions are constantly reproduced," and "uninterruptedly, production and consumption are carried on predominantly in the same place within the framework of the same economic unity," where they are but minimally integrated within some broader economic system.[88] Being thus self-sufficient, the feudal nobility could operate in relative political independence of the king—and really of any overarching social forces. The king was their nominal master. But the conditions of the time—poor transportation, the absence of an extensive money economy—severely constrained his actual power over them, rendering him merely the first among equals, if even that. The king couldn't empower a noble to advance his interests—for example, by giving him a militarily defensible fief—without simultaneously empowering this vassal to act *against* his interests should the right incentives materialize. And so a monarch's power was never very secure. He could respond to any treachery militarily, but he was powerless to prevent it through any routine structural impediments (like employment-at-will, performance reviews, and annual bonuses). Lords could also be overpowered militarily by a hostile neighbor, a perennial danger that was never far from mind. But this is merely to say that it was only "direct, physical, external compulsion" that could

[87] Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, pg. 467.
[88] Ibid., pg. 319.

induce them to restraint.[89] Absent were all the complex chains of interdependence through which power would later be exercised bureaucratically.

The following centuries were marked by the gradually weakening of these centrifugal forces. Political competition increasingly drove feudal lords into military conflict, and the winners of each struggle absorbed the territories of the losers. The circle of competitors was thus gradually narrowed, eventually leading to "the monopoly of one and finally—in conjunction with other mechanisms of integration such as processes of increasing capital formation and functional differentiation—the formation of the absolutist state."[90] With developments like a more extensive money economy, improved transportation and communication networks, and some decisive battles, power became concentrated in ever fewer hands. This in turn positioned monarchs to exercise power more directly—through dependent salaried officials, for example—without surrendering the concrete mechanisms of power to persons of dubious and shifting loyalties. And so the monarchs gradually became lords of their realms, not only in name and right, but also in fact, thus establishing the foundations of the modern state.

Beset on the one side by the burgeoning political power of centralized monarchies and on the other by a rising bourgeoisie, the old feudal nobility found itself progressively emasculated, both militarily and economically, stripped of the glorious self-sufficiency it enjoyed in an earlier, more anarchic period. Retaining any vestige of their former power and prestige now required, not physical prowess and military excellence, but cultivating the right relationships with the founts of power. At its limit, this meant taking up full-time residence in the absolutist monarchic court, where aristocrats would make a career of cultivating influence. One of the decisive developments in the Western civilizing process, writes Elias, was *the transformation of warriors into courtiers*.[91] This political transition entailed a set of thoroughgoing psychological changes that would eventually spread beyond the monarchic courts and profoundly affect the identity of the modern West, shaping our basic concept of what it means to be "civilized."

Elias writes that the affects of the independent, self-sufficient feudal lord of old had, like those of medievals in general, enjoyed "rather free and unfettered play in all the terrors and joys of life."[92] With the feudal lord's time being "only very slightly subject to the continuous division

[89] Ibid., pg. 319.
[90] Ibid., pg. 444.
[91] Ibid., pg. 467.
[92] Ibid., pg. 319.

and regulation imposed by dependence on others," he did not develop a strict and stable super-ego through which compulsions stemming from others became self-restraints.[93] But all this changes with the rise of the great royal courts of the absolutist period. Now "his value has its real foundation not in the wealth or even the achievements or ability of the individual, but in the favour he enjoys with the king, the influence he has with other mighty ones, his importance in the play of courtly cliques."[94] Under these new conditions,

> He is no longer the relatively free man, the master of his own castle, whose castle is his homeland. He now lives at court. He serves the prince. He waits on him at table. And at court he lives surrounded by people. He must behave toward each of them in exact accordance with their rank and his own. He must learn to adjust his gestures exactly to the different ranks and standing of the people at court, to measure his language exactly, and even to control his eyes exactly. It is a new self-discipline, an incomparably stronger reserve that is imposed on people by this new social space and the new ties of interdependence.[95]

This new social space spawned a new personality structure, a new "peculiarly courtly rationality"[96] under whose aegis "the coarser habits, the wilder, more uninhibited customs of medieval society with its warrior upper classes, the corollaries of an uncertain, constantly threatened life" became "softened," "polished," and "civilized."[97] Medieval mayhem and wantonness were now suppressed, as power became less and less a matter of brute physical force and was instead exercised through words and surveillance. This left individuals more socially vulnerable than before, and this changed their relationship to themselves. With the radical heightening of the level of the day-to-day coercion people could exert on one another, "the demand for 'good behavior' is raised more emphatically," and that "[a]ll problems concerned with behavior take on new importance."[98]

Earlier medieval couldn't just ignore others' interests, of course. But now the level of consideration people expect of each other is magnified, as the "sense of what to do and what not to do in order not to offend or shock others becomes subtler"—and also more binding.[99] Occupying his social position with relative security, the independent knight of old felt no need to

[93] Ibid., pg. 319.
[94] Ibid., pg. 476.
[95] Ibid., pg. 177.
[96] Ibid., pg. 268.
[97] Ibid., pg. 268.
[98] Ibid., pg. 63.
[99] Ibid., pg. 64.

banish coarseness and vulgarity from his life.[100] But with the court having become a kind of "stock exchange" in which the his value was being continually assessed and reassessed, he could no longer afford this former freedom.[101] Gone were the days in which joking could lead to mockery and from there to violent disagreement and violence itself in the span of a few minutes. Gone were the days in which one could leap from the most exuberant pleasure to the deepest despondency on the basis of slight impressions. What mattered now was others' impressions, not one's own, and the foremost task became impression-management, which also meant self-management.

A new self-consciousness emerged on the scene, not because essential human nature had been liberated from the confining horizons of a benighted past, but because a new social milieu *created inner depths out of outer necessity*. Whereas political standing was formerly decided by the sword, it is now "[c]ontinuous reflection, foresight, and calculation, self-control, precise and articulate regulation of one's own affects, knowledge of the whole terrain, human and non-human, in which one acts, [that] become more and more indispensable preconditions of social success."[102] People now "mold themselves more deliberately than in the Middle Ages"[103] and increasingly "observe themselves and others."[104] Directly or indirectly, the "intertwining of all activities with which everyone at court is inevitably confronted, compels… [the courtier] to observe constant vigilance, and to subject everything he says and does to minute scrutiny."[105]

Here is where Western man first becomes "psychological," because it is here that social self-preservation comes to require "a more precise observation of others and oneself in terms of longer series of motives and causal connections," a "vigilant self-control and perpetual observation of others."[106] With social status now hinging on words rather than swords, "[s]tylistic conventions, the forms of social intercourse, affect-molding, esteem for courtesy, the importance of good speech and conversation, articulateness of language" all assume a newfound importance.[107] "Good taste" acquires a new prestige value, as members of courtly society listen "with growing sensitivity to nuances of rhythm, tone and significance, to the spoken and written word."[108] Every plebian

[100] Ibid., pg. 470.
[101] Ibid., pg. 476.
[102] Ibid., pg. 476.
[103] Ibid., pg. 63.
[104] Ibid., pg. 63.
[105] Ibid., pg. 466.
[106] Ibid., pg. 478.
[107] Ibid., pg. 30.
[108] Ibid., pg. 49.

expression was to be eliminated, replaced by language that was, like courtly etiquette generally, "clear, transparent, precisely regulated."[109]

All the self-aggrandizing impulses that formerly expressed themselves brutally, coarsely, and openly now assume a more "refined" form. Pride and contempt are now expressed subtly and obliquely, through the manipulation of the intricate shades of social meaning which the peculiarly courtly rationality spawned. Earlier social arrangements unmarked by complicated chains of human interdependence generally encouraged either "unambiguously negative relationships, of pure, unmoderated enmity" or else "unmixed friendships, alliances, relationships of love and service."[110] Hence what Elias describes as the "peculiar black-and-white colouring of many medieval books, which often know nothing but good friends or villains."[111] But the extended chains of functional dependencies in which one became enmeshed at court encouraged new levels of ambiguity, contradiction, and compromise in the feelings and behavior of people. These now became marked by "a co-existence of positive and negative elements, a mixture of muted affection and muted dislike in varying proportions and nuances."[112] The courtiers had to become more calculating and less wholehearted—less "sincere" and "authentic," we might say. Such was necessitated by the new social interdependence. If people developed a new moral sophistication, this was the product, not of advancing knowledge, but of the gradual introjection of social exigencies, the muting of affect-structure required by the peculiarly courtly rationality.

This new social and psychological sophistication developed hand-in-hand with the lowering of the threshold of shame, embarrassment, and repugnance in the social relations of the European upper classes, as "people, in the course of the civilizing process, seek to suppress in themselves every characteristic that they feel to be 'animal.'"[113] There was an intensification of disgust before the ejection of saliva, which becomes increasingly shunned.[114] Attitudes toward food, and meat in particular, also undergo a transformation. Whereas carving up a dead animal at table was formerly standard practice, and possibly a source of pleasure, becoming "civilized" meant eliminating any reminders that meat involves killing animals. The animal origin of meat dishes had to be "so concealed and changed by the art of its preparation and carving that while

[109] Ibid., pg. 13.
[110] Ibid., pg. 395.
[111] Ibid., pg. 395.
[112] Ibid., pg. 395.
[113] Ibid., pg. 98.
[114] Ibid., pg. 130.

eating one is scarcely reminded of its origin."[115] For the same reason, eating with one's hands became increasingly frowned upon, as the fork and individual cutlery and crockery were introduced into the dining experience.

Some of these new practices had hygienic or other rational justifications. But Elias emphasizes that only much later were they defended in these terms. Long before anything was known about saliva's tendency to transmit germs, it became an object of social disgust.[116] Handling of knives became more regulated, so that it became inappropriate to point a knife at another's face. The reason wasn't any calculable danger, however, but rather "the general memory of and association with death and danger."[117] The knife carried a symbolic meaning that was unproblematic in an earlier period but was now incongruous with the advancing internal pacification of society. Far from reflecting a "demonstrable understanding of causal connections," the new rules of civility evolved "over a long period and in conjunction with a specific change in human relationships."[118] They reflected the emergence of a new identity premised on ever-increasing distances between individuals and their animality. Whereas the subtraction account revolves around the augmentation of knowledge and understanding, the mutation counter-narrative revolves around transformations in the overall human make-up. And the mutation counter-narrative reveals that the rationality which the subtraction account mistakes for timeless human nature was a late development, the fortuitous byproduct of contingent social forces that may have been anything but rational.

5. Church and State in Collusion

The forms of self-control that developed in courtly society differed in their motivations from the this-worldly asceticism promoted by Religious Reform, with its de-sacralization of nature, moralization of sin, and excarnation of faith. But as Elias observes, "the moderated restraint of the emotions and the disciplined shaping of behavior as a whole, which under the name of *civilité* have been developed in the upper class as a purely secular and social phenomenon, a consequence of certain forms of social life, have affinities to particular tendencies in traditional

[115] Ibid., pg. 130.
[116] Ibid., pg. 130.
[117] Ibid., pg. 100
[118] Ibid., pg. 94.

ecclesiastical behavior."[119] Both the peculiarly courtly rationality and Religious Reform commended a new form of self-restraint, the disengagement or buffering of consciousness vis-à-vis one's immediate impulses and experience. And so these tendencies gradually came to converge upon each other, if not in their theories and principles, then certainly in their ethos and practice.

This convergence of the religious and the secular was at first something new and strange. Hence Father La Salle's complaint that "the majority of Christians regard decency and civility only as a purely human and worldly quality and, not thinking to elevate their minds more highly, do not consider it a virtue related to God, our neighbor, and ourselves." This, he lamented, "well shows how little Christianity there is in the world."[120] The complaint seems strange today, given that religious traditionalists associate their faith with just these virtues. But La Salle was writing in the early modern period, in the context of a world that had only recently begun to outgrow medieval resignation to sin and disorder. So religion's role in the reformation of secular institutions and practices was only beginning to take shape and was far from obvious. La Salle owed his disappointment, not to the cynicism or laziness of his contemporaries as individual actors, but to the traditional resignation of medieval Christianity, the fact that Christianity had not seen fit to build renunciation into ordinary life until the emergence of his own likes.

But this now changes, and Elias notes that "[c]lerical circles, above all, become popularizers of the courtly customs" one of "the most important organs of the downward diffusion of [its] behavioral models."[121] Whether marketed as a religious commandment or a secular virtue, these new disciplines were progressively diffused to ever broader social circles:

> The courtly society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and above all the courtly nobility of France that forms its centre, occupies a specific position within this whole movement of the interpenetration of the patterns of conduct of ever-widening circles… [T]he courtiers did not originate or invent the muting of affects and the more even regulation of conduct. They, like everyone else in this movement, were bending to the constraints of interdependence that were not planned by any individual person or group of persons. But it is in this courtly society that the basic stock of models of conduct is formed which then, fused with others and modified in accordance with the position of the groups carrying them, spread, with the compulsion to exercise foresight, to ever-wider circles of function.[122]

[119] Ibid., pg. 83.
[120] Qt. in Ibid., pg. 83.
[121] Ibid., pg. 83.
[122] Ibid., pg. 465.

The peculiarly courtly rationality was originally bound up with social status and served to suppress conduct signaling disrespect for those of superior rank. But this rationality was gradually uprooted from its original social context and spread to more and more social circles. The prohibited impulses then became intrinsically objectionable. They were affronts, not to others' rank, but to "civility," and were all the more radically repressed.[123] This diffusion could change the character of the peculiarly courtly rationality in some ways, as different forms of self-control developed in different social sectors. The bourgeoisie, for instance, placed less emphasis on manners and delicacy of speech while demanding overall greater discipline, especially as concerns sexuality.[124] But whatever the cultural variations to which it became subject, the courtly ethos in combination with new forms of disenchanted religiosity collaborated to effectuate a widespread "buffering" of the Western identity.

With the increasing division of labor and extension of trade networks, individuals now lived in closer proximity and became bound to one another in ever more complex relations of social and functional interdependence. The lengthier and more intricate the chains of social interdependency became, the stronger the need to impose self-discipline, until it was finally "instilled in the individual from his earliest years as an automatism, a self-compulsion that he cannot resist even if he consciously wishes to."[125] The moderation of spontaneous emotion, the extension of mental space beyond the moment into the past and future, and the habit of connecting events in terms of cause and effect are not timeless human faculties, but specific transformations in the human make-up made possible by the monopolization of physical violence in the state and the social interdependencies this fostered. Only with these did ever-broader segments of society develop the "strict, continuous, and uniform" modes of drive-control that were once exclusive to monks and courtiers.[126]

The development of modernity can thus be viewed as the *democratization of courtly civility and secularization of monkish asceticism*. Behavioral norms that were originally used to tame an unruly military aristocracy through court service or estate management were over later centuries deployed to tame the general population[127]—to which end religion became conscripted, offering

[123] Ibid., pgs. 123-31.
[124] Ibid., pg. 504.
[125] Ibid., pg. 445.
[126] Ibid., pg. 330.
[127] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 124.

as it did a theological justification for disciplining wide swaths of the population away from the wantonness and license of an earlier period. Thus, explains Taylor, did the ethic of "active state intervention," promoted by absolutistic governments combine with Calvinism so as to "introduce a rationalized, disciplined, professionalized mode of life" into the populace as a whole.[128] These "ordering impulses" sought to "create a stable order in society by training people into 'settled courses,' through dedication to some profession, whose goals were defined in terms of service to our fellow human beings: in the private sector, through productive labor."[129]

The subtraction account elides that modern notions of individual self-interest were built atop a systematic program of social engineering through which older *passions*, like military adventurism, were replaced by new ones, like an ethic of disciplined production. This engineering gradually abolished some oppressive social hierarchies. But it also reduced "diversity" in important ways. We now tolerate more diversity of formal creed than did medievals, but we are also less tolerant of different human make-ups and ways of being. The modern order is defined, not by tolerance and nonjudgmentalism, but by a strongly interventionist and uniformizing impulse, a desire, as Taylor says, to "apply a single model or schema to everything and everybody" to "eliminate anomalies, exceptions, marginal populations, and all kinds of non-conformists."[130] Deviant individuals and populations could be heavily stigmatized in pre-modern societies. But it is only in the modern era that they become targeted for wholesale rehabilitation. And this is because the buffered identity has become the only "normal" or "healthy" way to be.

These interventions were implemented, not by the unwashed, uneducated masses, whom we now associate with authoritarian intolerance but, on the contrary, by elites, who assumed responsibility for inculcating stricter impulse control in their social inferiors well before this function was democratized through the bourgeois family.[131] The older feudal nobility basked in its open displays of contempt for the wretchedness of the lower orders. It therefore made no effort to eliminate that wretchedness, since it was by way of this contrast that it valorized itself.[132] By contrast, it is the quintessential ambition of modern elites, writes Taylor, to "make over the whole society, to change the lives of the mass of people, and make them conform better to certain models

[128] Ibid., pg. 119.
[129] Ibid., pg. 119.
[130] Ibid., pg. 86.
[131] Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, pg. 112.
[132] Ibid., pg. 172.

which carried strong conviction among these elites."[133] Modern elites are more egalitarian and less openly arrogant, but they are also more meddlesome, more paternalistic, and less tolerant. Believing that they embody what are universal ideals, they see themselves not so much as superior as more "advanced." And this creates a special responsibility to reform those who are less so.

The elites executed this responsibility by erecting a new "police state" charged with instilling the new rationality,[134] ensuring that the lower orders were "not left as they are, but badgered bullied, pushed, preached at, drilled, and organized to abandon their lax and disordered folkways and conform to one or another feature of civil behavior."[135] By contrast with medieval Christianity's resignation to our fallen lot, Religious Reform was perfectionist and puritanical, spurred by a "humorless determination to castigate sin and disorder, a denial of ambiguity and complexity in unmixed condemnation."[136] Hence the elites' efforts "to abolish carnivalesque and ludic practices, on the grounds that they sew disorder, mix pagan and Christian elements, and are a breeding ground of vice."[137] These elites' philosophical sensibilities varied may have tended more religious or more secular. But they all shared in the same underlying spirit of moralistic humorlessness, the same contempt for the social and personal disorder of the complacent masses. Being relatively disordered themselves, earlier elites were resigned to sin and disorder, like medieval generally. But modern elites lose any sense of the mutual complementarity and interdependence of order and chaos.[138] No longer seeing human beings as opened out to "anti-structure," they are convinced that a perfect human code is possible.[139] With people no longer subject to the unpredictable machinations of spirit forces, there remains no excuse for tolerating a level of disorder that was once considered inevitable.

Foucault observes that whereas power in feudal societies operated only intermittently and inefficiently through levies, war, and sundry rituals of fealty to the liege lord, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries transformed power into a more all-pervasive and uninterrupted affair. No longer a matter of punishing defiance or disrespect, it became "a matter of obtaining productive service from individuals in their concrete lives." Power now meant the minute regulation of acts,

[133] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 85.
[134] Ibid., pg. 86.
[135] Ibid., pg. 102.
[136] Ibid., pg. 87.
[137] Ibid., pg. 87.
[138] Ibid., pg. 124.
[139] Ibid., pg. 51.

attitudes, and everyday behavior, the subjecting of bodies to "highly complex systems of manipulation and conditioning."[140] Whereas older elites wanted only to maintain their power and authority, modern ones demand not only obedience but conformity, which means a more regulated and predictable relationship to our own impulses.

The disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity extended to the experience of time itself. Time had previously been informed by strong conceptions of the sacred. Ordinary time was seen as being "punctuated" by its relationship to certain privileged "high points" established by pivotal religious revelations of the past, points where, as Taylor writes, "the ordinary sequences of events touches higher time."[141] But now time became disenchanted and linear, purged of any such connection to the higher.[142] With ordinary time having assumed an absolute value it previously lacked, it became subject to constraints and regulations never before imagined. So all-encompassing have "the disciplines of our modern civilized order" become, writes Taylor, that they have "led us to measure and organize time as never before in human history." They have transformed time into "a precious resource, not to be 'wasted,'" creating a "tight, ordered time environment" that "has enveloped us, until it comes to seem like nature."[143] This radically-purged time consciousness might seem like bare *liberation* from the misbegotten religious beliefs that had sustained a sacralized understanding of time. But the mutation counter-narrative reveals that it was also the *imposition* of a particular identity, the forcible buffering of the human agent against his own embodied experience.

Sexuality also became an object of social control. No less than uninhibited immersion in an enchanted world of "charged" objects, places, and times, uninhibited sexuality posed an obstacle to the emerging disciplinary society, threatening the affective-instinctual stability needed to navigate an increasingly complex and differentiated social environment. And so sex was, Elias writes, "removed behind the scenes of social life and enclosed in a particular enclave, the nuclear family," as something that "even among adults… is referred to officially only with caution and circumlocutions."[144] Traditional Christianity is sometimes seen as hostile to sexuality. But whatever the truth of this charge on the level of theological doctrine, it was only with the rise of

[140] Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pgs. 61, 66-67.
[141] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 209.
[142] Ibid., pg. 196.
[143] Ibid., pg. 59.
[144] Elias, *The Civilzing Process*, 148.

the modern, *secular* order that this putative hostility becomes translated into effective prohibitions, restrictions, and taboos for the mass of people.

Whereas the secular realm was formerly seen as a necessary compromise with a fallen world, a sphere in which violence, license, and disorder were simply unavoidable, that realm had now become pervaded by a renunciatory ethos. The religious and the secular became increasingly separated at the level of formal doctrine in the sense that political rule became decreasingly reliant on theological justifications. But the two spheres increasingly *converged* on the level of social practice and ethos, on the level of the "overall human make-up." With the religious becoming worldly and the secular becoming renunciatory, the old oppositions of the medieval period softened or collapsed, fusing into a this-worldly, secularized asceticism. In a sense, secularization meant *the transformation of Christianity from an avowedly unrealizable ideal to an actively enforced practice*. The theological rationales lost their credibility. But what was officially lost here was unofficially compensated for at the level of the overall human make-up, which *translated the theology into the very structure of human agency*. Modernity and secularity are not a general and undifferentiated subtraction of inherited illusions, but a *specific* and *focused* subtraction of the residual pagan tendencies, including pagan tolerance, which were standing in the way of the transformations.

6. A Spiritual-Secular Whole

This widespread buffering of the human agent comes to define, not only our individual relationship to our own impulses, but also our civilizational relationship to our past and to other cultures that resemble it. The buffered identity is now the lens though which we behold our distance from earlier ages, informing our basic historical sense of our civilization as a distinctive age that has overcome the unreflective default settings of all earlier periods. Taylor writes:

> The buffered distance becomes part of the complex modern-European concept of "civilization", developing since the Renaissance notion of "civility", and becomes a crucial part of our own historicized self-awareness, whereby we place ourselves to our own "barbarian" past, and to other, less fortunate peoples. Woven into the other elements—literacy and education, personal self-discipline, development of the productive arts, a sense of decorum, government and respect for law—which make up this developing ideal of civility… this new kind of invulnerability and distance takes its place, inflecting the ideals of discipline, education, decorum, and good political order.[145]

[145] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 301.

But *what precisely we are to make* of this "historicized self-awareness" turns on the kind of history with which we're operating, turns on whether we interpret history through the subtraction account or through the mutation counter-narrative. The fulcrum of the subtraction account is the progressive falling aside of untenable religious and metaphysical beliefs. But the dispositive fact for the mutation counter-narrative is that tensions within Christianity working in conjunction with congruous secular developments generate a *new kind of identity*, a *new sense of human agency.* It is *this*, and not mere knowledge and rationality, that provides us with a "new kind of invulnerability" and foremost distinguishes us from "other, less fortunate peoples."

Modern societies aspire to what Taylor calls the "mutual service conception of order" or "order of mutual benefit." This is our contemporary social imaginary of rational agents pursuing their rational interests while respecting others' rights, opinions, and interests. And the subtraction account conceptualizes this vision as just the logical byproduct of renouncing the vainglory which swept up individuals great and small in the medieval period. But this is to overlook how this development presupposed, not mere enlightenment about social causality—as per Hobbes—but the transformation of human beings at the hands of a disciplinary society, which went hand in hand with "secularization." Secularization is not the negation of religion but the process whereby the secular became more religious and the religious became more secular. An alliance between religious Reform and the secular disciplines of the peculiarly courtly rationality gradually "compresse[d]" the "dualistic world of mediaeval Christianity" into a "spiritual-secular whole,"[146] creating a *courtly-ascetic ethos* that reconstitutes these elements of the medieval world into a new secular vision. Modernity is not the bare subtraction of a pre-modern past, but something that developed as impulses that were marginal and sequestered in special enclaves during the pre-modern period—i.e., ascetic renunciation and courtly gentility—gradually assume preeminence over erstwhile dominant ones, becoming fused with the general life of the wider populace and detached from their pre-modern justifications.

The mutation counter-narrative is not just a causal or historical thesis about the preconditions of modernity—for example, the claim that certain modern ideas derived from pre-modern antecedents—but the stronger, *ontological* thesis that what modernity *is* cannot be disentangled from the processes that created it. What the subtraction account represents as "underlying features of human nature which were there all along, but had been impeded by what

[146] Ibid., pg. 267.

is now set aside" are for the mutation counter-narrative the outgrowths and sublimations of what the subtraction account erroneously presumes has been set aside. The mutation counter-narrative tracks what Taylor calls the "sedimentation of the past in the present,"[147] the ways in which the religiosity of earlier ages has been *incorporated* into our contemporary secular identities. What is "derived" from the past is not merely our ideas but our *consciousness*, our pre-reflective experience of agency. Historically bequeathed tendencies which no longer manifest themselves theoretically in terms of ideas nevertheless continue to manifest themselves in other, equally consequential ways, on the pre-reflective, pre-theorized level of feeling and sensation, in *the overall make-ups of human beings*.

* * *

Asking what "*conquered* the Christian God," Nietzsche posits that it was "Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness taken more and more strictly, the confessional subtlety of the Christian conscience translated and sublimated into the scientific conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any price." Atheism isn't the simple negation of religious faith, but a human possibility that was historically created by such faith, the final outcome of protracted Christian discipline, the millennia-long cultivation of the *ascetic ideal*. Nietzsche writes:

> Everywhere else that the spirit is strong, mighty, and at work without counterfeit today, it does without ideals of any kind—the popular word for this abstinence is "atheism"—*except for its will to truth*. But this will, this *remnant* of an ideal is, if you will believe me, this ideal itself in its strictest, most spiritual formulation, esoteric through and through with all external additions abolished, and thus not so much its remnant as its *kernel*. Unconditional honest atheism (and *its* is the only air we breathe, we more spiritual men of this age!) is therefore *not* the antithesis of that ideal, as it appears to be; it is rather only one of the latest phases of its evolution, one of its terminal forms and inner consequences—it is the awe-inspiring *catastrophe* of two thousand years of training in truthfulness that finally forbids itself the *lie involved in belief in God*.[148]

Considered strictly along the axis of religious belief, Nietzsche is advancing what seems like a subtraction account of modernity, with God being an illusion of which we are now becoming free. But along the axis of human agency—that is, the overall human make-up—Nietzsche recognizes an underlying continuity between a religious ideal of self-control and the disengaged scientific stance that pursues truth above all. The latter's spiritual roots lie in theistic religion and its ascetic

[147] Ibid. pg. 268.
[148] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* , trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), pg. 160 (Essay IIII, Sec. 27).

demands for "abstinence"—precisely the abstinence of which the porous, pre-modern self was incapable. Skepticism about religion developed, not because religiosity as such was weakened but, on the contrary, because a religiously inculcated discipline upended our default teleological impulses. The quest for truth had to first be cultivated as a religious ideal before it could be recognized as a secular one, before it could become uprooted from, and then turn against, the theological soil that first nourished it.

The scientific stance presupposes, not a mere augmentation of knowledge, but a fundamental alteration in our self-understandings as agents, our buffering vis-à-vis the "peculiarly human emotions." Elias observes:

> The development of the idea that the earth circles round the sun in a purely mechanical way in accordance with natural laws—that is, in a way not in the least determined by any purpose relating to mankind, and therefore no longer possessing any great emotional significance for men—presupposed and demanded at the same time a development in human beings themselves toward increased emotional control, a greater restraint of their spontaneous feeling that everything they experience and everything that concerns them takes its stamp from them, is the expression of an intention, a destiny, a purpose relating to themselves.[149]

Non-anthropocentricity required, not just knowledge, but a change in people's basic sense of themselves toward a new kind of self-restraint. Only this could reign in the teleological libertinism that will not distinguish the subjective realm of mind from the objective realm of fact. This is the process of "disenchantment." And whereas the subtraction account upholds disenchantment as the product of scientific reason, the mutation counter-narrative traces it to excarnated religion and its disciplinary ethos. It was these that inculcated a this-worldly asceticism that would eventually become secularized into the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. This ethos is not the subtraction of contingent illusions, but a positive construction that is itself just as contingent as these illusions.

The subtraction account and the mutation counter-narrative both concur with Stolzenberg that "the concept of the secular has itself, ironically, been secularized." But the mutation counter-narrative adds the *further irony* that this secularization was precipitated by a religious vision. Given that the secular was from the outset bound up with a wider religious cosmology, it could not really have gone otherwise. The concept of the secular being the mirror image and corollary of the concept of the divine, a change in the latter meant a change in the former. It was the

[149] Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, pg. 209.

reformers' god of unqualified transcendence that made disenchantment, and hence secularity, possible. These forgotten origins continue to shape what it now *means* to be secular, which is really *the compression of the religious into the secular*. Gillespie explains:

> What actually occurs in the course of modernity is thus not simply the erasure or disappearance of God but the transference of his attributes, essential powers, and capacities to other entities or realms of being. The so-called process of disenchantment is thus also a process of reenchantment in and through which both man and nature are infused with a number of attributes or powers previously ascribed to God. To put the matter more starkly, in the face of the long drawn out death of God, science can provide a coherent account of the whole only by making man or nature or both in some sense divine.[150]

The subtraction account posits a non-religious core of human nature—perhaps autonomy or preference-maximization—and then explains religious belief as an overlay which was formerly necessary to explain the world or cope with hardship. The mutation counter-narrative, by contrast, posits teleological categories of thought, not as epistemic adaptations to circumstances, but as human agency's default setting, something that remains with us in some form even when it has supposedly been superseded. This is why modernity is merely the "transference" of God's powers and attributes to other realms of being. This transference was facilitated by religion itself. Only after divinity was uprooted from the world, exalted as an unqualified transcendence that no longer permeates the world, could "nature" and the human will become central to our identities. These took the place of God, and initially under his auspices. God may no longer speak to us through the sacred, but he remains with us in our idealization of the will—i.e., buffered disengagement—and of nature as approached by that will. The mutation counter-narrative thus reveals what Gillespie calls "the concealed wellsprings of our own passions."[151] As we shall later see, these wellsprings are precisely the crypto-theology of which conservatives accuse liberals.

* * *

What turns on the contest between the subtraction account and the mutation counter-narrative is whether we accept the buffered identity at *face value*. The subtraction account identifies modernity and secularity with the emergence individual freedom, social tolerance, and diversity, the gradual eclipse of hegemonic social norms and receding of overbearing social restraint. This is, we observed with Gillespie, the self-congratulatory story that modernity tells

[150] Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, pg. 274.
[151] Ibid., pg. xii.

about itself. And self-congratulation is indeed in order if we attend solely to things like democracy, religious tolerance, and human rights. But the mutation counter-narrative reveals this to be a one-sided picture. Elias writes:

> The firmer, more comprehensive and uniform restraint of the affects characteristic of this civilizational shift, together with the increased internal compulsions that, more implacably than before, prevent all spontaneous impulses from manifesting themselves directly and motorically in action, without the intervention of control mechanisms—these are what is experienced as the capsule, the invisible wall dividing the "inner world" of the individual from the "external world" or, in different versions, the subject of cognition from its object, the "ego" from the "other," the "individual" from "society." What is encapsulated are the retrained instinctual and affective impulses denied direct access to the motor apparatus. They appear in self-perception as what is hidden from all others, and often as the true self, the core of individuality.[152]

The buffered identity facilitates a certain kind of individual liberation vis-à-vis some historically bequeathed social illusions. This is what the subtraction account makes salient. But it also obscures from view any sense that this liberation was facilitated by new social *inhibitions*. The new standards of self-control, writes Elias, came to encompass the individual's entire conduct "like a tight ring" that subordinates individual drives to a steadily expanding web of social norms that were previously nonexistent or unenforced.[153] It is *this* which first produced the "individualism" invoked in modernity's self-congratulatory story. People may have gained the liberty to sell their labor to the highest bidder as the feudal serf could not. But earlier social constraints were replaced by new, *internalized*, constraints, the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. If the modern social world appears, as Berger says, less "firm" than the pre-modern one, the reason is that much of the firmness was *transplanted*—and *not* subtracted—from the order of institutions and traditions into the emotional life of the individual. What Berger describes as the previously unfathomed "depth" of modern subjectivity is simply the outcome of this transplantation.

Whereas the subtraction account *naturalizes* the "the retrained instinctual and affective impulses denied direct access to the motor apparatus" as the ordinary human desire that remains upon the discarding of religious and metaphysical illusions, the mutation counter-narrative reveals these desires as the internalized refraction of specific social pressures. The innerness of the modern self is not an underlying feature of human nature that had been artificially suppressed by illusory teleological hierarchies, but the product of specific forms of social inderdependency. What the

[152] Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, pg. 211.
[153] Ibid., pg. 452.

subtraction account upholds as plainspoken "fulfillment," is more thickly described as what Elias calls "a particular moulding of the whole personality," a molding that "emerges more strongly the more clearly and totally the spontaneous impulses of the individual threaten to bring about, through the structure of human dependencies, loss of pleasure, decline and inferiority in relation to others, or even the ruin of one's social existence."[154] The ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity is merely the introjected reflection of these dangers, a *social* ideal suited for a particular social terrain.

This is the broader context for my argument last chapter that the self-understanding of modernity is distorted inasmuch as it mistakes the disengaged lucidity of the strategic agent for a primordial phenomenon that simply *displaces* the teleological immersion of pre-moderns. By contrast, the mutation counter-narrative reveals that the disengaged strategic self is a derivative phenomenon that has been *superimposed* on that immersion. And so this self remains in its own way permeated by and extended over a "field of social meanings," which is what structures the concrete shapes the disengagement assumes. Whereas the subtraction account is a story of displacement, the mutation counter-narrative is a story of superimposition. It is the historical record of the social mechanisms, both religious and secular, through which porous selves unselfconsciously accepting of the "Field Theory of Man" were progressively compelled to "turn back" on themselves and assume a posture of reflective disengagement extricated from the fields of social meaning to which they were formerly subject. The extrication is indeed just a posture, the deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry thereof, because it was itself facilitated by various *mutations* in a field of social meanings that emerged from the compression of the religious and the secular into the courtly-ascetic ethos, into the buffered distance. We may see ourselves as wholly self-possessed and thus operating in a "neutral environment," but this environment is in fact structured by these origins and so less neutral than it appears.

As we shall see, this is why conservatives are correct to see liberalism as a hero-system in disguise and not the transcendence of all hero-systems. The subtraction account understands the distinctive *innerness* of the buffered identity as what remains upon transcending the constraints which heretofore obscured and suppressed it—as a "shift" in the "accent of reality" from "the objective order of institutions to the realm of subjectivity" as Berger says. Seeing only this liberated subjectivity, it cannot recognize what Taylor calls "the possibility that Western modernity

[154] Ibid., pg. 203.

might be sustained by its own original spiritual vision."[155] For all that remains upon this liberation is an unvarnished lucidity that by definition admits of no further analysis. But it is precisely the development of an original spiritual vision—that is, a distinctive hero-system—which the mutation counter-narrative chronicles, because it reveals the historical elements from which our modern innerness was *constructed*. It comprehends the buffered identity as refracting the specific historical forces which brought it into being. And so it permits us to recognize modern humanism, not as a bare elimination of superstition, but as something more ambiguous, more contingent and artificial. It is a particular hero-system that is, as Taylor says, "marked by the process which brings it about, by its activism, uniformization, homogenization, rationalization, and of course by its hostility to enchantment and equilibrium."[156]

With its fixation on changes in what Elias calls "the contents of consciousness," the subtraction account cannot recognize changes in the *form* of consciousness, the unarticulated, taken-for-granted background of our thinking. The subtraction account must classify the "activism, uniformization, homogenization, rationalization" that created the modern world as utility-enhancing expedients, just rational means to the "fulfillment" that we ultimately care about. But the mutation counter-narrative reveals that these tendencies have actually shaped that fulfillment's concrete meaning for us. Our commitment to the buffered distance—to "literacy and education, personal self-discipline, development of the productive arts, a sense of decorum, government and respect for law"— has been *inflected* by a courtly-ascetic ethos. And so it incorporates imperatives that might not have arisen under a different set of historical and cultural circumstances—had the path toward greater social and hence organismic integration proceeded in another way, in response to a different range of pressures.

Those who identify with the buffered distance do not see themselves as subject to the push and pull of the inhibitions atop of which this identity was erected. On the contrary, they may see themselves as quite insightful vis-à-vis the artifices of social life and entirely free of any visceral and reflexive subjection to them. But this is because these inhibitions have been so internalized as to mold the whole personality, and so preempt the emergence of any recalcitrant desires. The *very dignity* of the buffered stance with its encapsulated innerness obscures the subjection that is

[155] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 572.
[156] Ibid., pg. 88.

at its very origin, obscures that this dignity is in the end only what Elias calls the "the retrained instinctual and affective impulses denied direct access to the motor apparatus."

Motivations that might get articulated in terms of "fulfillment"—in hedonic or perhaps utilitarian or quasi-utilitarian terms—nevertheless operate in continuous interaction with the imperative to position oneself toward an order of things. This imperative—the pre-modern residuum as I put it in Chapter Four—isn't anything so dubious as the Great Chain of Being of old, and consists rather in a sense of teleology *embodying the very historical developments I have been charting*. The buffered identity is an identity predicated on the contemporary *reenactment* of those developments and must therefore posit the buffered distance against anything that could be construed as undignified submission to unreflective "folkways" or embodied religious feeling. It is this opposition that structures and determines the concrete meaning of our putatively secular aspirations, whose actual operations are imperceptibly rooted in a spiritual drive which our articulated self-conceptions elide. There can be an "inextinguishable drunkenness" underneath the putative sobriety of a secular, rationalistic social order because what the subtraction account represents in purely negative terms, as a brute refusal and elimination, conceals a positive *drive* to instantiate the courtly-ascetic ethos in novel ways. The buffered distance understands itself as a condition achieved. But the mutation counter-narrative reveals it to be only the deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry of a conditioned achieved. For it is a continuing ideal and imperative that seeks expression under the cover of its own official self-understanding and, in so doing, operates in fundamental contravention of its own principles.

Chapter Six

The Mutation Counter-Narrative Applied

The argument of the preceding chapter may seem abstruse. But as we shall now see, its significance is concretized in the phenomenon which we have come to know as conservative claims of cultural oppression. At their core, these claims are a protest against the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity and the ideology of the subtraction account, which misrepresents these disciplines and repressions as "underlying features of human nature" whose liberation will ineluctably propel us toward liberalism. Lino Graglia writes:

> Whatever the reason, American academics and others who live professionally in a world of words tend overwhelmingly to be people of the left with adversarial attitudes to the beliefs and traditions of most of their fellow citizens. Across the spectrum of basic social policy issues—capital punishment, prayer in the schools, suppression of pornography, swift and effective enforcement of the criminal law, busing for school racial balance, and so on—their views and the views of most Americans could hardly be more opposed.
>
> The nightmare of the typical American intellectual, therefore, is that public policymaking should fall into the hands of the American people.[1]

Graglia's choice of words—"whatever the reason," "adversarial attitudes"—suggest some uncertainty as to what precisely could imbue the "adversarial attitudes" he opposes with any conceptual coherence whatsoever. But there is an underlying coherence. For these attitudes are *none other than the buffered distance,* none other than the "historicized self-awareness" that posits itself in opposition to the "less fortunate peoples" of a barbarian past. If public policymaking cannot be permitted to fall into the hands of the American people, this is because the American people refuse the buffered distance, because they are too mired in their unreflective folkways and too indulgent of their embodied religious feelings to accede to the civilizing process that liberals feel they must spread to them.

What we have come to know as the culture wars are not just the recent invention of Republican political strategists. For they are most profoundly understood as a *contemporary recapitulation* of the culture wars between moderns and pre-moderns detailed in the last chapter. They are the *reenacting* by other means of the same structural oppositions between the "default"

[1] Lino A. Graglia, *Romer v. Evans: The People Foiled Again by the Constitution*, 68 U. Colo. L. Rev 409, 412 (1997).

dispositions of the pre-modern, porous self and the disciplinary demands leveled by the buffered identity and its courtly-ascetic ethos. The difference between conservatives and liberals is not that one faction is more or less individualistic, or more or less communitarian, than the other—though these distinctions can illuminate some things some of the time—but that that liberals have more thoroughly internalized the secularized asceticism of the buffered identity. There are spheres of human activity where liberals and conservatives have internalized this identity to similar degrees—for example, table etiquette, basic courtesy, aversion to animal cruelty. But there are also others—cultural, educational, political, and religious—where they have not. And these spheres are the sites of the culture wars.

The official bones of contention seem altogether distinct from those of five centuries ago. The targets of the elites' "ordering impulses" were once the borderline paganism of those fascinated by charged objects, the peasantry's predilection for malingering at the expense of productive labor and village-consciousness at the expense of nation-consciousness, its raucous and often violent street carnivals, and most importantly the honor ethic of the warrior classes, whose vainglorious impulses were incompatible with the smooth functioning of a commercial society. Today, the targets are rather different things—the retributivist impulses that drive support for capital punishment (and even "swift and effective enforcement of the criminal law"), the self-indulgent sentimentalism that would assign personhood to a fetus, the impatient exhibitionism that cannot wait until the close of the school day before beseeching God. But while the theoretical *content* of these two sets of oppositions are very different, they mirror one another *structural* levelly. They are both struggles between modern self-control and pre-modern impulsivity, between the demand for strategic disengagement and the unreflective "folkways" against which that demand is leveled.

Contrasting liberals and conservatives as moderns and pre-moderns might seem like rhetorical license rather than serious analysis. It seems more plausible to contrast liberalism and conservatism as different brands of individualism both of which are thoroughly modern. In this vein, Taylor argues that today's cultural conservatives are heirs to the "instrumental individualism" that flourished in the Nineteenth Century and whose moral pillars were family, nation, and religion.[2] The "expressive individualism" championed by liberals then comes on the scene in the mid-Twentieth Century and either supplements or supplants the earlier variety of individualism

[2] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), pg. 506.

with new ideals of authenticity, championing a conception of the social order with no necessary connection to the sacred.[3] As different as these are, both are thoroughly "modern" in the strict sense of the term. Both conceptualize social institutions as the creations of citizens. And so both can be contrasted the older dispensation in which the social order existed "since time out of mind," prescribing the destinies of its future members.[4]

This conceptualization is not inaccurate and may be preferable for some purposes. But my argument is that the relationship between these two forms of individualism recapitulates the relationship between the modern and pre-modern. Conservatives are not the porous selves of medieval Europe finding themselves perennially "invaded" by spirits bringing them into their "field of force." Nor do they engage in "ludic intervals" marked by violence, sexual license, and role reversal. But we can imagine a continuum stretched between such selves and Graglia's "typical American intellectual," a continuum defined by the degree to which the buffered identity has been internalized, the degree to which the agent's horizon of meaning is relatively buffered or relatively porous. With conservatives standing for whatever reasons "further back along the way" than liberals, they are less accepting of the disciplined, disengaged agency embraced by those "who live professionally in a world of words." This is what makes conservatives "pre-modern" in the specific sense I am intending here. However the "modern stretch" of this continuum is demarcated from the pre-modern one as a matter of cultural or intellectual history, it can in turn be subdivided in a way that mirrors the original division between modern and pre-modern. "Modern" and "pre-modern" as employed here describe different *forms of consciousness*, not different ideas, and so they admit of *degrees*.

Liberals sometimes charge that conservatives reject modernity. They are "half-savage relics of past times" who as Robin says try to "make medievalism modern." And liberals are not altogether mistaken here. But what we make of this hostility toward modernity—what it *means* to make medievalism modern—turns crucially on whether we assume the subtraction account or the mutation counter-narrative. What the former casts as a struggle between reason and parochial tradition, or between tolerance and prejudice, is for the latter a conflict between different forms of human agency, a conflict about what Elias calls the "overall human make-up." It is a matter, not of differential enlightenment, but of differential civilization.

[3] Ibid. pgs. 471-90.
[4] Ibid. pg. 460.

This kind of differentiation explains how the Right should have become the Left in order to accuse the Left of becoming the Right, why conservatives are so drawn to the role of the underdog and to this end appropriate the tropes of the Left for their own cause. The reason is that, in presupposing a more thoroughgoing internalization of modernity's secularized asceticism, liberalism also presupposes a more thoroughgoing *repression* of our "default" impulses as porous selves. The Right becomes the Left once this repression assumes a political dimension. Liberal ideals are made possible by this repression. But they are also contravened in *the process* of repression, because the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity will damage some more than others. And this ambiguates the usual lines liberals draw between freedom and oppression, equality and inequality, and victim and perpetrator. This ambiguity, I will be arguing, is what conservative claims of cultural oppression ultimately seek to articulate.

Resentment against the secularized asceticism of the modern order is the concealed wellspring of conservative passions, the fuel that sustains the near-endless creativity with which conservatives strive to turn liberalism on its head. It is this which animates their sense of righteous resistance before a false consciousness-breeding liberal hegemon, providing the recurring webs of resonance by means of which analytically heterogeneous issues come to feel somehow connected on a deeper level, as various battlefields on which ordinary Americans resist the encroachments of the liberal elites. The elites are despised because they have become *the symbolic embodiments of the buffered identity*. Correlatively, this resentment also fuels conservatives' powerful sense of their own authenticity, of their special insight into liberalism's campaign of "stealth and subterfuge," and the accompanying conviction that liberals' verbal eloquence is too glib and shallow to grasp the deeper layers of meaning to which they are attuned. If there is an "indoctrination gap" between liberal elites and ordinary Americans, some difference that isn't really about logic or learning, this is the extent to which the parties have internalized the secularized asceticism of the buffered identity. Conservative claims of cultural oppression are a protest against this internalization, which is what the seemingly amorphous "elitism" of liberals ultimately consists in.

The disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity are never taken up as the explicit object of political grievance, of course. But they lie in the background, casting a shadow on everything else as the hidden premise that lends a new significance to arguments that would otherwise be unintelligible. Conservatives are most attuned, not to liberal intentions, but to the

affective-instinctual structure that facilitate those intentions. If conservatives refuse to accept liberalism at face value, this is because they viscerally sense that liberalism originates in such a structure, in what Elias calls "the retrained instinctual and affective impulses denied direct access to the motor apparatus." This is why conservatives see symmetry where liberals see only asymmetry and believe that liberals exempt themselves from the standards to which they hold others. For liberals give free reign to their own affective-instinctual structure, and therefore the hero-systems which it supports, while stigmatizing that of conservatives as barbaric and backward. Conservatives see politics as a contest, not only of ideas, but also of the overall human make-up. And what they experience as liberal domination refers to a situation in which one such make-up is assuming preeminence over another, in which the properly ordered sociability of the buffered identity has become the only "normal" or "healthy" way to be. Hence conservatives' sense that they are targets of a conservaphobia that is on some basic level akin to racism, sexism, or homophobia.

The mutation counter-narrative is therefore the key to the "higher truth" of conservative claims of cultural oppression, the key to transcending what I called the implausibly "fundamentalist" or "black U.N. helicopter" interpretation of these claims. The mutation counter-narrative is what enables us to separate the underlying impulses that animate the conservative protest from the rhetorical shapes they assume—just as it allows us to separate the impulses that drive the liberal reaction to these claims from the rhetorical shapes which *they* assume. In doing so, this narrative enables us to translate conservatives' visceral sense of oppression—as well as liberals' equally visceral incredulity before that sense of oppression—into a set of bona fide philosophical questions about whether the ideals of liberalism lend themselves to a conservative appropriation. It is to this task that we now turn.

1. Crypto-Aristocracy Revisited

My thesis may seem counterintuitive. After all, it is a commonplace that it is conservatives who, in calling for sexual self-restraint, the work ethic, and deferred gratification, are the ones most drawn toward the disciplinary asceticism that I have instead associated with liberalism. Hofstadter writes that "insofar as economic life is regarded as a sphere for the fulfillment of the

ascetic Protestant virtues, Christian moralism has worked for right-wing discontent."[5] By contrast, I am proposing that this asceticism is the *target* of right-wing discontent. And this may sound strange. Is it not conservatives rather than liberals who condemn mass-bohemianization and defend the "strict" or "austere" morality of the common people against the "loose" system of the "people of fashion"? Is it not conservatives, not liberals, who are guided by "Strict Father" morality? Conservatives understand themselves to be defending civilization against its discontents. But I am suggesting that conservatives *are* civilization's discontents. And this departure from the received wisdom requires an explanation.

Peter Stearns argues in his *Battleground of Desire* that liberals and conservatives both oversimplify the contrast between Victorian order and contemporary freedom (or license, according to one's perspective). Having overthrown the strictures of Victorian "character," we feel ourselves liberated to express post-Victorian "personality." But Stearns contends that twentieth-century personality is an overlay on, rather than a replacement for, nineteenth-century character. While contemporary social life would seem informal in comparison with nineteenth-century rigidities, this merely reflects a "movement away from supportive structures toward more reliance on individual impulse control," and not the wholesale abandonment of the Victorian ethos. We may be more relaxed when it comes to language and posture. But this is because casualness now carries its own constraints. Swearing, for example, is now permissible as it once wasn't. But this liberalization presupposes a socially enforced diminution in emotional intensity. It is now understood that the swearer isn't too serious and that his expletives are nothing to get worked up about. By contrast, nineteenth-century politicians could be much more unrestrained and effusive in their emotional outbursts than are politicians today. Thus, it cannot be said that today's constraints are categorically weaker than in the heyday of Victorianism, for what we celebrate as our individualism involves "a distinctive set of tolerances and restrictions" that in some ways demands even greater vigilance.[6]

The received wisdom challenged by Stearns is part and parcel of the subtraction account, which overlooks the disciplinary scaffolding of modern subjectivity chronicled by the mutation counter-narrative. Liberals may demand moral relaxation—a shift in the "accent of reality" from

[5] Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), pg. 81.

[6] Peter N. Stearns, *Battleground of Desire: The Struggle for Self-Control in Modern America* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), pgs. 4, 22, 39, 57, 174, 176, 358.

"the objective order of institutions to the realm of subjectivity" as Berger says. But as we saw, this was only possible because the "firmness" that formerly attached to the order of institutions and traditions was transplanted into the inner life of the individual. This is precisely what Stearns's study confirms. In discounting the mutation counter-narrative, the received wisdom cannot recognize that liberalization, and therefore liberalism, presupposes an overall heightening of self-discipline, because it is this discipline that first created the "individual" celebrated by liberalism and the subtraction account.

As we already saw in Chapter Four, what superficially appears like the "looseness" of liberal morality is underpinned by the disciplined renunciation of anthropocentricity. It is conservatives, not liberals, who are by contrast guilty of "teleological libertinism." And as we saw in Chapter Five, these disciplinary tendencies arose from the building of renunciation into everyday life, the secularized asceticism that Religious Reform transplanted from the monastery into ordinary human affairs. This is the historical context in which the ostensible "looseness" of liberal morality must be understood and the reason why any sharp dichotomies between Victorian self-control and modern spontaneity greatly oversimplify. As Elias observes, the relaxation of traditional taboos in the Twentieth Century, as in modern bathing and dancing practices, "is only possible because the level of habitually, technically, and institutionally consolidated self-control, the individual capacity to restrain one's urges and behavior… has been on the whole secured." This liberalization isn't a bald regression into medieval license and wantonness but "a relaxation within the framework of an already established standard."[7]

* * *

This historical context explains why conservatives can in the same breath accuse liberals of *both* corrosive moral relativism and insufferable moral puritanism without sensing a contradiction. Gertrude Himmelfarb charges that the "New Victorians" of the politically correct Left have abandoned the traditional sexual morality of the old Victorians while promoting "a new moral code that is more intrusive and repressive than the old because it is based not on familiar, accepted principles but on new and recondite ones, as if designed for another culture or tribe."[8]

[7] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), pg. 115.
[8] Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), pg. 261.

And as we noted in Chapter Two, Christopher Lasch complains that upper middle-class liberals have, in the name of a "hygienic conception of life" mounted "a crusade to sanitize American society: to create a 'smoke-free environment,' to censor everything from pornography to 'hate speech,' and at the same time, incongruously, to extend the range of personal choice in matters where most people feel the need of solid moral guidelines."

Congruity is relative to conceptual scheme, however. And what Lasch and Himmelfarb condemn as liberal hypocrisy is in fact the logical expression of liberals' particular positioning along the modern/pre-modern continuum. Liberals and conservatives clash because conservatives are either 1) pursuing earlier forms of disciplinary internalization—e.g., "traditional morality"—that liberals, being more "advanced" along the continuum, feel is needless and odious, or else 2) resisting more "advanced" forms of internalization which can resonate for the more thoroughly buffered but will feel alien and menacing for the less so. Liberals are relativistic, skeptical, or adversarial vis-à-vis the disciplines that conservatives would internalize but moralistic—i.e., politically correct—vis-à-vis those which they would internalize and which conservatives would resist. "Political correctness" may strike Himmelfarb and other conservatives as a recondite morality designed for another tribe. But this impression is readily explained by the mutation counter-narrative, for this is how the unwashed "folk" have always looked upon the reforming impulses of modern elites. What Lasch and Himmelfarb see as hypocrisy and confusion dissolves within the mutation counter-narrative, which conceptualizes political ideology in terms the overall human make-up rather than ideas alone.

Taylor observes that one reason for the decline of faith in the modern West is that faith has completed its historical function, which was to promote "the inculcation of a productive adaptive character structure" needed to function in a modern environment.[9] Whereas measures like absolute temperance or total Sabbath observance were once necessary to curb the residues of medieval license and wantonness, the disciplinary function of Christianity now seems irksome and onerous to those in whom that internalization is more complete, who are therefore in a position to relax traditional discipline in some spheres of life.[10] Seen in this context, conservative claims of cultural oppression speak for those in whom the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity haven't yet become second nature and so who can benefit from the admonitions of "traditional morality."

[9] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 452.
[10] Ibid. pgs. 492-93.

By contrast, the upper middle-class liberals in whom this identity has become second nature have no use for this morality. This is why the liberal elites adopt the positions they do, and why conservatives see those positions as covertly sectarian.

Liberals may eschew traditional theologies, but they are also the vanguard of the disciplines which these theologies first inculcated. They may not believe in God, but they are the products of a historical process through which the idea of God was used to tame the merely "animal" in human nature. As quintessential moderns, liberals are what Nietzsche calls "heirs of the conscience-vivisection and self-torture of millennia"[11] without which the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity could not have developed. The liberal elites do not themselves *need* religion, not because they are "enlightened," but because religion has, in *their* case, already done most of its work, "thorough[ly] molding and interpentrat[ing] the secular world," as Hegel says, mutating from a set of beliefs, principles, and formal practices into a consciousness and ethos that now feel "natural" but are not.

As we saw in Chapter Three, Himmelfarb accuses that liberals are today's "people of fashion," heirs to the "loose" system of morality that was always the privilege of the aristocracy. This privilege has always stood in opposition to the strict or austere morality embraced by the "common people," who can ill-afford the loose system. Hence conservatives' belief that liberals are "crypto-aristocrats." But the mutation counter-narrative tells us that while the aristocracy may have been loose sexually, it was also the segment of European society which spearheaded the peculiarly courtly rationality and its affective-instinctual restraints. And it was this rationality which, once fused with the work of Religious Reform, helped propagate the austere system of values within the population at large. The peculiarly courtly rationality was the preeminent fashion of the people of fashion, and it was precisely this that engendered the "basic stock of models" that then served to more strictly regulate behavior and attitude within society at large.

These are the true underpinnings of the New Class privilege attacked by conservatives. The "people of fashion" can afford the "loose" system of morality, not only because they are economically shielded from its consequences, but because, being at the forefront of the civilizing process, their overall make-up permits what Elias calls a "relaxation within the framework of an already established standard." This privilege is what allows the liberal elites to dismiss the austere

[11] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), pg. 95 (Essay II, Sec. 24).

system as backward and indulge in a moral relativism and subjectivism that those who have not internalized that established standard cannot permit themselves. Himmelfarb remarks that the notion, common among the disciples of Nietzsche and Foucault, that the self-induced morality of the internalized conscience is coercive and tyrannical, "would have been incomprehensible to virtually all Victorians."[12] If what is obvious to liberals would have been incomprehensible to Victorian traditionalists, this is because liberals have already internalized what the Victorians were still in the process of internalizing. "Free-spirited" liberals can *afford* to be free-spirited because they are the beneficiaries and heirs of an extended historical process in which Victorianism had an important part.

The ideology of the subtraction account conceals this privilege from liberals, however. Observing that many traditionally Republican states have higher rates of divorce, teenage promiscuity, and out-of-wedlock birth than many traditionally Democratic ones, Alan Wolfe remarks that "Americans in the red states might consider that politics, even conservative politics, cannot help them if their marriages are unhappy, their children rebellious, and their willpower weak."[13] Naturally, liberals pounce upon these discrepancies as evidence of conservative hypocrisy. But the impression of hypocrisy is a function of the subtraction account and its focus on *belief*. Conceptualizing human motivation along this axis, liberals see an inconsistency between conservatives' professed convictions and their actual conduct. But the contradiction is dissolved by the mutation of counter-narrative, at the level of the overall human make-up. Seen in this context, it is to be expected that "traditional family values" will be more celebrated where they are more *needed*, where religion has not yet achieved its transformative ends. If some red staters' willpower is in fact weak, this is because they have yet to internalize the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. And so what liberals cast as a contradiction between professed principle and actual conduct is simply their attempt to realize an ideal they are not privileged to take for granted.

If liberals can accuse conservatives of hypocritically failing to live by the "traditional family values" which they claim to uphold, then conservatives can with equal justice accuse liberals of the hypocrisy of *actually living by values* which they officially dismiss as the mean-

[12] Himmelfarb, *The De-Moralization of Society*, pg. 51.
[13] James Davison Hunter and Alan Wolfe, *Is There A Culture War?: A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life*, eds. E.J. Dionne Jr. and Michael Cromartie (Washington D.C.: Brooking Institution Press, 2006), pgs. 58.

spiritedness of benighted moralists. Noting that the upper-middle-class liberals who are most likely to condemn the stigmatization of out-of-wedlock pregnancy as prejudice are also "the least likely to behave as if that original prejudice were unjustified," Theodore Dalrymple concludes that "for that class the matter is principally one of intellectual preening and point-scoring, of appearing bold, generous, imaginative, and independent-minded in the eyes of their peers, rather than a matter of practical policy."[14] The liberal will retort that there is no contradiction of principle, and therefore no hypocrisy, because his monogamous hard-working lifestyle is just a personal choice whose validity he has never impugned. He criticizes conservatives, not for their own personal choices but for their intolerance toward the choices of others. However, the mutation counter-narrative tells us that the monogamous, hard-working lifestyle is *not* an individual choice, strictly speaking, but rather the historical legacy of the civilizing process. Far from being voluntary, it is something that, as Elias says, is "instilled in the individual from his earliest years as an automatism, a self-compulsion that he cannot resist even if he consciously wishes to." The "choice" celebrated by liberals arises *in the context* of a "relaxation within the framework of an already established standard." But that standard has not itself been chosen. And this is why conservatives see liberals as hypocritical for urging a choice rather than urging morality.

On the other hand, Dalrymple's critique isn't entirely fair. Just like conservative hypocrisy, liberal hypocrisy is dissolved by the mutation counter-narrative. While Charles Murray and other conservatives criticize upper middle-class liberals for refusing to "preach what they practice" to the lower classes, it is crucial to what these liberals are practicing that it *not* be preached. What is being practiced isn't simply certain behavioral norms, but those norms as they operate at a certain stage in the development of the buffered identity, where they have become second-nature and almost invisible as norms. If liberals have no patience for what Lasch defends as ordinary people's "need for solid moral guidelines," this is because their particular position within the civilizing process disposes them toward the subtraction account, which tells them that moral discipline can be imposed by autonomous rationality alone. This rationality having been accepted as an underlying feature of human nature rather than the expression of a particular hero-system, what is needed isn't moral guidelines, but such enlightenment as may be found in education, therapy, or rehabilitation—which all seek to recover something that is presumed to have always been there.

[14] Theodore Dalrymple, *In Praise of Prejudice: The Necessity of Preconceived Ideas* (New York: Encounter Books, 2007), pg. 25.

* * *

As we saw with Elias, it was with the emergence of a peculiarly courtly rationality that "the demand for 'good behavior' is raised more emphatically," and that "[a]ll problems concerned with behavior take on new importance." This demand for good behavior is the origin of "political correctness," which projects the norms of courtly etiquette onto the political stage, extending its demand not to offend to an ever-widening array of contexts, extending its scope to include a much broader range of sensibilities and sensitivities. Those so privileged as to enjoy a "relaxation within the framework of an already established standard" have the leeway to establish *new* standards. And this is what liberals do when they promote "understanding," "equal respect," "tolerance," and related ideals.

Himmelfarb objects that whereas the old Victorians espoused a set of clear, consistent, and commonsensical moral prohibitions, the "New Victorians" of the Left have adopted a convoluted and often contradictory moral code, a "curious combination of promiscuity and prudery." The New Victorians do not denounce drunkenness but only "those who take 'advantage' of their partners' drunkenness." They also trivialize rape by "associating it with 'date rape,' defined so loosely as to include consensual intercourse that is belatedly regretted by the woman."[15] These currents, argues Himmelfarb, have engendered a new and unprecedented repressiveness. Being straightforward and commonsensical, the old code was "deeply embedded in tradition and convention" and so "largely internalized."[16] By contrast, the morality of the New Victorians is "novel and contrived, officially legislated and coercively enforced."[17] Though the old Victorians have an undeserved reputation as meddlesome moralists and officious busybodies, they would in reality "have been as distressed by the overtness and formality of college regulations governing sexual conduct (with explicit consent required at every stage of the sexual relation) as by the kind of conduct—promiscuity, they would have called it—implicitly sanctioned by those regulations."[18]

However, what Himmelfarb interprets as the arbitrariness of the New Victorian morality is actually liberals' more thoroughgoing internalization of the buffered identity. With a high "level of habitually, technically, and institutionally consolidated self-control," being a given, and so with

[15] Himmelfarb, *The De-Moralization of Society*, pg. 261.
[16] Ibid., pg. 260.
[17] Ibid., pg. 260.
[18] Ibid., pg. 260.

the buffered identity's function as a mechanism for organismic self-governance having been securely established, the dangers of drunkenness and promiscuity per se recedes into the background. And so the concern can now shift to the individual's inner depth, as the innerness of the buffered identity becomes more a *fount of self-expression* and less a *center of self-control*, as it was for the Victorians. Victorian character having evolved into modern personality, the nature of interpersonal morality must evolve accordingly. This is not a "curious combination of promiscuity and prudery," but one more manifestation of the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, of which Victorian prudery was merely an earlier iteration.

These disciplines and repressions are at play in feminist Lois Pineau's proposal that rape law should presume that a woman has consented to intercourse only when she was offered "communicative sexuality" according to which "mutual sexual enjoyment requires an atmosphere of comfort and communication, a minimum of pressure, and an ongoing check-up on one's partner's state."[19] This being what any woman would naturally want, sex that does not live up to this standard is presumptively non-consensual. This standard is sensible because good sex aspires to the same ideals as good conversation. Pineau explains:

> Good conversationalists are intuitive, sympathetic, and charitable. They do not overwhelm their respondents with a barrage of their own opinions. While they may be persuasive, the forcefulness of their persuasion does not lie in their being overbearing, but rather in their capacity to see others' point of view, to understand what it depends on, and so to address the essential point, but with tact and clarity.[20]

Pineau believes good sex aspires to analogous ideals. As Elias observes, courtly norms provided "the basic stock of models" that would eventually be disseminated within the wider society, where it would inform expectations about proper behavior and attitudes in a wide range of spheres. And Pineau's proposal is merely among the latest and most ambitious of such extensions, one which applies the peculiarly courtly rationality, not only to the restraint of sexuality, but to sexuality itself. Courtly etiquette required a language that is "clear, transparent, precisely regulated," and Pineau is simply transplanting this ideal to the sexual realm as the measure of genuine consent. It is not an arbitrary, convoluted morality, but rather the standard to which any properly "civilized" sexuality must conform. This is what Himmelfarb's prudery/promiscuity dichotomy fails to capture.

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[19] Ibid., pg. 498.
[20] Lois A. Pineau, "Date Rape: A Feminist Analysis," in *Morality and Moral Conroversies*, ed. John Arthur (1989), pg. 499.

The buffered self is the self that is defined ontologically by the possibility of disengagement and, normatively, by the *demand* for disengagement, by the imperative to "take a distance" from "everything outside the mind," as Taylor says, and thereby establish an "inner base area" through which to distinguish how things are from how they feel. And it is this civilizational imperative that drives the seemingly convoluted morality of the New Victorians. The purpose of communicative sexuality is to advance that imperative and thereby ensure the self-possession required to distinguish authentic, inwardly generated desire from externally induced "pressure." The requirement that consent be somehow re-elicited and re-issued at every stage of a sexual encounter is intended to promote the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, without which a woman's true feelings cannot be distinguished from whatever fleeing, merely animal impulses her seducer may have succeeded in stimulating. The sense that "consensual intercourse that is belatedly regretted by the woman" can constitute rape reflects the retrospective insight that the seducer was indifferent to fostering this inner base area and thus bears responsibility for the consequences.

Feminists see themselves as concerned, not with instilling a peculiarly courtly rationality, but with combatting sexual coercion. But what *qualifies as coercion* depends on how we understand human agency, and how feminists conceptualize coercion presupposes a conception of agency that allows us to draw clear lines between the autonomous and the heteronomous, between an inner base area and the external meanings that threaten to engulf it. Only once these meanings are experienced as an invasive force that compromises our agency—rather than a necessary feature of that agency, as it was for porous pre-moderns—can communicative sexuality seem preferable to a sexuality that is more tacit, animal-like, and impulsive. What a more porous self would experience as the morally neutral fact that human organisms "impress themselves" upon one another on a visceral, pre-reflective level, the buffered identity may experience as the seeds of "domination," the submersion of consciousness in mere flesh. The acceptable threshold of tolerance for the merely animal having been much lowered, the merely animal is now identified, not only with unambiguous physical coercion—how conservatives define rape—but with the slightest intimations thereof in raw, un-intellectualized animal desire, with anything that, in neglecting an "on-going check-up on one's partner's state," fails to uphold the peculiarly courtly

rationality. Hence Pineau's interpretation of sexual teasing. Teasing is not a power-play that first stimulates and then frustrates animal lust but rather an activity that is "playful and inspires wit."[21]

This peculiarly courtly rationality is also at play in Anita Bernstein's proposal that sexual harassment law should center around respect rather than reasonableness of conduct.[22] Bernstein argues that "unreasonableness" fails to capture the harm at the heart of sexual harassment, indignity, and invokes a social consensus that is often just a male consensus.[23] By contrast, respect is "a commonsensical norm that lay persons understand and apply."[24] Respect is simply the "recognition of a person's inherent worth."[25] And respectful persons are simply persons who do not "engage in conduct that rejects or denies the personhood or self-conception of another."[26] But then the *meaning* of respect turns on what it means to deny the personhood and self-conception of another. And this is not obvious. What some would condemn as "disrespect" is only an exaggeration of attitudes that are at play in any normal human relationship. Challenging others' self-conception is an ineluctable feature of ordinary human interaction. Standing alone, the concept of respect cannot establish any neat lines of interpersonal propriety.

If the essence of "respect" can *seem* commonsensical and obvious, as it does to Bernstein, this is only by virtue of taken-for-granted assumptions about the essence of personhood. As with Pineau's proposal, these assumptions are manifestations of the buffered identity, for which personhood means disengaged self-possession. This is why Bernstein endorses Richard Norman's definition of respect as an attitude of separateness, "a reaction of distancing oneself,"[27] because to distance oneself is to acknowledge another's right to disengaged self-possession, to communicate that one has no intention of interfering with it. But not everyone places this right at the center of their identity, which is why feminist proposals often prove to be more controversial than feminists believe they should be, and why many see feminism as a symptom of sexual "hang-ups." What some women will dismiss as harmless sexual innuendo acknowledging the basic fact of animal attraction may be experienced by feminists as a denial of their personhood, a degrading fall from the lofty heights of that personhood into merely animal passions. The reason is that feminists have

[21] Ibid. pg. 499.
[22] Anita Bernstein, *Treating Sexual Harassment with Respect* , 111 Harv. L. Rev. 445, 452 (1997).
[23] Ibid., pg. 452-76.
[24] Ibid., pg. 521.
[25] Ibid., pg. 452.
[26] Ibid., pg. 487.
[27] Ibid., pg. 512.

more thoroughly internalized the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. With the threshold of tolerance for the merely animal having been lowered, the self is now defined in opposition to merely animal passions. It is the subject that is never to be made an object, not the "agent/thing" of pre-moderns but an agent *simplicter*. Notwithstanding feminist talk of "objectification," the sexual harasser doesn't really treat women as things, but rather as agent/things—or, more precisely, as *more* of an agent/thing than is compatible with feminists' particular identities, with their particular position along the civilizing process. This, and not abstract "disrespect," is the actual offense.

Catherine MacKinnon claims to uphold a "feminism unmodified."[28] But her feminism has in fact been modified by the buffered distance and its ideals of self-possessed interiority and invulnerability, modified by what Taylor calls "one historically constructed understanding of agency among others." Whereas Himmelfarb dismisses feminist morality as novel and recondite, Camille Paglia writes that feminism "doesn't realize the degree to which it's been co-opted by a certain kind of Puritan *whiteness*,"[29] exemplified in MacKinnon's "dour background of Protestant high seriousness."[30] There is nothing *theologically* Protestant in MacKinnon's views, of course. But the truth of Paglia's observation resides in its allusion to the buffered identity, which Protestant high seriousness with its focus on the inner assent of conscience had an important hand in shaping. Whether they know it or not, feminists promote this high seriousness right alongside their feminism. The New Victorianism is not a wholly novel and arbitrary contrivance, as Himmelfarb charges, but rather the latest extension of the historical processes that gave birth to the modern world—including the old Victorianism. It is one more raising of what Elias calls the "invisible wall of affects which seems now to rise between one human body and another, repelling and separating."[31] The college sexual conduct codes criticized by conservatives are merely etiquette manuals for safely navigating around that wall. And therein lies the hidden parochialism that feminism's opponents detect in it. Feminists may claim to be concerned solely with power and not with morality. But this is deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry once again, because

[28] Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1987).
[29] Camille Paglia, *Vamps & Tramps* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), pg. 290.
[30] Ibid, pg. 109.
[31] Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, pg. 55.

the morality has been built into the very identities being safeguarded against coercion, harassment, and the like.

Brian Wilson wonders why conservatives who vocally oppose to college codes designed to ensure that sex is genuinely consensual refuse to likewise condemn the more severe brands of "sexual correctness" instituted by some religious colleges—including blanket prohibitions on divorce, homosexuality, immodest dress, pre-marital sex, and overnight dorm visits.[32] But just like any number of other hypocrisies, the hypocrisy of criticizing lesser restrictions on sexual freedom while tolerating greater ones dissolves within the mutation counter-narrative. The bone of contention between conservatives and liberals is never the abstract question of whether there is to be more or less freedom, but always the concrete identity that is being implicitly promoted through arguments about freedom. This is why conservatives adopt the positions they do. What Himmelfarb condemns as a "curious combination of promiscuity and prudery" *makes sense* in the context of a more thorough internalization of the buffered identity and its courtly-ascetic ethos. And it is because conservatives reject this ethos that that they reject that combination as bizarre and nonsensical. In registering their bemusement, they are signaling their rejection of the mode of human agency that would dissolve this bemusement, dissenting from liberalism's attempt to naturalize the buffered identity as essential human nature. Though culture war conflict is formally adjudicated in the language of high moral abstractions, like freedom and equality, it is the structure of agency, the "overall make-up" of human beings, that is the true bone of contention. Feminism is simply one arm of Macedo's transformative liberalism, which is what conservatives are in every case resisting. The foreground of that liberalism is constituted by culturally denuded abstractions like autonomy and equal respect, which few would baldly reject. But its silent background is the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, which are being surreptitiously inculcated *through* demands for autonomy and equal respect. Hence conservatives' refusal to accept those demands at face value.

2. Cosmological Orientation

The above are merely a few preliminary illustrations of my thesis. And what they foremost illustrate is that liberals and conservatives alike *over-intellectualize* the nature of their conflicts—

[32] John K. Wilson, *The Myth of Political Correctness: The Conservative Attack on Higher Education* (Duke University Press, 1995), pg. 119-20.

which must therefore be *de*-intellectualized to be understood. Liberals and conservatives alike operate within what Taylor calls the *epistemological construal* of human agency, the premise that we are in the first instance *knowers*, and that we can best understand ourselves and each other in terms of this capacity. But the epistemological construal is hardly "neutral." Being rooted in the subtraction account and the strategic conception of agency, it inevitably favors the liberal cause and has been internalized by conservatives to their detriment and against their deepest instincts. There is an alternative construal that follows from the mutation counter-narrative and what it reveals about default human nature. Taylor explains:

> The tremendous contribution of Heidegger, like that of Kant, consists in having focused the issue properly. Once this is done, we can't deny the picture that emerges. Even in our theoretical stance to the world, we are agents. Even to find out about the world and formulate disinterested pictures, we have to come to grips with it, experiment, set ourselves to observe, control conditions. But in all this, which forms the indispensable basis of theory, we are engaged as agents coping with things. It is clear that we couldn't form disinterested representations any other way.
>
> But once we take this point, then the entire epistemological position is undermined. Obviously, foundationalism goes, since our representations of things—the kinds of objects we pick out as whole, enduring entities—are grounded in the way we deal with things. These dealings are largely inarticulate, and the project of articulating them fully is an essentially incoherent one, just because any articulative project would itself rely on a background or horizon of nonexplicit engagement with the world.
>
> But the argument here cuts deeper. Foundationalism is undermined because you can't go on digging under our ordinary representations to uncover further, more basic representations. What you get underlying our representations of the world—the kinds of things we formulate, for instance, in declarative sentences—is not further representations but rather a certain grasp of the world that we have as agents in it. This shows the whole epistemological construal of knowledge to be mistaken. It doesn't just consist of inner pictures of outer reality, but grounds in something quite other.[33]

This "something quite other" is the way in which we are oriented toward the world *before* representational claims are formulated. And what I've described as the modern/pre-modern continuum refers to a range of ways in which one can be thus oriented. The culture wars are a conflict, not of ideas, but of what I will here term *cosmological orientations*. If being conservative is, as James Kirchick suggested in Chapter Two, very much like being gay, this is because both consist in an orientation rather than a belief. Gays are not attracted to the same sex because they *believe* that such attraction accurately reflects what sexuality truly is, but because they are *oriented* toward sexuality in a particular way, because homosexuality speaks to who they are as heterosexuality does not. And likewise, both liberalism and conservatism can be understood at a

[33] Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Harvard University Press, 1995), pgs. 11-12.

level antecedent to reflective deliberation. To use Taylor's language, they aren't just opposed sets of "disinterested representations" but also competing forms of "nonexplicit engagement with the world," different ways of being "already out-of-doors" in a world of concern, as Barrett says. The culture wars are ultimately a clash of cosmological orientation, and it is on this level that conservative claims of cultural oppression make sense.

Cosmological orientation is never itself the explicit subject of political disagreement but rather what lends shape to it. It is what Taylor calls a "largely unstructured and unarticulated understanding of our whole situation, within which particular features of our world show up for us in the sense they have."[34] It is not a theory but a background "whose shape is not perceived, but which conditions, largely unnoticed, the way we think, infer, experience, process claims and arguments."[35] The epistemological framework adjudicates between liberalism and conservatism on the level of ideas, treating their conflict as a disagreement about the truth of different ideas. But *qua* cosmological orientations, liberalism and conservatism are competing background understandings that go unnoticed by liberals and conservatives themselves. Cosmological orientation is our basic sense of what it is to be a human agent acting in a world, the horizon of meaning against whose backdrop we reflect upon our ends. It is, as Heidegger says, the way human beings are "delivered over" to themselves[36], something that exists "*prior* to all cognition and volition, and *beyond* their range of disclosure."[37] Cosmological orientation is not normally disclosed because it is our *way* of disclosing the world, structuring the way in which things first impress themselves upon us *before* we will them or think them. It is the invisible scaffolding of the self. This is why cultural warfare is indeed warfare, why these disagreements can become so virulent, because they concern, not only what the world is like, but also what *we* are like.

The epistemological construal of agency is the corollary of the subtraction account just as cosmological orientation is the corollary of the mutation counter-narrative. Whereas the subtraction account conceptualizes the rise of modernity and secularity in terms of changes in our ideas, the mutation counter-narrative conceptualizes it in terms of changes in the overall human

[34] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 173.
[35] Ibid. pg. 565.
[36] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (HarperSanFrancisco, 1962), pg. 174.
[37] Ibid., pg. 175.

make-up, which is what the concept of cosmological orientation as nonexplicit engagement with the world is intended to capture.

Thus, the subtraction account traces the movement from orthodox Christianity to Providential Deism to skepticism to changes in our "disinterested representations." The movement from the first to the second to the last is simply a sequential subtraction of unwarranted beliefs, the subtraction of a sacralized conception of divinity for a progressively de-sacralized one followed by the subtraction of the latter in favor of atheism or agnosticism. These developments are merely stages in the forward march of knowledge. By contrast, the mutation counter-narrative charts the same developments as the unfolding of a cosmological orientation, the disengaged self-possession of the buffered self, which grew out of religion before assuming a life of its own and turning against religion. These religious origins are the reason why religious conservatives do not accept liberals' professed commitment to religious neutrality at face value, and instead dismiss liberal neutrality as the stealth and subterfuge of a sectarian impulse. The sectarian impulse in question is the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, and it can go unnoticed because it inheres in liberals' cosmological orientation rather than in their tenets.

Gillespie writes that "[t]he modern world certainly arises out of the Reformation and has a strongly Protestant character even when it seems most secular. Insofar as Protestantism always defined itself in terms of the *deus absconditus*, secularism can be understood as merely one of its extreme forms."[38] Though the religious neutrality of secularists does not presuppose any Protestant beliefs, it does presuppose the cosmological orientation that first developed through those beliefs, the cosmological orientation that would permit one to recognize God as *deus absconditus*, the God of religious Reform. What secularists uphold as religious neutrality can qualify as such only if God is first conceived as a God of unqualified transcendence, as an absent God who does not deign to directly embed his divinity in space and time, leaving room for a "natural world" in which he does not directly participate. Only in that case can he be safely disregarded at public functions without insult. And so only in that case can such disregard qualify as religiously neutral. Liberalism doesn't formally endorse this conception of God to the exclusion of another one. But it does presuppose a form of consciousness that developed through this conception. Far from being what naturally emerges upon having "lost, or sloughed off, or liberated [ourselves] from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge," the religious neutrality of

[38] Michael Allen Gillsespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (The University of Chicago Press, 2008), pg. 227.

secularists is just a further step toward the de-sacralization of religion initiated by Religious Reform, an intellectualized and sublimated reconstitution of Protestant hostility to idolatry and embodied religious feeling. I will develop this argument fully in Chapter Nine. But the essential point is that cosmological orientation and the mutation counter-narrative endow conservative claims of cultural oppression with an intelligibility they lack within the subtraction account.

The abortion controversy can be similarly illuminated. The secular liberal may imagine that, whatever reasonable arguments might be mounted against legal abortion in the third trimester of a pregnancy, these are surely inapplicable to stem cells or a newly conceived fetus, which plainly lack the neurological substratum to support consciousness, and therefore personhood and rights. And so these cases seem to relieve us of whatever difficult ethical quandaries might arise at later stages of a pregnancy. But this reasoning assumes the cosmological orientation of the buffered self, for which to say that the fetus is *potential* life is to make a claim about efficient causation, a claim that the fetus will, given the laws of biology, achieve infancy if various causal preconditions are satisfied. But as relative pre-moderns, conservatives inhabit a world of final causes. Potentiality here refers, not to a fact *about* how the fetus is likely to interact with the rest of the world but a fact *in* the fetus itself. The fetus is a "charged object" as it were—if not a full-fledged agent, then at least an "agent/thing." Being moderns, liberals dichotomize more strongly between agents and things. Recognizing that a new fetus lacks the neurological development to support agency, they conclude that it must be a thing and nothing but a thing. But being less bound by this dichotomy, conservatives can see personhood in a fetus even when it lacks the capacity to function as a strategic agent. As we saw with Mary Midgley in the last chapter, the science of the early modern period aimed to purge nature of its "animist accretions," and this is precisely what pro-lifers cannot do.

How one conceives of the fetus's potentiality is thus a function of the extent to which one has internalized the buffered identity with its mind-body dualism and de-sacralization of matter. Those who experience this dualism more profoundly in themselves will also be more disposed to question whether a fetus's physiological development at a given juncture can support the consciousness, the predicate of moral personhood. By contrast, those who experience the dualism less deeply, whose sensibilities are more pre-modern, will be more disposed to believe that a fetus has personhood by virtue of the teleology that inheres in it from the beginning—a personhood which its growing resemblance to an infant reveals but does not create.

To be sure, conservatives explain their motivations in the language of belief—e.g., family values, respect for life, *etc.* But this scarcely explains *why* they hold the beliefs they hold. The explanation, I am arguing, resides in cosmological orientation. The culture wars have proven intractable, *not* because they implicate "deeply held beliefs," as is often said, but because they implicate something even *deeper* than deeply held belief, cosmological orientation. Berger writes that the counterculture of the 1960s was "rooted in pre-theoretical consciousness—that is, in consciousness prior to any particular theoretical legitimations."[39] The same can be said of both the counter-counter culture of conservative claims of cultural oppression and the dominant liberal culture they protest. I am here attempting to *theorize those pre-theoretical consciousnesses*, to put into words what we usually just feel and thereby articulate the pre-rational features of our political conflicts. John Gray writes, "People who belong to different ways of life need have no disagreement. They may simply be different."[40] And our project here is to translate what are presented as disagreements into human differences that cannot be captured by the language of agreement and disagreement. This is what the concept of cosmological orientation and the buffered/porous dichotomy permits us to do.

But can we really say that liberals and conservatives "belong to different ways of life"? Nunberg argues that while one could plausibly describe the working and upper classes of Victorian England as discrete cultures, it takes "willful disregard to imagine that the cultural differences between upper-middle-class Texans and New Englanders are more dramatic than the economic differences between the inhabitants of Beverly Hills and Watts."[41] This seems sensible enough. But how we quantify cultural difference depends on how we conceive of culture. As Kymlicka observes, if culture refers to the "civilization" of a people, then nearly all modern westerners share the same culture, which can be distinguished from the feudal, agricultural, and theocratic worlds of their ancestors. On the other hand, if "culture" refers to various lifestyle enclaves, social movements, and voluntary associations, then modern societies contain a plethora of cultures.[42] Seen in this light, Nunberg's argument seems to be that while conservatives speak of their cultural

[39] Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pg. 34.
[40] John Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism* (New York: New Press, 2000), pg. 5.
[41] Geoffrey Nunberg, Talking Right: *How Conservatives Turned Liberalism into a Tax-Raising, Latte-Drinking, Sushi-Eating, Volvo-Driving, New York Times-Reading, Body-Piercing, Hollywood-Loving, Left Wing Freak Show* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007), pg. 74-75.
[42] Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford University Press, 1995), pg. 18.

differences from liberals as though they were so vast as to be nearly civilizational, they are in fact no greater than the differences between various lifestyle enclaves, and perhaps not even so extensive as these go. However, the concept of cosmological orientation offers a third way of conceptualizing the cultural differences that conservatives allege and that liberals deny. Liberals and conservatives may accept the same basic civilizational structures and possess many of the same habits, hobbies, and consumer preferences. But underneath these similarities is a meaningful if largely visceral and unconscious difference in the degree to which they have accepted and internalized the buffered identity. This difference cannot be readily quantified—as can the economic differences between Beverly Hills and Watts. But it is not for this reason unreal. As I have already begun to show, it can illuminate a great deal.

This model doesn't permit us to "track" people's social and political views with perfect accuracy, of course. There are pro-life church-state separationists, just as there are pro-choice non-church-state separationists, and such anomalies are not explained by the model. But this is a limitation that afflicts all studies of political psychology, which must posit ideal-types that are only imperfectly instantiated in flesh-and-blood individuals. The value of such studies is to be measured, not according to whether they realize what is an impossible aspiration, but by the extent to which they illuminate our intuitive sense that there is some *reason* for why certain sets of facially unrelated moral, social, and political opinions tend to cluster together in the general outlooks of certain sorts of people. Sowell observes:

> One of the curious things about political opinions is how often the same people line up on opposite sides of different issues. The issues themselves may have no intrinsic connection with each other. They may range from military spending to drug laws to monetary policy to education. Yet the same familiar faces can be found glaring at each other from opposite sides of the political fence, again and again. It happens too often to be coincidence and it is too uncontrolled to be a plot.[43]

Often is not always. Just as there may exist neurological reasons why some people are "biconceptual" as between Strict Father and Nurturant Parent moralities, so these may also explain why a particular individual is "modern" in some contexts but "pre-modern" in others. Some people may be complex repositories of modern and pre-modern impulses, each of which is restricted to particular outlets. Whatever the ultimate explanation, our objective here is not to more accurately predict the views of particular actors but to more profoundly understand the *meaning* of those

[43] Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (Basic Books, 2002), pg. 3.

views. And my argument is that this meaning resides in a pre-theoretical layer of human experience, the degree to which we are more buffered or more porous. Standing alone, this difference has no discernible political content. But it is what is being articulated *through* the political content.

Cosmological orientation explains conservatives' sense that they are divided from liberals by "indelible psychological differences," their conviction that liberalism refers, not to any narrowly political credo, but to a social identity and overarching cultural ethos that informs a broad range of ostensibly apolitical mores. As relative pre-moderns who have not internalized the epistemological framework to the extent that have liberals, conservatives are more attuned to cosmological orientation, which is why they refuse to accept liberalism at face value as just a set of ideas or values. Cosmological orientation explains, not only why "the same familiar faces can be found glaring at each other from opposite sides of the political fence, again and again," but also why conservatives should again and again experience that political fence as a source of cultural oppression. Their claims of cultural oppression all originate in their visceral sense that they are being *discriminated against on the basis of cosmological orientation*. This is what enables them to position themselves as victims with a good conscience. If conservatives have, as James Poulos complains, been judged "unfit for life off the reservation, unable and unwilling to function in any truly human environment," this is because they have not internalized the "ordering impulses" of the buffered identity and remain correspondingly "uncivilized." As a coarse and squalid animalistic peasantry, they are outsiders denied entry to the courtly halls of liberalism with all its false airs and empty refinements. This hierarchy goes largely unstated, of course. But this is because it is a component of cosmological orientation, something "whose shape is not perceived, but which conditions, largely unnoticed, the way we think, infer, experience, process claims and arguments." Conservatives articulate their sense of exclusion in a wide variety of ways. But the feeling itself originates in their alienation from the buffered identity, their predicament as relative pre-moderns facing a world hostile to who they are.

It must be emphasized that "pre-modern" is being employed in a technical philosophical sense, as a form of phenomenological description, and is not intended to imply any judgment on conservatives' rationality or insight. To be sure, the connotation is that conservatives are "backwards" in some chronological sense. It does not follow, however, that their claims of cultural oppression are "backwards" in a philosophical sense. The pre-moderns of yesteryear may have

been wrong about the shape of the solar system. But it does not follow that their contemporary scions are mistaken as regards what concerns us here, their claims of cultural oppression. They could be right about this even if they are wrong about everything else.

It might be objected that whatever I intend these terms to mean, "pre-modern" just does carry generally negative connotations, whereas "modern" carries generally positive ones. As Saba Mahmood observes, modern/pre-modern and buffered/porous are hardly neutral descriptors. Quite the contrary, they serve to relegate "unruly subjects" like evangelicals and fundamentalists to the temporal past or the geospatial location of the "non-West." They express "the operation of modern secular power through which certain religious subjectivities are authorized and others made the object of reform and subject to the 'civility' of secular norms and conventions."[44] These connotations cannot be denied. But be this as it may, our objective from the outset has been to construct a philosophically cogent *critical theory of the Right*, and my terminological preferences are fully in line with this aspiration. If the gay rights movement could appropriate the formerly pejorative "queer" for its own purposes, then the critical theory of the right can appropriate the sometimes pejorative "pre-modern" for its purposes.

3. Grasping Treason

As we saw in Chapter Two, David Gelernter condemns today's PORGIs—post-religious globalist intellectuals—for having cut themselves off from their own national and religious traditions, scoffing at patriotism as "simply vulgar," and having moreover deprived their fellow Americans of the "unselfconscious patriotic pleasure" that once came with praising their nation. Conservatives suspect that liberals are less than fully patriotic, and perhaps less than fully American. As we will now see, the truth of these allegations is a function of the cosmological orientation through which the meaning of patriotism is being processed. Here as elsewhere, the apparent intractability of political disagreement originates, not in deeply held beliefs, but in something deeper than deeply held belief, cosmological orientation.

There is no greater symbol of patriotism than the American flag, and a clash of cosmological orientation can be discovered in the different meanings it carries for different people.

[44] Saba Mahmood,"Can Secularism be Other-wise?," in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, eds. Michael Warner, Jonathan Vanantwerpen, and Craig Calhoun (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), pgs. 293-94.

These divergent meanings were articulated in *Texas v. Johnson*, where the Supreme Court held that a Texas statute criminalizing the desecration of the American flag violated the First Amendment. The Supreme Court thereby upheld the judgment of the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, which concluded that since the state cannot dictate citizens' attitudes toward the flag and what it symbolizes, it cannot restrict the flag's use to the communication of approved attitudes.[45] The State of Texas had argued that "if one physically treats the flag in a way that would tend to cast doubt on either the idea that nationhood and national unity are the flag's referents or that national unity actually exists, the message conveyed thereby is a harmful one and therefore may be prohibited."[46] But as the Court saw it the "harm" in question was simply the changes in attitude toward the flag and America that flag-burning threatened to induce. Texas maintained that it was attempting to protect something intrinsic to the flag itself, but it was actually attempting to control people's attitudes toward it.

To uphold the Texas law therefore would have been to announce that "the flag itself may be used as a symbol -- as a substitute for the written or spoken word or a 'short cut from mind to mind' -- only in one direction."[47] The Court would be "permitting a State to 'prescribe what shall be orthodox' by holding that one may use the flag to convey one's attitude toward it and its referents only if one does not endanger the flag's representation of nationhood and national unity."[48] But nationhood and national unity clearly represent what is one viewpoint among others, precisely the viewpoint that was being contradicted by flag-burning: "Thus, if Texas means to argue that its interest does not prefer any viewpoint over another, it is mistaken; surely one's attitude toward the flag and its referents is a viewpoint."[49] Given that the "intent to convey a particularized message" was plainly present,[50] there could be no principled basis upon which to distinguish flag burning from other forms of constitutionally protected symbolic speech.[51]

Justices Rehnquist and Stevens both dissented, however, and argued that the majority committed a category error in framing the issue as one of viewpoint discrimination. The Court took it as obvious that the flag was a vehicle for symbolic speech: "Pregnant with expressive

[45] *Texas v. Johnson*, 491 U.S. 397, 404 (U.S., 1989).
[46] Ibid., pg. 413.
[47] Ibid., pg. 417.
[48] Ibid., pg. 417.
[49] Ibid., pg. 413, n. 9.
[50] Ibid., pg. 404 (quoting Spence v. Washington, 418 U.S. 405, 410-411 (U.S. 1974)).
[51] Ibid., pg. 417.

content, the flag as readily signifies this Nation as does the combination of letters found in 'America.'"[52] But Rehnquist disagreed and lamented that the "[t]he uniquely deep awe and respect for our flag felt by virtually all of us are bundled off [by the majority] under the rubric of 'designated symbols,'…that the First Amendment prohibits the government from 'establishing.'"[53] Given that Americans' feelings toward their flag aren't tied to any particular political or philosophical doctrine, the statute did not qualify as unconstitutional viewpoint discrimination:

> The flag does not represent the views of any particular political party, and it does not represent any particular political philosophy. The flag is not simply another 'idea' or 'point of view' competing for recognition in the marketplace of ideas. Millions and millions of Americans regard it with an almost mystical reverence regardless of what sort of social, political, or philosophical beliefs they may have."[54]

This being the case, flag burning does not qualify as constitutionally protected symbolic speech: "Far from being a case of 'one picture being worth a thousand words,' flag burning is the equivalent of an inarticulate grunt or roar that, it seems fair to say, is most likely to be indulged in not to express any particular idea, but to antagonize others."[55] Justice Stevens agreed with Rehnquist that flag burning lacked any discernable propositional content, arguing that "[t]he case has nothing to do with 'disagreeable ideas,'" and rather involved "disagreeable conduct that, in my opinion, diminishes the value of an important national asset."[56] The Court's free speech doctrine, Stevens argued, was rendered inapplicable by the case's "intangible dimension."[57]

Neither of the dissenters grappled with the basic problem raised by this line of argument, however. As Steven Gey observes, "[a]ll proponents of flag protection legislation rely in some fashion on the argument that the flag is 'special.'" But when "they attempt to define the 'special' characteristics of the flag they inevitably do so in a way that highlights the unavoidably expressive nature of the flag."[58] Justice Stevens asserts that flag burning "diminishes the value of an important national asset." But what is this asset other than the fact that most Americans believe certain things? And what is it to diminish this asset other than to change what they believe? Justice Rehnquist objected to the contradiction of a government that "may conscript men into the Armed Forces where they must fight and perhaps die for the flag" but "may not prohibit the public burning

[52] Ibid., pg. 405.
[53] Ibid., pg. 434.
[54] Ibid., pg. 429.
[55] Ibid., pg. 432.
[56] Ibid., pg. 428.
[57] Ibid., pg. 436.
[58] Steven G. Gey, *This is not a Flag: The Aesthetics of Desecration*, 1990 Wis. L. Rev. 1549, 1575 (1990).

of the banner under which they fight."[59] But surely, no one is prepared to die for a piece of cloth, but only for *the ideas and interests it represents*. "Dying for the flag" may be unobjectionable as a figure of speech, but Justice Rehnquist seems to be exploiting this figure of speech to obscure the First Amendment stakes, viewpoint discrimination. He compares flag burning to an "inarticulate grunt or roar" that was calculated to offend. But he does not explain the source of the offensiveness. What could this be other than the communication of an offensive *idea*?

The logical structure of the disagreement is clear. A prohibition on flag-burning can qualify as unconstitutional viewpoint discrimination because flag-burning seems to consist in two phenomena: 1) the physical alteration of a material substance and 2) the communication through that alteration of various propositions from one mind to others—a "short cut from mind to mind" as the Court put it. The first is not intrinsically harmful while the second is harmful only by virtue of the ideas it communicates. Only by *rejecting this bifurcation*, then—the premise that the flag and its burning are reducible to their physical and mental components—can this conclusion be avoided. Since the dissents do seek to avoid this conclusion, it follows that they are implicitly imputing to the flag *an ontological status that is neither strictly physical nor strictly subjective or mental*, imputing to the flag *a meaning that transcends the representational function* it plays for individuals communicating their viewpoints.

This is precisely what we have come to understand as the pre-modern condition, which precludes any clear boundary between mind and matter or between agency and thing. Critiquing the Court's reasoning, Paul Greenberg argues:

> [I]f a nation lives by its symbols, it also dies with them… There are some so rooted in history and custom, and in the heroic imagination of a nation, that they transcend the merely symbolic; they become presences…Today's strange arguments from our best-and-brightest against protecting the national emblem are not symptomatic of any kind of treason-of-the-intellectuals, but of a different malady; an isolating intellectualism cut off from a sense of reverence, and so from the historical memory and heroic imagination that determines the fate of any nation.[60]

To speak of the flag as a "presence" is to speak of it as a *charged object* that is at once both agent and thing. *This* is what makes the flag "special." So much was suggested by Justice Rehnquist himself, who, borrowing from Justice Fortas, imputed to the flag "a special kind of personality."[61]

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[59] *Texas v. Johnson*, 491 U.S. 397, 435 (U.S., 1989).
[60] Qt. in Robert H. Bork, *Slouching toward Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (New York: Regan Books, 2003), pg. 101.
[61] *Texas v. Johnson*, 491 U.S. 397, 432-33 (U.S., 1989).

The flag does not merely *represent* the belief that patriotism is a good thing, but rather *presents* us with a claim. The power exercised by the flag isn't something which individuals exercise upon one another *through the flag*, by communicating their "viewpoints," but something which they permit the flag itself to achieve *through them*. Hence Justice Rehnquist's observation that many Americans regard the flag with "an almost mystical reverence." Understood in pre-modern terms, patriotism is not a viewpoint one might undertake to advance, but an objective power that manifests itself in the awe with which true patriots encounter the flag. The flag can be a "presence" because it is, to use Taylor's metaphor "a source of light or heat," the symbolic embodiment of the order of things. The patriot is not the propagator of a particular viewpoint, but the recipient of the flag's light and warmth.

The question of whether prohibitions on flag burning constitute viewpoint discrimination is thus *a question about the relative legitimacy of modern and pre-modern cosmological orientations*. For these are the lenses through which the stakes are being implicitly framed. If those supporting the Court's ruling were afflicted by "an isolating intellectualism cut off from a sense of reverence," this is because they are insensible to the flag's status as "a source of light or heat," unnaturally *buffered* from the order to which the patriotic remain attuned. To deny that prohibitions on flag burning constitute viewpoint discrimination is to uphold this order, to implicitly posit a pre-modern cosmos where things carry a significance that humans discover but do not generate.

It was precisely this kind of significance—the flag's status as an agent/thing—that was being denied by the Court majority. Its opinion was just a further step in the modern rejection of anthropocentricity, one more demand for the rigorous division of the world into its subjective and objective components. The Court concluded that what Texas argued was a public asset existing apart from people's attitudes toward it covertly referenced these attitudes. In doing so, it aspired to a non-anthropocentric description of flag-burning and its impact, conceptualizing our feelings toward the flag as subjective projections rather than *responses* to an objective order. Greenberg speaks of the flag's "presence." But from a naturalistic standpoint, it is only the flag's physical properties that are ever truly present. In invoking the existence of a "presence," Greenberg was indulging his teleological libertinism, rationalizing as some special insight what was actually his inability to "distance" himself from these subjective meanings and operate as a strategic agent within a "neutral" environment. In refusing to give Greenberg's disposition legal effect, the Court

announced that it too operates in a neutral environment. *Texas v. Johnson* helped enshrine the buffered identity into law, announcing that the law will not dignify sentiments that cannot be translated into non-anthropocentric terms.

* * *

The right to burn the flag is now settled law. But it is this same clash of cosmological orientation that informs liberals' and conservatives' attitudes toward patriotism more generally. Responding to John O'Sullivan's accusation that liberals disdain "the patriotism of ordinary people" as "something simplistic, vulgar, shameful, and thus to be avoided," Nunberg retorts that while conservatives charge that liberals are disloyal to America, O'Sullivan's accusation reveals that liberals' disloyalty isn't actually "to their nation but to the values and tastes of 'regular Americans.'"[62] Conservatives who insinuate that liberals are unpatriotic are not talking about anyone's concrete acts or omissions, as "when people applied the word to hoarders in World War II or to draft evaders during Vietnam." The concept of patriotism as deployed by conservatives is "really a matter of values and style, of conveying 'toughness,' and of subscribing to a particularly combative view of America's role [in the world]."[63]

But what might be discounted as mere taste or style assumes a new significance within the mutation counter-narrative, which reveals the cosmological dimension of the patriotism debate. Queried by CNN about her suggestion that "certain parts of America… are maybe more American than other parts of America," Sarah Palin clarified:

> I don't want that misunderstood. No, I do not want that misunderstood. You know, when I go to these rallies and we see the patriotism just shining through these people's faces and the Vietnam veterans wearing their hats so proudly and they have tears in their eyes as we sing our national anthem and it is so inspiring and I say that this is true America, you get it, you understand how important it is that in the next four years we have a leader who will fight for you. I certainly don't want that interpreted as one area being more patriotic or more American than another. If that's the way it's come across, I apologize.[64]

Palin was in fact being sincere in avouching that she wasn't associating patriotism with certain geographical regions. Any geographical allusions she may have made were only crude proxies for her actual position, which is that pre-modern, less buffered, America is more American than modern, more buffered America—a distinction that may correlate with, but is irreducible to,

[62] Nunberg, *Talking Right*, pg. 197.
[63] Ibid., pg. 196.
[64] http://www.progressive.org/node/124677/81180

geography. What, after all, is the "patriotism just shining through these people's faces" but the patriotism of porous selves, of selves who, not being buffered from that patriotism, can be "invaded" by it as though by spirit forces? Bellicose toughness isn't the essence of conservatives' patriotism, but merely one outlet for the expression of their residual pre-modern porousness. It is direct evidence that one has been appropriately "seized" by one's patriotism without the mediation of the buffered self's "inner base area," gripped by a force that shapes one's very self. This is precisely what the Veterans' tears symbolized for Palin.

The patriotism of conservatives consists in their *surrender to the embodied feelings of the higher* which the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity seek to extirpate. This is the threat they see coming from unpatriotic liberal elites. It is the reason why John Kerry derived so little political mileage from his Vietnam War record in his 2004 presidential run. His persona was quintessentially buffered— "haughty, French-looking" and marked by an "out-of-touch aristocratic bearing" as Anderson puts it.[65] And this vitiated everything else in the eyes of more porous Americans. If the liberal elites are, as conservatives complain, "out of touch" with the lived experience of "ordinary Americans," this is a detachment, not from their empirical condition, but from their cosmological orientation. The liberal identity is premised on the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, and this places it in direct conflict with those whose patriotism resists that ethos.

Liberals will insist that their patriotism is the reflective patriotism of ideals and principles rather than the unreflective patriotism of blood, soil, and language. Nunberg argues that "there is no question that the vast majority of American liberals are patriotic." If liberals "have reservations about past and present policies, it's most often because they believe those policies fail to live up to the best American ideals, usually a sign of patriotism and optimism in itself."[66] But while the patriotism of ideals and principles may be defensible in terms of ideals and principles, this is a circular, unpersuasive logic to those whose patriotism is more pre-modern, less "excarnated" and more "enfleshed."

Reacting to studies suggesting that conservatives view the world with less nuance and complexity than liberals, Coulter explains: "Whenever you have backed a liberal into a corner—

[65] Brian C. Anderson, *South Park Conservatives: The Revolt Against Liberal Media Bias* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2005), pg. 117.
[66] Nunberg, *Talking Right*, pg. 190.

if he doesn't start crying—he says, 'It's a complicated issue.' Loving America is too simple an emotion. To be nuanced you have to hate it a little. Conservatives may not grasp 'nuance,' but we're pretty good at grasping treason."[67] The "treason" grasped by Coulter and other conservatives is just a corollary of the buffered identity and its peculiarly courtly rationality, the corollary of an affective-instinctual structure that, as Elias says, embraces that "co-existence of positive and negative elements, a mixture of muted affection and muted dislike in varying proportions and nuances." By contrast, the simple emotions endorsed by Coulter recapitulate what Elias describes as the "peculiar black-and-white colouring" of medieval books, which know of "nothing but good friends or villains." Conservatives are "pretty good at grasping treason" because they process liberal nuance in *pre-epistemological terms,* at the level of cosmological orientation, of the overall human make-up, as a form of nonexplicit engagement with the world that sacrifices "embodied feelings of the higher" on the altar of the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. Coulter refuses to accept liberal nuance at face value because she refuses to accept the identity it expresses at face value. Hence her impulse to reduce that nuance to its cruder constituent parts—a little love and a little hate. In this way does she affirm the more pre-modern instinctual-affective structure against the liberalism that threatens it.

Liberals claim to "love" their country. But Goldberg observes that their feelings toward America do not comport with any normal understanding of love:

> [I]magine a man who relishes going out of the way to point out how his wife isn't all that special. You might think that guy isn't wholly committed to her. And if a woman said, "My daughter is fine, but she's really no better than any other kid," you might think she's lacking in the maternal-love department. This illustrates a truth about how love works. At some basic level, if you love something, you must find it preferable to something else, perhaps everything else. Your reasons can be subjective or simply impossible to quantify. Love, true love, is a mystery.[68]

What liberals present as their "reservations about past and present policies" is as conservatives see it merely a pretext for the relish with which they go out of their way to point out how America "isn't all that special," how America is fine but really no better than any other country. How, then, can they claim to love America? There is no precise formula for gauging when a husband no longer loves his wife. Adultery may constitute clear proof. But certainly, this wife need not wait until her husband actually engages in an affair before she may discern signs of his discontent and

[67] Qt. in Chris Mooney, *The Republican Brain: The Science of Why They Deny Science—and Reality* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), pg. 60.
[68] Jonah Goldberg, *The Tyranny of Clichés: How Liberals Cheat in the War of Ideas* (Sentinel, 2012), pg. 126.

arrive at her proper conclusions. And this is also the reason why conservatives do not feel they require evidence that liberals are actually collaborating with America's enemies before suggesting that liberals are unpatriotic, for the mere intellectualization of patriotism through "reservations about past and present policies" is already the seeds of betrayal. It qualifies as such, not because the reservations are intrinsically unpatriotic, but because liberal patriotism has been *defined* in terms of them and because this definition "buffers" liberals from the embodied feeling through which conservatives understand patriotism. Conservative aspersions on liberal patriotism are not contrived. On the contrary, they reflect how a more porous consciousness must process a more buffered one.

Liberal hostility to what conservatives celebrate as their patriotism should also be understood at the level of cosmological orientation, as the way in which a more buffered consciousness must process a more porous one. Noemie Emery wrote in the *Weekly Standard* that after 9/11 "[t]entatively, slowly, some [liberals] are allowing themselves now to feel warm toward their country, embarrassed though they may be by these primordial feelings."[69] But these "primordial feelings" are a source, not only embarrassment, but also of apprehension. For liberals understand this indulgence in embodied feeling as the surrender of the buffered identity's disengaged self-possession. And this surrender augurs patriotism's slide into fanaticism and xenophobia, a pagan idolatry that cannot distinguish America's highest moral ideals from the contingent material and cultural formations in which they have been partially and imperfectly instantiated. "True love" is a mystery, as Goldberg says. And this means that conservatives, the true lovers of their country, must remain inscrutable, liable to the wildly oscillating passions of the pre-modern self. If liberals look askance at conservative patriotism, this is because conservative patriots are, to borrow from Mahmoud, "unruly subjects," who refuse "the 'civility' of secular norms and conventions."

This is why Goldberg can correctly observe that liberals are more disturbed by extreme pro-Americanism than by extreme anti-Americanism.[70] Extreme anti-Americanism may be unreasonable, but it is extreme pro-Americanism that threatens liberalism's disciplinary agenda, which is to suppress the ordinary American's default porousness and inculcate the buffered identity. What conservatives condemn the contempt with which the elites look upon the patriotism

[69] Qt. in Nunberg, *Talking Right*, pg. 189.
[70] Goldberg, *The Tyranny of Clichés*, pg. 126.

of ordinary Americans does *not* in the first instance refer to any self-consciously entertained mental state. This is the "fundamentalist" interpretation of conservative claims of cultural oppression. Understood in the context of the mutation counter-narrative, the contempt is inherent to *the structure of the buffered identity*, which understands itself as possessed of a privileged lucidity that exalts it above teleological libertines still mired in anthropocentricity.

This "elitism" was the *social meaning* of *Texas v. Johnson*. Defending free speech is not the same as approving of the particular speech being defended. But the initial conceptualization of flag burning as symbolic expression presupposes the suppression of our anthropocentricity. And this suppression paves the way for various biological and social explanations for the ordinary American's sense that the flag is a "presence" rather than merely symbol. The disengaged non-anthropocentric stance requires us to conceptualize patriotism as an evolved disposition toward rigid in-group/out-group thinking which, though indispensable in the ancestral environment our evolution, is profoundly out of place in the modern world, to whose complexities this ancient reflex is inadequate. And so what was formerly understood as the "desecration" of the flag is reduced to Hobbesian "annoyance," a biological glitch in our rationality to be taken with a grain of salt. This is nothing that the Supreme Court actually argued, of course, but it is implicit in the cosmological orientation that underpins what it did argue. Conservative claims of cultural oppression are reactions to this layer of our experience, not to liberal ideas or liberal intentions but to *the structural possibilities inherent in liberals' nonexplicit engagement with the world.* What gets framed as a debate about ideas has as its deepest subject matter what are diverging overall human make-ups and the implications they carry for each other, the ways in which they *must* attempt to discredit one another.

Goldberg writes that though liberals will whine "about how Republicans use patriotism as a wedge against their opponents, the reality is more complicated," for liberals "are uncomfortable with the topic of patriotism because their core philosophical impulses are to make America a different country than it is."[71] The reality is indeed more complicated. But the reason is not liberal aversion to the country as it is, but the fact that America from its inception embodied a contradictory mélange of cosmological impulses, whose resultant tensions continue to be played out to this very day underneath the surface of what seem like purely theoretical disagreements.

[71] Ibid., pg. 127.

Pre-modern societies, Taylor explains, understood their foundations as lying in a "time of origins," a "higher time, filled with agents of a superior kind, which we should ceaselessly try to re-approach."[72] But modern social imaginaries take the idea of foundations "out of the mythical early time" and turn it into "something that people can do today," something "that can be brought about by collective action in contemporary, purely secular time."[73] The United States is on one level the preeminent example of the latter, a nation of individuals who deliberate and collaborate in furtherance of the common good. And yet what can be cast as the resolution of a collective action problem has paradoxically been invested with a pre-modern significance, as a mythical higher time, a special dispensation whose meaning must be continuously reappropriated in order to reinvigorate the present. These are the impulses that animate conservative patriotism. Conservatives believes that conservative values are American values because it is the ordinary American with his traditionalism who remains most connected to America's founding as a "higher time, filled with agents of a superior kind." Liberals disagree. And this is the conflict that gives rise to the patriotism controversy. It is what determines whether one views the flag as just another symbolic instrument through which to undertake collective deliberation or else as a charged object, the sacred embodiment of a higher time that sustains and reinvigorates the present.

Conservatives pay considerable homage to the notion that America, unlike the nations of Europe, is defined by "ideas." But their less than fully "excarnated" understanding of patriotism means they cannot take their professed position to its logical conclusion. For this logical conclusion might well involve conceptualizing patriotism as just a cultural modification of an evolved in-group/out-group disposition—clearly not the kind of patriotism Palin was admiring at her rallies. One cannot love America both as the nation that it is and as a nation of ideas because respect for ideas implies the possibility that we should "make America a different country than it is"—which conservatives like Goldberg condemn as a liberal perversion of true patriotism. Though conservatives celebrate "American exceptionalism," that exceptionalism is vitiated by their pre-modern sensibilities.

[72] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 208.
[73] Ibid., pg. 197.

4. An Insurrection of Subjugated Knowledges

The patriotism controversy crystallizes my thesis with particular clarity. As we shall now see, conservatives' broader sense of their situation, and so too of America's historical predicament, can be understood in the very same terms, as a conflict of cosmological orientations pitting the buffered identity against those who remain recalcitrant to its disciplines and repressions. It is this recalcitrance, and not "tradition" as such, that drives conservative claims of cultural oppression.

Examining the roots of the "next American civil war"—this time between liberal elites and ordinary Americans—Lee Harris concedes that the "populist conservatives" of the Tea Party movement have been susceptible to paranoid conspiracy-mongering, as in their concerns about Obamacare "death panels."[74] Their appeal to the yeoman virtues of a rugged, republican individualism is moreover an exercise in political nostalgia, as they aren't truly interested in returning to the harsh conditions of frontier life.[75] This nostalgia is also at odds with their insistence that America keep its place the planet's sole superpower, which presupposes a far larger government than was ever countenanced in the national past they idealize.[76] And in bewailing the depredations of overbearing liberal elites, populist conservatives betray their blindness to the workings of "impersonal forces far beyond the control of even the most cunning and ingenious cabal of villains."[77] Their affinity for doctrinaire libertarianism furthermore blinds them to corrupt corporate executives and amoral financial consortiums, responsibility for which cannot fairly be laid at the feet of big government.[78] It also lands them in the contradiction of taking for granted some government programs, like Medicare, while being reflexively hostile to others.[79]

On these and similar points, Harris is in full agreement with liberals. But unlike them, he believes that it "does not matter greatly whether the resentment and resistance makes sense logically or is backed by solid evidence."[80] The grievances of the populist conservative are rooted, not in any kind of social or economic theory that could be rationally evaluated, but in "a specific character type," the "natural libertarian" who becomes "ornery" whenever "he feels that his self-

[74] Lee Harris, *The Next American Civil War: The Populist Revolt Against the Liberal Elite* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), pg. 7.
[75] Ibid., pg. 49.
[76] Ibid., pgs. 54-56.
[77] Ibid., pg. 59.
[78] Ibid., pg. 211.
[79] Ibid., pgs. 210-11.
[80] Ibid., pg. 217.

image as a free and independent individual is under assault."[81] "Ornery Americans" are the heirs of the Jacksonian spirit, the egalitarian ethos of independence and self-sufficiency that once defined America.[82] And their populist conservatism is their attempt to keep this ethos alive against the efforts of the liberal elites to uproot it. In resisting the forces that seek to tame and subdue them, populist conservatives try to "hold back, at least for another day, the dusk of decadence that comes whenever the forces of order have triumphed too completely over the anarchic will of free men."[83]

These priorities explain why populist conservatives aren't "particularly interested in honing beautifully crafted logical arguments" and "feel no shame in vulgar rabble-rousing."[84] For their ultimate aim is simply to maintain this resistance by any means necessary. The resistance and resentment may assume the form of paranoid fantasy. But the underlying principles are sound, argues Harris. Populist conservatives are to be respected, not for the accuracy of their assertions, the cogency of their arguments, or the wisdom of their prescriptions, but for *the kind of people they are*, ornery Americans. To critique them intellectually is therefore to fall into a category error. Since their anger isn't ultimately "driven by intellectual arguments," it "cannot be brought to an end through intellectual arguments."[85] Their objections to this or that federal program may not always be cogent. But the "the ostensible issues," says Harris, "are always secondary,"[86] merely the contingent mediums through which something more fundamental is being expressed. And this is the "anarchic will of free men," which the elites are hell bent on extirpating but which the populist conservative will defend to the end.

The dislocation of traditional ideological boundaries appears complete, with Harris self-consciously celebrating as conservative virtues precisely those qualities which the Right has traditionally associated with the radicals of the Left, and especially those of the 1960s, who were condemned for having seized upon specific grievances as outlets to give vent to their own anarchic will. If the ostensible issues are always secondary, this is because they are, just as Kimball said of the 1960s, mere "rallying points for a revolution in sensibilities." This ideological dislocation is exactly what could be expected if conservative claims of cultural oppression represent *the counter-*

[81] Ibid., pg. 217.
[82] Ibid., pg. 157.
[83] Ibid., pg. 237.
[84] Ibid., pg. 40.
[85] Ibid., pg. 137.
[86] Ibid., pg. 124.

culture to the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, the counter-culture to the civilizing process. Hofstadter writes:

> America was settled by men and women who repudiated European civilization for its oppressiveness or decadence, among other reasons, and who found the most striking thing on the American strand not in the rude social forms that were taking shape here but in the world of nature and of savages. The escape from civilization to Arcadia, from Europe to nature, was perpetuated in repeated escapes from the East to the West, from the settled world to the frontier. Again and again the American mind turned fretfully against the encroachments of organized society, which were felt to be an effort to reimpose what had been once thrown off; for civilization, though it could hardly be repudiated in its entirety, was still believed to have something pernicious about it.[87]

These repeated escapes from the settled world to the frontier in search of savage nature do not seem inherently political. But the impulses which animated these escapes can become politicized inasmuch as the civilization they resist becomes identified with the left wing of the American political spectrum, where the buffered identity is most thoroughly internalized. And this politicization is precisely what conservative claims of cultural oppression seek to achieve. These claims recast liberal positions into *symbolic embodiments of the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity*, and this is why conservatives see coercion and intimidation where liberals see pragmatism and empathy.

Speaking satirically for the Left, Kahane describes the debasement into which progressivism has thrust the ordinary American:

> From a nation of free men and women, who once crossed the Great Plains in prairie schooners, conquered the Rockies, sent whaling ships around the world, and rose to defend freedom wherever and whenever it was threatened by people like—well, like us—you have become a nation of sheep, cowering disarmed and unmanned in your homes, worrying about the children. Which you don't have any of, since we have also convinced you that having kids is selfish, that we're destroying the planet with our very presence, that we have to reduce our "carbon footprint" (how I laugh every time I hear those words, since we are carbon-based life forms), and, my own personal favorite, that it would be a crime to bring children into a world as horrid as this one.[88]

Kahane's nostalgia for these "free men and women" and their more adventurous lives isn't nostalgia for medieval Europe. But their appeal for, and idealization by, Kahane and other conservatives is the result of America's historic reservations about "civilization." These reservations have limited the internalization of the buffered identity that is more fully accepted in

[87] Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), pg. 49.
[88] David Kahane, *Rules for Radical Conservatives: Beating the Left at Its Own Game to Take Back America* (Ballantine Books, 2010), pg. 111.

Europe, leaving some segments of the American populace with a "residual porousness" in search of an outlet. The Americans who braved the Great Plains and the Rockies weren't necessarily invaded by spirits, brought within their "field of force." But they could find themselves invaded by other imperatives more powerfully than is countenanced by the liberal dispensation, leading lives less rooted in the buffered identity's "inner base area" and more given to that embodied feelings of the higher that this identity represses.

Kahane's "free men and women" may have had certain narrow sympathies and parochial prejudices. But they were also free from the tighter regimes of affective-instinctual control that define later stages of the civilizing process. They had the anarchic will of free men if nothing else. And it is therein that their freedom lied, an inner, spiritual freedom for which the Rockies and Great Plains are only symbols. Conservative claimants of cultural oppression resent, not modern society per se—whose comforts and conveniences they do not, as Harris notes, really care to repudiate—but rather the *organized personality structure* that emerges from it, the properly ordered sociability of the buffered identity. In issuing their claims of cultural oppression, conservatives express their longing for a mode of experience that is less compromised by this sociability's demands. They pine for a way of being that is less rationalized, intellectualized, and disengaged—for human nature's authentic default consciousness. Such is the deeper meaning of the orneriness in relation to which the ostensible issues are always secondary.

This orneriness is why young conservative Todd Sweeney argues that "conservative and punk sensibilities naturally complement each other."[89] Conservatives, observes Sweeney, are naturally "drawn to imagery and a tone conveying order and discipline—respectability and reverence." But while conservatives should continue to defend traditional values, they also need a broader understanding of what those values consist in. The nation whose goodness they praise stands, not only for peace and security, but equally for the risk and adventure in which America was once plentiful but which liberalism now seeks to extirpate.[90] It was America that invented the cowboys and the frontier, as well as jazz, flappers, beatniks, bikers, rock 'n' roll, and the anarchic punk movement. And it has since rediscovered those roots in the Tea Party movement, a reminder that Americans haven't always been servile to government. America being a country founded on

[89] Todd Seavey, "Conservatism for Punks," in *Proud To Be Right: Voices Of The Next Conservative Generation*, ed. Jonah Goldberg, (New York: Harper, 2010), pg. 193.
[90] Ibid., pgs. 195-96.

freedom and rebellion, it is a serious mistake for conservatives "to accept the mantle of the fuddy-duddies" and let "the country's free spirits, creative types, young people, and individualists go running to the other camp, where they'll end up, in a tragic non sequitur, aiding and abetting stifling collectivist bureaucracies like the Environmental Protection Agency."[91]

Conservatives can see themselves as the true individualists because they identify the individualism of liberals with the ordering impulses of the buffered identity, which is what punk conservatism resists. Like the elites of old, today's liberals insist that the lower orders be "not left as they are, but badgered bullied, pushed, preached at, drilled, and organized to abandon their lax and disordered folkways and conform to one or another feature of civil behavior." Seen in the context of the mutation counter-narrative, the E.P.A. and other liberal institutions are merely carrying forth this longstanding tradition. Conservatives see their conservatism as their resistance to the badgering and bullying, and this is why they cannot but see liberals as tyrants and usurpers, crypto-fascists scheming to undermine their natural liberty. Liberalism has become ascendant, not by providing compelling solutions to real problems, but by suppressing and discrediting the free human nature that the conservative strives to retain. Such is the "higher truth" that conservative claims of cultural oppression strive to expose but which liberalism's rationalistic façade works to conceal.

The ordering impulses of the buffered identity are what render liberalism "un-American" in the eyes of conservatives. If they accuse liberals of betraying a collective faith in American exceptionalism in favor of the universalistic Hellenism of a Europe, as we saw in Chapter Two, this reflects their own identification of Europe with the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. Hence Codevilla's warning that the "Ruling Class" seeks to establish an administrative state that will reduce "American families to Swedish levels of intellectual and moral subordination to government 'science,'"[92] and his observation that the Democratic Party has "transformed itself into a unity with near-European discipline."[93] One might question whether Swedes are really so subservient to their government, or whether European political parties and the Democrats are actually more disciplined and unified than the Republicans. But these ostensibly empirical claims are merely the *mediums* through which conservatives articulate something more fundamental. The

[91] Ibid., pg. 192.
[92] Angelo M. Codevilla, *The Ruling Class: How They Corrupted America and What We Can Do About It* (Beauford Books, 2010), pg. 67.
[93] Ibid., pg. 77.

ostensible issues are always secondary, as Harris says. And what is primary is the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, the ultimate target of conservative claims of cultural oppression.

* * *

Hofstadter associates one strand of American anti-intellectualism with a disposition that "elevates hatred into a kind of creed" and is filled "with obscure and ill-directed grievances and frustrations, with elaborate hallucinations about secrets and conspiracies."[94] But this kind of anti-intellectualism should not, Hofstadter emphasizes, be confused with the "highbrow anti-rationalism" of philosophers like Nietzsche or Heidegger, which his study wasn't addressing.[95] However, my argument here is that what liberals dismiss as know-nothing anti-intellectualism has a distinctive structure that is illuminated by highbrow anti-rationalism. And this is precisely what we have been undertaking to do.

Arguing that the anti-intellectualism first examined by Hofstadter has only worsened in recent years, Jacoby writes that many conservatives have got caught up in the pretense that ordinary, semi-educated "folk" are the repository of greater wisdom than "the elites." They are therefore "incapable of admitting that a great many Americans lack the knowledge needed to make informed decisions about public affairs."[96] Even moderates, she laments, have been "in no way immune to the overwhelming pull of belief systems that treat evidence as a tiresome stumbling block to deeper, instinctive 'ways of knowing.'"[97] But I am here arguing that these "deeper, instinctive 'ways of knowing'" have discernible intellectual content. They reflect, not raw impatience with evidence and argument, but conservatives' *largely intuitive, under-theorized understanding of the mutation counter-narrative.* This is what the highbrow rationalism reveals.

This under-theorized understanding is why Nunberg can observe that Republicans have been remarkably successful when it comes to embedding their positions in a narrative that "manages to be evocative without being specific,"[98] a narrative that in "giv[ing] values flesh" can elicit passions that abstract values alone cannot inspire.[99] This narrative is the mutation counter-

[94] Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, pg. 37.
[95] Ibid., pg. 8.
[96] Susan Jacoby, *The Age of American Unreason* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), pg. 297.
[97] Ibid., pg. 211.
[98] Nunberg, *Talking Right*, pg. 14.
[99] Ibid., pg. 104.

narrative. And it can give conservative values flesh because it tracks the development of the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. Conservative claims of cultural oppression are the convoluted record of those disciplines and repressions, and a convoluted protest by the human unconscious against them. They are significant, not for what they reveal about empirical reality in any narrowly factual sense, but for what they reveal about what Taylor calls the "sedimentation of the past in the present," the ways the past lives on in the present unnoticed. These claims are symbolic protests against the historical forces that are now built into our contemporary western consciousness. They are what Foucault calls "an insurrection of subjugated knowledges." This is knowledge "located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity," knowledge in which "lay the memory of hostile encounters," knowledge which "owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it."[100] Those hostile encounters are the badgering, bullying, and scolding with which modern elites have always sought to impose their disciplinary impulses, which have now become nearly invisible, taken for granted as "natural." This problem may sometimes be articulated through provably false empirical claims. But the empirical claims are most profoundly grasped as symbolic efforts to expose the contingency of the buffered identity, the buffered identity as the outcome of a parochial culture hiding behind a universalistic facade.

Thus, Kahane charges that liberals prefer to undertake their struggles in the courtroom, a forum, not for truth "but for nonmortal combat in which victory goes to the clever, not to the strong."[101] And liberals will naturally dismiss this as empty bluster and chest-thumping. Their professions of all-American ruggedness notwithstanding, conservatives no less than liberals prefer to resolve their grievances in court rather than with their fists. Once again, conservative claims of cultural oppression seem devoid of genuine intellectual content. But this disingenuousness isn't the entire story. For we can, if we listen, hear echoes of the pre-modern's resistance to the modern manifesting itself. What is Kahane's implicit endorsement of physical violence but an unwitting allusion to a time when, as Elias says, "the hatters, the tailors, the shepherds, were all quick to draw their knives"? What is "the mortal combat of life" other than "the incurable unrest, the perpetual proximity of danger, the whole atmosphere of this unpredictable and insecure life" that

[100] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977,* ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pgs. 81-83.
[101] Kahane, *Rules for Radical Conservatives*, pg. 155.

inflamed the wildly oscillating passions of pre-moderns? Kahane's attack on liberals may be disingenuousness. But this disingenuousness is an insurrection of subordinated knowledges. It is the logical outcome of the limitations under which such knowledge labors, an attempt to articulate the mutation counter-narrative without a language that is actually capable of doing so.

Kahane also accuses that progressives are "telling you at every turn what you may or may not do, what you should eat and shouldn't smoke, where you must put your trash, your 'recyclables,' even your grass clippings—and all for your own good."[102] And what is this protest against regulated disposal of grass clippings but a contemporary recapitulation of what we observed to be medieval *laissez-aller*, with its lax, tolerant attitudes toward all things organic? Here again, the contemporary cultural wars are a latter-day recapitulation of the struggles by which the modern emerged from pre-modern.

Liberals will object that the obligation to recycle and appropriately dispose of grass clippings hardly compromises anyone's dignity as an autonomous individual and that grievances to this effect are therefore contrived, distractions the "real" issues that conservatives prefer not to discuss. But the critical theory of the Right must be judged by the same principles that guide the critical theory of the Left, by the same principles that liberals invoke in defense of their preferred victims. As mere words, racial slurs might also be dismissed as insignificant, because simply irrelevant to the big picture of African-American advancement. But we can all recognize that the offense cannot be minimized as just individual "name-calling," because the racial slur evokes an entire history of racial justice, alluding to the entire accretion of social attitudes that make up that history. Here is Foucault's "memory of hostile encounters," which liberals understand shapes the objective social context in which African-Americans are compelled to operate. And I am arguing that something like this is also transpiring in the context of the regulations whose oppressiveness Kahane and other conservatives seem to be histrionically exaggerating.

These regulations may be only trivially inconvenient when considered in the abstract. But they assume a special significance in the context of the mutation counter-narrative, wherein the domination of the unwashed "folk" by disciplinarian elites is always lying in the background as the storyline into which contemporary events will be unconsciously fitted. This is what Kahane's hyperbole is doing. Conservative claims of cultural oppression employ politics as the medium through which the buffered identity may be protested. This is what their symbolic politics are

[102] Ibid., pg. 15.

symbolic *of*, what unites Frank's "curious amassing of petty, unrelated beefs about the world." If liberals cannot see how these beefs are interrelated, this is because their allegiance to the subtraction account blinds them to the grievances' origins in the imposition of a contingent, historically constructed form of human agency. Being beholden to the subtraction account of modernity and secularity, liberals cannot recognize this contingency, which is why conservative claims of cultural oppression inevitably strike them as disingenuous.

As we saw, Kahane attributes to liberals the opinion that "it would be a crime to bring children into a world as horrid as this one." And this charge once again reflects how a more porous self must process a more buffered one. What liberals see as their broader social consciousness is, on the mutation counter-narrative, the more thoroughgoing secularization of the City of God and its moral rigors. And this secularization will strike those who resist it—those more resigned to the persistence of sin and disorder in the world—as a nihilistic hostility to life as it is and must be, a humorless moralism and desire to castigate sin, as Taylor describes the religious reformers. Hence Kahane's impression that liberals are fundamentally pessimistic, which reflects their unnaturally stringent moral standards.

This stringency is why Kahane can furthermore charge that liberals are "getting into your head. Making you feel uncomfortable in your own country. In your own home. In your own skin. Making you feel *guilty*."[103] Following Hofstadter, liberals will dismiss these accusations as "obscure and ill-directed grievances and frustrations, with elaborate hallucinations about secrets and conspiracies." But the mutation counter-narrative endows these grievances and frustrations with a new coherence. For this sense of the self's integrity being compromised by an alien force is the natural outcome of what Elias calls "the retrained instinctual and affective impulses" that have been "denied direct access to the motor apparatus." *This* is the guilt that liberals stand accused of instilling in conservatives. If liberals are not haunted by this guilt, this is because it is a guilt with which they more fully identify as a feature of their buffered identities, and so a guilt from which they can derive a spiritual meaning. However, this meaning is unavailable to recalcitrant conservatives who, though more Christian theologically, are less Christian existentially and cosmologically, retaining more of the residual paganism which the original reformers sought to extirpate—the agenda now inherited by liberalism.

[103] Ibid., pg. 30.

The difference between liberals and conservatives is *not* the difference between secularism and religion, but a difference in *the degree to which the religious has been compressed into the secular*. Conservatives can decry a "religion of secularism" or a "religion of secular humanism" where liberals see only the histrionic posturing of populist rabble-rousers because where liberals see the categorical *subtraction* of religion, bare secularism, conservatives see what Taylor characterizes as the *compression* of the religious and the secular into a "spiritual-secular whole." Conservatives discern the religious origins of what liberals accept as liberated human nature. And this is why they are perennially speaking past each other.

This compression also explains how conservatives can casually oscillate between accusing liberals of moral subjectivism, relativism, or nihilism and accusing them of insufferable moralistic zealotry. The compression of the religious and the secular qualifies as nihilistic when viewed from the side of the religious—e.g., the loss of traditional values—but morally puritanical when viewed from that of the secular—e.g., liberals' totalitarian will to impose their politically correct utopias on a fragile, flawed human nature. Both characterizations refer us to the same phenomenon seen from different angles, each of which articulates how a more pre-modern consciousness must process a more modern one. Conservative claims of cultural oppression are not contrived because they are, properly understood, *logically derivable* from this clash of cosmological orientations. They seek to "make medievalism modern," as Robin says. And this is because they endeavor to articulate the modern condition in terms of the medieval tensions from which it first emerged.

Conservatives' own position as (relative) pre-moderns provides them with a vantage point from which to actually *see* what more modern liberals can only *live*. In this regard, conservatives occupy a position analogous to that with which the Left often credits women and oppressed minorities. They are outsiders who by virtue of their disenfranchisement can discern power structures and cultural messages which must go unnoticed by the more privileged, who take these for granted as just the fabric of things. Conservatives have a visceral sense of what Nilüfer Göle calls "the powers of the secular":

> The powers of the secular can be traced in its capacity to develop a set of disciplinary practices, both corporal and spatial, that are inseparable from the formations of the secular self. Secularism is about state politics, lawmaking, and constitutional principles, but foremost it permeates and establishes the rhythm of a phenomenology of everyday life

> practices. Secularism is not a "neutral," power-free space and a set of abstract principles; it is embodied in people's agencies and imaginaries.[104]

Conservative claimants of cultural oppression possess *some* understanding of the mutation counter-narrative because they possess an intuitive acquaintance with the disciplinary powers whose emergence it chronicles. With these powers having colonized their very life-worlds—their own "agencies and imaginaries," structuring the "rhythm" of their "everyday life practices"—the claimants possess an unconscious memory of the forces that created the present. But lacking a properly *conceptual* grasp of the actual historical dynamics that would explain this vague memory, they simply identify it with the left wing of the American political spectrum, whose policies express the most thoroughgoing internalization of the buffered identity. In so doing, conservatives *misarticulate* the "powers of the secular," misarticulate their existential oppression in political terms, in the language of "abstract principle"—as in the cognitive elites' wish to rule over ordinary Americans, or else at the level of "state politics, lawmaking, and constitutional principles," as in the elites' subversion of popular sovereignty. This is the "fundamentalist" interpretation of conservative claims of cultural oppression that liberals find so easy to dismiss. But this interpretation is ultimately a distorted articulation of something real, the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, which have shaped the secular, liberal self.

If conservatives will not permit themselves to be intimidated by liberal intellectualism and instead adopt an anthropological stance that approaches it as a cultural parochialism whose pretensions must be exposed, this is because their "deeper, instinctive 'ways of knowing'" apprise them of this meta-truth, which will not be overshadowed the ordinary truths upon which liberals rest their arguments. To the extent conservatives are anti-intellectual, this is because they follow feminism in adopting what Anne Philips calls a "politics of presence" over a "politics of ideas." Whereas the latter detaches ideas from basic human experience, the former emphasizes the interrelationship between the two and so enable "a more exploratory notion of possibilities so far silenced."[105] The possibility so far silenced by liberalism is the possibility of exposing the contingency of the buffered identity. As in the feminist context, the dominant dispensation can be

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[104] Nilüfer Göle, "The Civilizational, Spatial, and Sexual Powers of the Secular," in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, eds. Michael Warner, Jonathan Vanantwerpen, and Craig Calhoun (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), pg. 254.

[105] Anne Phillips, "Dealing with Difference: A Politics of Ideas, or a Politics of Presence?," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pg. 141-42.

expected to control the very terms through which it is criticized and, to that degree, preempt or severely limit the persuasiveness of those criticisms before they can get off the ground intellectually. The naturalization of the buffered identity and the erection of entire social order on its basis cannot but leave this identity's enemies with only a vague and inchoate sense of what might lie beyond it. Conservative claims of cultural oppression are, as Foucault says, "located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity." And this is why "the ostensible issues are always secondary," why it does not "matter greatly whether the resentment and resistance makes sense logically or is backed by solid evidence." Lacking the words for what is primary, conservative claimants of cultural oppression can only persevere in that resentment and resistance in the hope that this will eventually yield some insight into their true meaning. To accept the intellectual framework insisted upon by liberals would be to surrender the field at the very outset, and this they refuse to do.

5. The New Class Revisited

Kahane charges that progressives have "undermined manliness, feminized your culture, elevated fretful safety and excessive caution into virtues instead of weaknesses."[106] Following Lakoff, liberals will diagnose the conservative invocation of manliness as yet another symptom of Strict Father morality, for which strict gender differentiation and masculine strength are how one defends "Moral Order" against a threatening world.[107] The Strict Father model, says Lakoff, "takes as background the view that life is difficult and that the world is fundamentally dangerous."[108] And as liberals see it, this background view is really a pretext for conservative authoritarianism, which is sold to the public as a solution to dangers that liberals in their fretful safety and excessive caution refuse to confront.

By contrast, conservatives see manliness as an *anti*-authoritarian impulse, a force that disrupts rather than upholds established convention. Harvey Mansfield writes that whereas rational control "wants our lives to be bound by rules," manliness "is dissatisfied with whatever is merely legal or conventional." Whilst rational control "wants peace, discounts risk, and prefers

[106] Kahane, *Rules for Radical Conservatives*, pg. 17.
[107] George Lakoff: *The Political Mind: Why You Can't Understand 21st-Century American Politics with an 18th-Century Brain* (Viking, 2008), pg. 106.
[108] George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (The University of Chicago Press, 2002), pg. 65.

role models to heroes," manliness "favors war, likes risk, and admires heroes,"[109] Manliness "seeks and welcomes drama and prefers times of war, conflict, and risk."[110] It "tends to be insistent and intolerant,"[111] just as it is "steadfast… taking a stand, not surrendering, not allowing oneself to be determined by one's context, not being adaptive or flexible."[112] Manliness must "must prove itself and do so before an audience." It seeks "to be theatrical, welcomes drama, and wants your attention." By contrast, rational control "prefers routine and doesn't like getting excited" and therefore aims to keep manliness "unemployed by means of measures that encourage or compel behavior intended to be lacking in drama."[113]

Manliness so conceived is the very antithesis of the buffered distance, a visceral rejection of its "ordering impulses." It is most fundamentally a protest against the rationalizing forces of the modern world, against the peculiarly courtly rationality, which is what has made us "adaptive and flexible." The liberal culture is unmanly because it is hostile, not only to actual contests of swords, but also to the entire range of virtues and identities which these once embodied—which is what the conservative celebration of manliness aims to resuscitate. Rather than pursuing the "new form of invulnerability" promised by the buffered distance, manliness embraces the vulnerability of the pre-modern dispensation, our exposure to the "anti-structure" that relativizes and destabilizes the conventional social world, revealing the precariousness of all merely human designs. As relative pre-moderns, conservatives are attuned to anti-structure—the inherent flux and fragility of all mortal things—as liberals are not, and this is why they think themselves more manly.

This conception of manliness is part of what animates conservatives' embrace of the free market, whose association with conservatism is not as obvious as it seems. Conservatives have always defended property rights and opposed centralized economic control. But contemporary conservatives' idealization of the free market as an all-purpose social panacea and flawless barometer of personal virtue seems inconsistent with conservatives' bedrock commitment to pragmatism, stability, public morality, and tradition. Mark Henrie writes that post-war traditionalist conservatism originated as a reaction against the "homogenization of the entire world

[109] Harvey C. Mansfield, *Manliness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pg. 233.
[110] Ibid., pg. ix.
[111] Ibid., pg. 16.
[112] Ibid., pg. 48.
[113] Ibid., pg. 231.

on the basis of contract theory" and was an effort "to name those 'other' elements of the human good, which are obscured by the liberal dispensation."[114] How then, should untrammeled laissez-faire have achieved its present prestige for so many conservatives, when it is the purest embodiment of the contract theory to which traditional conservatism has always opposed itself? One might think that an authentic conservatism would, as Lasch argues, support limits on economic growth and resist the "ungodly ambition to acquire godlike powers over nature."[115] Yet this hubris scarcely vexes today's conservatives, who have no difficulty reconciling untrammeled laissez-faire with their "traditional values."

One explanation for this apparent discrepancy is that these so-called conservatives are really what Hofstadter calls "pseudo-conservatives." Far from embracing classic conservative virtues like prudence and moderation, pseudo-conservatives resent and seek to undermine the centrist consensus that has shaped modern American life. And this is hardly conservative.[116] The line between conservatism and pseudo-conservatism is blurrier than Hofstadter recognizes, however. And the mutation counter-narrative explains how pseudo-conservative resentment is compatible with the original conservative project of promoting the elements of the human good that modernity unwisely discounts. These elements include the chaos, unpredictability, and insecurity of the pre-modern condition of porous selves opened out to anti-structure. These are what enable manliness and the anarchic will of free men. And it is these discounted values that imbue untrammeled laissez-faire with its existential resonance for conservatives. Laissez-faire symbolizes the anti-structure denied by the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, affirming our submersion in forces we do not control, our openness to powers that transcend our will and upset our designs. Liberals reject this openness as the relic of a barbarian past of less fortunate peoples, which they in their superior enlightenment have overcome. And it is this presumption that conservatives oppose in opposing the welfare state in the name of capitalism. As Corey Robin observes, some Cold War conservatives looked upon the Soviet Union and the

[114] Mark C. Henrie, "Understanding Traditionalist Conservatism," in *Varieties of Conservatism in America*, ed. Peter Berkowitz (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2004), pg. 6-7.
[115] Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), pg. 39.
[116] Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, pgs. 43-65.

welfare state as "the ultimate symbols of cold Enlightenment rationalism," by contrast with which the free market stood as "the embodiment of the romantic counter-Enlightenment."[117]

This romanticism is rarely articulated, but it is the impetus behind conservatives' devotion to the untrammeled free markets. Officially, conservatives defend these as a desideratum of prosperity, which is achieved by giving free reign to millions of individual decision-makers possessing the wherewithal and incentives lacked by the third-party surrogates to which the elites would transfer their prerogatives. But it is cosmological orientation, and not theory alone, that explains why this defense can resonate for conservatives as it does. Cosmological orientation is what compels their idealization, not only of traditional values, but moreover of something so historically *un*-traditional as untrammeled laissez-faire capitalism, which resonates with conservatives, not only as wise, prudent, and right, but also as *authentic*, a symbolic acknowledgment of our constant exposure to anti-structure.

Lasch observes that the concept of the "New Class" has enabled conservatives to attack "elites" without attacking big business.[118] And the mutation counter-narrative explains how the contraposition of the elites *versus* business can resonate more strongly for conservatives than do the elites *of* business—where liberals would direct our attention. Whereas the elites of business accept authentic exposure to anti-structure, the liberal elites of the New Class reject it, and this is what their elitism ultimately consists in. Gouldner observes that the New Class demands "instinctual renunciation" of its members[119] and that, moreover,

> The culture of the New Class exacts still other costs: since its discourse emphasizes the importance of carefully edited speech, this has the vices of its virtues: in its *virtuous* aspect, self-editing implies a commendable circumspection, carefulness, self-discipline and "seriousness." In its negative modality, however, self-editing also disposes toward an unhealthy self-consciousness, toward stilted convoluted speech, an inhibition of play, imagination and passion, and continual pressure for expressive discipline. The new rationality thus becomes the source of a new alienation.
>
> Calling for watchfulness and self-discipline, CCD [culture of critical discourse] is productive of intellectual reflexivity *and* the loss of warmth and spontaneity. Moreover, that very reflexivity stresses the importance of adjusting action to some pattern of propriety. There is, therefore, a structured inflexibility when facing changing situations; there is a certain disregard of the differences in situations, and an insistence on hewing to the required rule.[120]

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[117] Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pg. 133.
[118] Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, pg. 512.
[119] Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), pg. 29.
[120] Ibid., pg. 84.

Though Lakoff and other liberals would associate discipline and renunciation with conservatives, this is yet another case of liberal projection as the latter see it. For it is the liberal New Class, not the bourgeois conservatives, which embodies the monkish virtues described by Gouldner. The New Class operates in insulated professional environments without manly drama, enclaves where its members can *afford* a "a structured inflexibility when facing changing situations," a "certain disregard of the differences in situations," and "an insistence on hewing to the required rule." By contrast, the "model citizen" celebrated by conservatives achieves his financial success through his manly willingness to own a situation not of his own making, his attentiveness to the concrete and unprecedented, and his willingness to throw out the old rules in pursuit of his vision. Lakoff believes that the conservative "model citizen" is admired for his reverence before the established order. But conservatives in fact idealize the capitalist for his *irreverence*, his willingness and ability to seize upon a vision that others disdain and then realize the profit that vindicates this irreverence.

This is not possible in New Class milieus, where "watchfulness and discipline" are the order of the day. The corporate employee whose ideas are rebuffed by his boss can in principle strike out on his own and prove his boss wrong. But no such recourse is available to the aspiring English professor whose ideas will not be accredited as "mainstream" by the literary deconstructionists who sit atop Bourdieu's "intellectual magistrature of the sacred college of masters." He must surrender to the New Class's "patterns of propriety" if he is to survive. Being insulated from the market and its shifting consumer preferences, the social world of the liberal elites isn't embedded in an anti-structure that relativizes it as a merely human construct. This insulation is repugnant to conservative claimants of cultural oppression and the hidden wellspring of their seemingly empty ad hominems against the liberal elites, whose elitism ultimately consists in the buffered distance, a hero-system anathema to their own. Liberals will dismiss these tirades as contrived. But here as elsewhere, conservative claims of cultural oppression are the logical outcome of how a more pre-modern consciousness must process a more modern one, the recapitulation in modern terms of the pre-modern's resistance to the modern.

Conservatives' reservations about educational meritocracy, their preference for the entrepreneur over the recipient of prestigious diplomas, awards, and posts, isn't raw anti-intellectualism, but rather the judgment that meritocracy is an inauthentic escape from the anti-

structure that is our true lot. Meritocracy, notes Mansfield, presupposes that virtue be understood "in conventional ways so that it can be recognized and scored by those in authority."[121] Meritocrats expect that "their merit should be recognized and promoted through an educational system that does the manly job of self-assertion for them by giving them honors they do not have to claim or fight for."[122] The liberal elites see this pacification as a social and intellectual achievement, the overcoming of a barbarian past by reason. But conservatives experience it as the alienated denial of the human condition. They concur with Lasch that "[i]n their drive to insulate themselves against risk and contingency—against the unpredictable hazards that afflict human life—the thinking classes have seceded not just from the common world around them but from reality itself."[123] Whereas liberals conceptualize this secession in epistemological terms, as an enlightened ascent to a wider, more cosmopolitan perspective, conservatives conceptualize it in terms of the overall human make-up, at the level of nonexplicit engagement with the world, as liberalism's insulation from the "squalor and coarseness" that offends its peculiarly courtly rationality. What George Will condemns as liberal condescension toward "masses making messes," and Goldberg opposes as the New Dealers' "contempt for the 'disorganized' character of capitalism,"[124] express the ordering impulses of the buffered identity, which the ordinary American resents and resists through the language of economics. This, not gullibility or stupidity, is why he rails against the liberal elites in apparent disregard for his "real" interests.

Liberals conceptualize the struggle between bourgeois and intellectual through the subtraction account, as a conflict between narrow self-interest and moral universalism, or between parochial prejudice and critical reflection. But conservatives conceptualize the same struggle through the mutation counter-narrative, as a conflict between those opened out to the anti-structure that relativizes and destabilizes the merely conventional and human and those who disingenuously seal themselves off from that anti-structure and thus from the humility it would have taught them. These are the *cosmological* roots of conservative "anti-intellectualism." Hofstadter writes that modern intellectuals are the scions of the aristocrat and the priest. Having inherited the leisurely playfulness of the former and the truth-seeking piety of the latter, they have also inherited the

[121] Mansfield, *Manliness*, pg. 56.
[122] Ibid., pg. 232.
[123] Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), pg. 20.
[124] Goldberg, *The Tyranny of Clichés*, pg. 54.

egalitarian animus which these qualities have traditionally provoked.[125] But where liberals see freedom and truth-seeking, conservative claimants of cultural oppression see what I described as a *courtly-ascetic ethos*, a peculiarly courtly rationality. As pre-modern outsiders look in, they see the social and historical contingency of an identity that for liberals is the invisible, taken-for-granted background of things.

Kahane is reacting to this background when he accuses that liberals can "[a]t a drop of a Rolodex… come with a rotating hit squad of well-placed academics ready to pounce and opine upon just about anything having to do with you." Its "people are trained practically from birth as an instant-response team, the weaklings and the physical cowards who sought the safety of a sinecure instead of the mortal combat of life but who still get the thrill of shooting inarticulate fish in a barrel."[126] This complaint might seem like yet another obscure and ill-directed grievance or frustration. But what is the "sinecure" enjoyed by liberal academics other than a contemporary iteration of the royal pension that an absolutist monarch bestowed on courtly supplicants, emasculated warriors-turned-courtiers? If these academics are competent to discredit conservatives as easily as one "shoot[s] inarticulate fish in a barrel," do they not owe their superior eloquence to the conditions that first generated it? These conditions are the peculiarly courtly rationality, the rituals of courtly supplication and manipulation that, as Elias says, came to constitute "the basic stock of models of conduct" that gradually spread "to ever-wider circles of functions"—including those now indexed on the liberal Rolodex. The elitism of which conservatives accuse liberals is simply the anthropomorphization of the forces that created the buffered identity. As an expression of conservatives' "subjugated knowledge," the elitism accusation articulates the present as a recapitulation of the past, in terms of the conflicts through which this identity first emerged.

One reason this knowledge is subjugated is that conservatives' idealized entrepreneur must operate within a thoroughly rationalized order that in point of fact makes few allowances for the anarchic will of free men. His is not the capitalism of the dangerous far-flung whaling expeditions extolled by Kahane. As Lasch observes, conservatives ignore how capitalism has been transformed since the days of Adam Smith, refusing to acknowledge that corporate centralization

[125] Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, pg. 32.
[126] Kahane, *Rules for Radical Conservatives*, pg. 182.

and bureaucratization now vitiate what they defend as the capitalistic virtues.[127] In refusing to recognize this, conservatives also refuse to recognize that they are just as compromised by unmanliness as the liberal elites.

Yet here as elsewhere, their claims of cultural oppression are most significant, not as empirical descriptions, but as symbolic articulations of the "sedimentation of the past in the present." In being subjected to the vagaries of an often unpredictable market, the entrepreneur can be seen (and idealized) as exposed to some modicum of anti-structure, however vestigial it may be by comparison with the pre-modern original it symbolizes—what Elias describes as "the incurable unrest, the perpetual proximity of danger, the whole atmosphere of this unpredictable and insecure life." Neither liberals nor conservatives any longer inhabit this atmosphere, but it is the liberal ethos that rejects it in principle, and this is the hidden sectarianism that oppresses conservatives at every turn.

The sharp lines that freedom-loving "ornery Americans" would draw between themselves and the liberal elites may seem without real-world foundation. But here as elsewhere, the "real world" foundations of conservative claims of cultural oppression lie in the *inner* world of the modern liberal identity. The "liberal elites" are merely the symbolic mediums through which this identity is protested and resisted. And this fact dissolves these claims' apparent contradictions. To the extent liberals are dismissed as effete and unmanly, this is in reflection of the affect-subduing character of the civilizing process. To the extent they are instead demonized as bullies who promote a "culture of fear and intimidation" that cows even red-blooded, beef-eating conservatives into silence and submission, this is because the civilizing process now penetrates the very organism of those who resist it—as Elias says, "retrain[ing] instinctual and affective impulses denied direct access to the motor apparatus," becoming "an automatism, a self-compulsion" that the individual "cannot resist even if he consciously wishes to."

Conservative claimants of cultural oppression can feel bullied by the liberalism that lies without because they already feel subordinated to the liberalism that lies within, which they then project onto flesh-and-blood liberals, thereby generating the caricature of the liberal elites. This conservative internalization of liberalism is why there can be a culture war notwithstanding that liberals and conservatives aren't divided by incompatible lifestyles, as conservatives sometimes intimate. They are divided, not by what is outwardly *expressed* in their lifestyles, but by what is

[127] Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, pg. 519.

inwardly *repressed* by the buffered identity, divided by the degree to which they are constitutionally averse to its disciplines and repressions. This is what makes conservatives "ornery." To the extent they may be said to pursue a lifestyle that is incongruous with liberalism, this lifestyle consists in the claiming of cultural oppression itself, which is a direct reflection of that inward repression—the root of their "Stockholm Syndrome."

* * *

Ingraham warns that "[p]arents would be disturbed to know that it is common practice among pediatricians these days to tell the moms and dads to leave the room so the 'professional' can have private chats with children—chats that involve controversial topics like abortion, premarital sex, masturbation, and birth control." Whether in doctors' offices or schools, the liberal elites presume that the "'experts' know best" and that "[p]arents are too ignorant, too 'traditional,' and too incompetent to be left 'unsupervised' to direct the lives of their own children."[128] Conservative claims of cultural oppression are sometimes misunderstood as only a rearguard defense of moral traditionalism against secularism and relativism. But this struggle is intertwined with another struggle centered on the defense of individual self-reliance and common sense against the claims of expertise and professionalism, which are no less antithetical to traditional American values than secularism and relativism. Ingraham's lament encompasses both struggles. And as we shall now see, both emanate from the single underling struggle we have been examining, from a conflict of cosmological orientations.

Tom Nichols writes that the "United States is now a country obsessed with the worship of its own ignorance."[129] To reject the advice of experts is now "to assert autonomy, a way for Americans to insulate their increasingly fragile egos from ever being told they're wrong about anything."[130] The new revolt against expertise is characterized by self-righteousness, fury, and narcissism "coupled with a disdain for expertise as some sort of exercise in self-actualization."[131] While these tendencies have multiple roots, central among them is, once again, conservatives' resistance to the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. If self-righteous disdain for

[128] Laura Ingraham, *Power to the People* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2007), pg.42.
[129] Tom Nichols, *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign against Established Knowledge and Why It Matters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pg. ix.
[130] Ibid., pg. x.
[131] Ibid., pg.xii.

expertise can now qualify as an exercise in self-actualization, this is because the self being actualized is the pre-modern porous self liberated from these disciplines and repressions. Nichols conceptualizes hostility to expertise in epistemological terms, as an obsession with the worship of one's own ignorance. But worship of ignorance is merely a *means* of opposing the buffered distance and its disciplinary impulses. Given that intellectuals and experts are among the foremost embodiments of these impulses, they are natural targets for conservatives, for whom intellectualism and expertise are just further emanations of an all-pervasive liberalism that must be opposed on every front.

Hofstadter writes that "it is the historic glory of the intellectual class of the West in modern times that, of all the classes which could be called in any sense privileged, it has shown the largest and most consistent concern for the well-being of the classes which lie below it in the social scale."[132] But for conservatives, this putative magnanimity bespeaks the fact that intellectuals' hierarchical impulses are invested in *influence* rather than acquisition. The "consistent concern" referenced by Hofstadter isn't unvarnished altruism, but rather the characteristic ambition of modern elites, to "make over the whole society, to change the lives of the mass of people, and make them conform better to certain models which carried strong conviction among these elites," as Taylor says. Like the elites of yesteryear, today's liberals believe the lower orders are not to be "left as they are, but badgered, bullied, pushed, preached at, drilled, and organized to abandon their lax and disordered folkways." That the bullying and badgering is now effectuated through the well-meaning solicitude of the family doctor rather than the stern admonitions of the village priest or constable does not alter the fundamentals of the project. For this solicitude is but the latest iteration of the civilizing process, merely a sublimated, intellectualized, and etherealized variant of the reforming impulses that were once expressed more brutally and openly by an earlier generation of modern elites. The bullying and badgering may now be subtle and indirect, and undertaken within the constraints of democratic norms. But conservatives sense that their cumulative impact is profound, because they have transformed our very understanding of who we are.

Harris writes that the social ascendance of the "cognitive elites" betrays America's original self-understanding as "the promised land of common sense," eroding the spirit of "cognitive egalitarianism" which it was once assumed "would keep the common people from being

[132] Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, pg. 29.

manipulated by intellectual charlatans of every ilk."[133] As we saw in Chapter Two, conservatives see the liberal elites as the charlatans of today, pretenders who employ their claims to intellectualism, expertise, and professionalism to cow ordinary Americans into silence and submission. Conservatives oppose, not only the specifically left-wing cultural priorities of the anointed, but also their more general assault on cognitive egalitarianism, on the ordinary American's capacity for autonomous self-reliance, the psychological bulwark of his conservatism. Since secularism and modernism form part of this assault, religion and tradition are defended, not only as such, but also as the common man's defense against the onslaughts of the cognitive elites. They are what inculcate the epistemic humility that is foreign to the anointed, instilling a wise deference to the lessons of our ancestors as the guarantee of freedom and self-reliance.

Christina Hoff Sommers observes that our culture's "therapism" emerged with the waning of traditional religion[134] and is premised on the proposition that "vulnerability, rather than strength, characterizes the American psyche… and that a diffident, anguished and emotionally apprehensive public requires a vast array of therapists, self-esteem educators, grief counselors, workshoppers, healers, and traumatologists to lead it through the trials of everyday life."[135] Therapism seeks to "professionalize" normal human distress,[136] appropriating common sense as its own special province,[137] and thus persuade the public that it requires specialized assistance to cope with normal human travails.[138] Enfeebling the objects of its compassion, therapism is an assault on the "American Creed" and its paramount virtues of self-reliance, stoicism, and courage. In undermining these, argues Sommers, therapism has gradually slid the nation into a permanent regime of "therapeutic self-absorption and moral debility."[139]

By resisting the solicitude of therapeutically-minded liberals, conservatives are once again signaling their rejection of the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, whose innerness they cannot but see as "therapeutic self-absorption." Their antagonism to therapeutic ideals is merely one outgrowth of their broader resistance to the liberal elites' ordering impulses, which are always lying underneath the altruism. In rejecting these impulses in favor of "the trials of everyday

[133] Harris, *The Next American Civil War*, pg. 71.
[134] Christina Hoff Sommers and Sally Satel, M.D., *One Nation Under Therapy: How the Helping Culture is Eroding Self-Reliance* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2005), pg. 216.
[135] Ibid., pg. 5.
[136] Ibid., pg. 183.
[137] Ibid., pg. 187.
[138] Ibid., pg. 131.
[139] Ibid., pg. 218.

life," conservatives are embracing the pre-modern anti-structure that forever upsets all merely human designs, announcing their resignation to the flux and disorder that the modern order refuses to acknowledge.

The elites' hostility to anti-structure is why Lasch can condemn educational reformers like Horace Mann for their tunnel-vision. These reformers hoped that a professionalized educational system would substitute for the frontier as a new engine of opportunity.[140] But their very professionalism, argues Lasch, involved a "distrust of pedagogically unmediated experience" such as was acquired in the streets or through ordinary conversation.[141] And conservatives believe that this distrust has become an essential feature of the liberal culture generally, which now has a vested identitarian interest in devaluing the kind of everyday, informal knowledge which liberals cannot regulate. Hence F. Carolyn Graglia's charge that family professionals relegate parents to the status of "rank amateurs," invoking "knowledge, technique, and the processing of information" to discredit the unconscious, intuitive self-assurance upon which the mother and housewife has traditionally drawn.[142] Knowledge, technique, and the processing of information all refer to the epistemological framework, to the clear and distinct ideas beheld by the buffered self. By contrast, conservative claims of cultural oppression celebrate Burke's "wisdom without reflection," our nonexplicit engagement with the world, to which the traditional housewife is instinctively attuned and to which liberal rationalism is instinctively insensible. What liberals condemn as conservative anti-intellectualism is more primordially a rejection of this rationalism. Anti-intellectualism is merely a byproduct of this rejection.

Sowell is attacking this rationalism when he notes that intellectuals eager to mitigate criminal responsibility on the basis of childhood trauma and other unchosen adversity "are seldom receptive to claims that policemen who had a split second to make a life-and-death shooting decision, at the risk of their own lives, should be cut some slack."[143] The ideological divide is not only between an "enlightened" approach to criminal justice and traditionalistic retributivism, but also between a disengaged social scientific stance that correlates adverse socio-economic conditions with criminality and the engaged, "pedagogically unmediated" experience of the cop

[140] Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites*, pg. 75.
[141] Ibid., pg. 150-51.
[142] *F. Carolyn Graglia, Domestic Tranquility: A Brief Against Feminism* (Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 1998), pg. 47-53.
[143] Thomas Sowell, *Intellectuals and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), pg. 175.

on the beat, which yields a wisdom and insight unavailable within the disengaged social scientific stance. Split-second, life-and-death judgments cannot be "scored by those with authority" as can peer-reviewed articles examining the socio-economic determinants of crime. And so they cannot be accredited as genuine knowledge by the elites, who would disable and discredit conservatives' capacity to act on their pedagogically unmediated experience. Like other ordinary Americans, the cop on the beat has wisdom without reflection. But being an affront to the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, this wisdom must be discredited at any price.

Questioning whether the post-war professionalization of education, business, and journalism was genuinely necessary, Gelernter observes that universities had an obvious interest in "convert[ing] as much of the landscape as possible into fenced-off, neatly tended, carefully patrolled academic preserves,"[144] so that the "smooth, manicured green lawn of science" might replace the "wild sweet meadow-grass of common sense."[145] Justified or not, this trend toward professionalization doesn't strike liberals as essentially political. If conservatives by contrast see it as one more liberal usurpation, this is because they interpret it through the lens of the mutation counter-narrative. Professionalization is just another expression of liberalism's ordering impulses and monkish virtues, the artificial devaluation of knowledge borne of encounters with anti-structure—the "wild sweet meadow-grass of common sense"—and an exaggerated respect for knowledge that, shielded from that anti-structure, can be "scored by those with authority." To maintain their dominion, liberals must discredit knowledge that originates in "embodied feeling" and "nonexplicit engagement with the world" as mindless habit and reflex, lax and disorganized folkways to be uprooted. Professionalization is merely another means to this end, to disciplining and transforming of human beings.

Himmelfarb is protesting this project when she laments that Christian outreach groups with highly effective substance-abuse treatment programs risk being shut down by the government because their employees, successfully recovered addicts themselves, are not credentialed with the proper academic degrees.[146] Though we now celebrate the paid professional as more capable than the volunteer amateur, the Victorians took the opposite view, regarding the amateur as more

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[144] David Gelernter, *America-Lite: How Imperial Academia Dismantled Our Culture (and Ushered In the Obamacrats)* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012), pg. 82.
[145] Ibid., pg. 86.
[146] Gertrude Himmelfarb, *One Nation, Two Cultures: A Searching Examination of American Society in the Aftermath of Our Cultural Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), pg. 109.

dedicated and public-spirited, more competent to address the specific needs of the poor.[147] Correspondingly, they looked askance at the professional social engineer, frowning upon him as officious and presumptuous.[148]

Liberalism would associate academic credentials with knowledge and competence. But conservatives may associate them with the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, in whose service the knowledge and competence operate. What Himmelfarb calls officiousness and presumptuousness is once again how a more porous consciousness must interpret these disciplines and repressions. Liberals may have the credentials, but it is conservatives who have the pedagogically unmediated experience of the ordinary American, who is attuned to, rather than buffered from, the "real world." Liberals are concerned with the imprimatur of institutions because, seeing the world through the prism of the buffered identity, they cannot appreciate this primordial attunement uncorrupted by the pretensions of expertise and intellectualism. Academic specialization can assume a political dimension because its ethos is also the ethos of a broader culture and identity. The elites oppose the amateur, not because he is genuinely incompetent, but because he does not participate in the project of "chang[ing] the lives of the mass of people" to "make them conform better to certain models which carried strong conviction among these elites."

Whether it be through the admonitions of the family doctor, the solicitude of therapists, the disciplinary specialization of universities, or the decisions of credentialing agencies, the unifying message is that ordinary Americans must be supervised by liberals, who are acting in their capacity as liberals even as they profess to be committed professionals just trying to get the job done. The distrust of pedagogically unmediated experience is, like other features of New Class sectarianism, part of a versatile toolkit of intimidation with which liberals impose what Gouldner calls the New Class's "new hierarchy of the knowing, the knowledgeable, the reflexive and insightful." Those who readily submit to the liberal Guardian class are celebrated as worldly, sophisticated, and "aware" while those who resist it are castigated as primitive and reactionary, people too fearful and benighted to navigate the complexities of the modern world.

Liberals claim to be stupefied by conservative anti-intellectualism. But this is because their fixation on the economic functions to conceal this new hierarchy, to which anti-intellectualism is

[147] HImmelfarb, *The De-Moralization of Society*, pg. 164.
[148] Ibid., pg. 171.

merely a reaction. A wider historical context makes this hierarchy salient, however. Lasch observes:

> In our own time money has come to be regarded as the only reliable measure of equality, and we therefore find it difficult to credit nineteenth-century impressions of America as an egalitarian society. But such impressions derived not merely from the distribution of wealth or economic opportunity but, above all, from the distribution of intelligence and competence. Citizenship appears to have given even the humbler members of society access to knowledge and cultivation elsewhere reserved for the privileged classes. Opportunity, as many Americans understood it, was a matter more of intellectual than of material enrichment. It was their restless curiosity, their skeptical and iconoclastic turn of mind, their resourcefulness and self-reliance, their capacity for invention and improvisation that most dramatically seemed to differentiate the laboring classes in America from their European counterparts.[149]

If the ordinary Americans of the Nineteenth Century were distinguished from their European counterparts by these virtues, then conservative claims of cultural oppression protest a state of affairs wherein they are no longer plausible in their more primordial "enfleshed" variants. Just like religion, these virtues have been excarnated and intellectualized. Eviscerated of their original sprit, they are available only through the medium of the buffered identity, which the elites impose *through* expertise and professionalism. The latter will be defended as inevitable byproducts of meritocracy and knowledge, necessary responses to the complexities of modern life. But conservative claimants of cultural oppression believe that much of this complexity was created by liberals and for liberals, who are always looking for new ways to set the buffered distance against a "barbarian past" of "less fortunate peoples."

This judgment can sometimes push conservatives over the brink into conspiracism. But cleared of the conspiracism, the underlying intuition finds a distinct analogue on the Left. Catherine MacKinnon writes:

> Men's physiology defines most sports, their needs define auto and health insurance coverage, their socially designed biographies define workplace expectations and successful career patterns, their perspectives and concerns define quality in scholarship, their experiences and obsessions define merit, their objectification of life define art, their military service defines citizenship, their presence defines family, their inability to get along with each other—their wars and rulerships—defines history, their image defines god, and their genitals define sex.[150]

[149] Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites*, pg. 59.
[150] Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), pg. 36.

Here as elsewhere, the critical theory of the Right mirrors that of the Left. Just as MacKinnon refuses to conflate our humanity with the male, so conservatives refuse to conflate it with the liberal, with the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. They are animated by the visceral conviction that the modern liberal identity is "one historically constructed understanding of agency among others," as Taylor says, and not essential liberated human nature. If patriarchy has, as per MacKinnon, distortively naturalized and universalized maleness, then liberalism has distortively naturalized and universalized the buffered identity and its ordering impulses. This is why the Right has become the Left in order to accuse the Left of becoming the Right, why conservatives can entertain the same level of all-encompassing suspiciousness as feminists like MacKinnon. Whatever their particular arguments, they viscerally intuit that the buffered identity and its ethos inflect a wide range of norms in accordance with sectarian imperatives that liberals refuse to acknowledge.

Liberals hold themselves out as issuing hard-nosed critiques of anachronistic prejudices. But conservatives suspect, with Gouldner, that "the negativity of intellectuals embodies a disguised set of claims advancing their own candidacy as a new elite" and that this negativity is therefore but "the opening move in the replacement of the old by a new class, and of an old tradition and hierarchy by a new one."[151] Irreducible to bare critique—e.g., Nunberg's "reservations about past and present policies"—the negativity of intellectuals also expresses a particular ideal of the overall human make-up, the buffered self. *This* is the liberal elites' "disguised set of claims." And it is in order to resist these claims that conservatives contrapose their cognitive egalitarianism to the cognitive elitism of counselors, therapists, and other liberal oppressors.

Strict Father morality is ostensibly concerned with "Moral Order" whilst Nurturant Parent morality is ostensibly concerned with the concrete individuality of persons. But Sommers's critique of therapism shows that Nurturant Parent morality is no less of an "imposition" than Strict Father morality, because it must *create* the kind of individuality that would be receptive to its nurturance, *create* the disengaged innerness that lends itself to anguish and thus to the services of self-esteem educators and other therapeutic professionals. Liberal altruism is anodyne in the abstract, but it is concretely structured by the buffered distance. Nurturant Parent morality seeks, not only to nurture, but to mold people in a more "civilized" direction. If this molding can be

[151] Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals*, pg. 32-33.

passed off as nurturance pure and simple, this is because the subtraction account conceals that it is even taking place.

Conservative claimants of cultural oppression see symmetry where liberals see asymmetry because they intuitively recognize that the liberal self and its claims to moral and cognitive superiority are no less a contingent social construction than their own "Moral Order." While the buffered identity sets itself in opposition to the lax and disorganized folkways of the unwashed masses, it itself a folkways of sorts. It is not an abstract commitment to unencumbered human desire—a neutral, power-free space as Göle says—but a specific way of existing in the world. This identity is not timeless human nature liberated from the shackles of unthinking convention, but the product of the civilizing process and its demands for ever-greater self-reflexivity and social interdependence. This is why liberal nurturance must seek to extirpate manliness, the anarchic will of free men, and exposure to anti-structure—which are all anathema to the properly ordered sociability of the buffered identity. Liberalism is not the transcendence of all hero-systems, but merely the deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry thereof. Intellectualism and expertise are opposed because they easily operate in the service of this mimicry.

6. Personal Tastes and Pretensions

It is often lamented that political discourse in America is now plagued by ever-increasing incivility, by an alarming refusal to approach opposing views with any modicum of open-mindedness and a correlative indulgence in ad hominem rhetoric. This is said to be a destructive trend that, in impeding intelligent debate of the "real issues," poses a serious danger to the health of our democracy. Amy Gutman and Dennis Thompson remark that "citizens do not reason together so much as they reason against one another" when they "reflexively attack persons instead of policies, looking for what is behind policies rather than what is in them."[152] The theoretical irrelevance of ad hominem attacks is axiomatic among sophisticated thinkers.

However, the mutation counter-narrative reveals that what seems like raw incivility constitutes a special kind of lucidity into the existentially deepest stakes of the debate. The ad hominems of conservatives are attempts to impugn, not only the motivations of individual liberals, but also the basic categories through which liberals understand themselves. These attacks seek to

[152] Amy Gutman and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge: Harvard Univesity Press, 1996), pg. 360.

describe a *particular identity* and *cultural membership* that liberals cannot recognize as such. The trope of the emaciated, pointy-headed intellectual is indeed a caricature. But it is a caricature that manifests conservatives' visceral sense that liberals are oblivious to the buffered identity *as* an identity, and therefore to the fact that liberalism imposes *a particular way of being* on the unwilling. This is what lies "behind" policies rather than "in" them, and what conservative claims of cultural oppression endeavor to bring to the forefront.

Nunberg notes that while "[David] Brooks writes entertainingly and caustically about the lifestyle of the inhabitants of urban liberal enclaves whom he calls Bobos… a deft satirist could find equally easy pickings in the political and cultural pretensions of any number of conservative sets" like "shallow upper-class WASPs" or "preternaturally clean-cut summer interns at right-wing think tanks."[153] Nunberg is surely correct that the political and cultural pretensions of conservatives would be easy pickings. Nevertheless, liberal satirists do not fixate upon the pretensions of conservatives with the same intensity with which conservatives fixate on those of liberals. And this is because the cultural prestige of the subtraction account and the buffered distance has *already* rendered conservative pretensions salient *qua* pretensions, while encouraging us to conceive of their liberal counterparts, not *as* pretensions, but as the unvarnished lucidity which naturally emerges from the supersession of conservatism. Nunberg in fact understates his case, because the conservative "pickings" are for this reason even *easier*.

Indeed, conservatives' cultural pretensions are acknowledged in their celebrations of traditional values. Lamenting the gender integration of the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) ordered by the Supreme Court in *United States v. Virginia*, Justice Scalia concluded his dissent by remarking that it was "powerfully impressive" that a public institution would require all first-year students to keep VMI's "Code of the Gentlemen" on their person. The Code, part of which Justice Scalia includes in his opinion, specifies: "Without a strict observance of the fundamental Code of Honor, no man, no matter how 'polished,' can be considered a gentleman. The honor of a gentleman demands the inviolability of his word, and the incorruptibility of his principles. He is the descendant of the knight, the crusader; he is the defender of the defenseless and the champion of justice...or he is not a Gentleman." A Gentleman, the Code explains,

> "Does not discuss his family affairs in public or with acquaintances.
> "Does not speak more than casually about his girl friend.

[153] Nunberg, *Talking Right*, pg. 68.

> "Does not go to a lady's house if he is affected by alcohol. He is temperate in the use of alcohol.
> "Does not lose his temper; nor exhibit anger, fear, hate, embarrassment, ardor or hilarity in public.
> "Does not hail a lady from a club window.
> "A gentleman never discusses the merits or demerits of a lady.
> "Does not mention names exactly as he avoids the mention of what things cost.
> "Does not borrow money from a friend, except in dire need. Money borrowed is a debt of honor, and must be repaid as promptly as possible. Debts incurred by a deceased parent, brother, sister or grown child are assumed by honorable men as a debt of honor.
> "Does not display his wealth, money or possessions.
> "Does not put his manners on and off, whether in the club or in a ballroom. He treats people with courtesy, no matter what their social position may be.
> "Does not slap strangers on the back nor so much as lay a finger on a lady.
> "Does not 'lick the boots of those above' nor 'kick the face of those below him on the social ladder.
> "Does not take advantage of another's helplessness or ignorance and assumes that no gentleman will take advantage of him.
> "A Gentleman respects the reserves of others, but demands that others respect those which are his.
> "A Gentleman can become what he wills to be ...."[154]

Liberals will find this less "powerfully impressive" than did Justice Scalia, however. One reason is the implicit chauvinism. Another is that honor is, as Peter Berger observes, as little respected in contemporary culture, and especially among intellectuals, as is chastity. Honor and chastity are both atavisms in a modern society, dismissed "as ideological leftovers in the consciousness of obsolete classes, such as military officers or ethnic grandmothers."[155] Whereas insult to honor was once deemed a serious social, and possibly legal, offense, someone who now fights to defend his honor will be seen as neurotic, abnormally sensitive, or hopelessly provincial.[156] These judgments are now the received wisdom. After all, honor cannot be translated into non-anthropocentric terms. And this is what enables liberals to dismiss "traditional values" like honor as so much empty bluster, the symptoms of emotional conflict and intellectual confusion rather than genuine goods.

The Gentleman's folly is the folly of Don Quixote, who begins his quest as a proud knight but ends it by recognizing himself as just a naked man in bed. Berger explains:

> The true self of the knight is revealed as he rides out to do battle in the full regalia of his role; by comparison, the naked man in bed with a woman represents a lesser reality of the self. In a world of dignity, in the modern sense, the social symbolism governing the interaction of men is a disguise. The escutcheons *hide* the true self. It is precisely the naked man, and even more specifically the naked man expressing his sexuality, who

[154] *United States v. Virginia*, 518 U.S 515, 603 (U.S. 1996) (Scalia, J., dissenting).
[155] Berger, Berger, and Kellner, *The Homeless Mind*, pg. 83.
[156] Ibid., pg. 84.

> represents himself more truthfully. Consequently, the understanding of self-discovery and self-mystification is reversed as between these two worlds. In a world of honor, the individual discovers his true identity in his roles, and to turn away from the roles is to turn away from himself—in "false consciousness," one is tempted to add. In a world of dignity, the individual can only discover his true identity by emancipating himself from his socially imposed roles—the latter are only masks, entangling him in illusion, "alienation" and "bad faith."[157]

The problem for the conservative is that he still clings to a world of honor, whether this be through the Code of the Gentleman, the preternaturally clean-cut look of conservative think tank interns, the patriotism of Sarah Palin rally attendees, or any number of other ways. And this is the ultimate source of liberal animus. The liberal's reaction to the Gentleman will be informed not primarily by what he does or believes, but by what he *is*. The Gentleman's original sin isn't his chauvinism or classism, but the *form of consciousness* that facilitates these qualities, his indisposition toward the disengagement that would compel him to *see through* his sense of honor, to see through his hero-system.

The Gentleman is seen to lack the full agency powers available to liberals because he is beholden to what Sartre calls the "spirit of seriousness," here illustrated by Simone de Beauvoir:

> [The serious man] stubbornly engulfs his transcendence in the object which bars the horizon and bolts the sky. The rest of the world is a faceless desert. Here again one sees how such a choice is immediately confirmed. If there is being only, for example, in the form of the Army, how could the military man wish for anything else than to multiply barracks and maneuvers? No appeal arises from the abandoned zones where nothing can be reaped because nothing has been sown.[158]

The man of seriousness is serious because he refuses to recognize the meanings which he projects upon the world *as* projections. Conflating the objective world of fact with the subjective human meaning he has projected onto it, he disingenuously treats values as what Sartre calls "transcendent givens independent of human subjectivity."[159] The spirit of seriousness is the refusal to recognize one's hero-system *as* a hero-system and to see oneself as the origin of that hero-system. The man of seriousness hides his own agency from himself in order to escape the anguished recognition of his own freedom. Seen from this perspective, what the Gentleman holds out as his steely conviction and unwavering determination is in fact his teleological libertinism, merely his passivity before meanings for which he refuses responsibility. The man of seriousness, writes

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[157] Ibid., pg. 90-91.
[158] Simone De Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* trans. Bernard Frechtman (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1997), p. 51.
[159] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), pg. 796.

Sartre, "makes himself such that he is waited for by all the tasks placed along the way," responding to these tasks as "mute demands" and experiencing himself as "the passive obedience to these demands."[160] However lofty sounding, the Code consists in just such tasks, mute demands by means of which the Gentleman perseveres in a trance that sacrifices individuality on the altar of identity.

Conservatives are culturally oppressed because they live under the cloud of such judgments. And they respond in kind, by recasting what liberals uphold as courage and critical intelligence as a set of inherited cultural dispositions that are no less reflexive and unthinking than their own have been judged to be. In seeking to expose the "education gap" as an "indoctrination gap," they hope to show that what liberals hold out as their unvarnished naturalistic lucidity constitutes a Sartrean trance in its own right. Liberals may be socially credentialed as sophisticated and enlightened, but their attitudes are no less than the Code of the Gentleman a form of "passive obedience" to "mute demands." The naked man in bed expressing his sexuality is no more lucid than the knight because that nakedness—i.e., the ordinary human desire that the subtraction account casts as the timeless essence of human nature—is in reality a hero-system and not the transcendence of all hero-systems.

* * *

This is the implicit upshot of Brooks' caustic wit, already examined in Chapter Three, the function of which is to communicate that the buffered distance cannot be accepted at face value as the realization of some abstract, value-free, culturally-contentless ideal of individual autonomy. The Bobo ethos isn't just the byproduct of having sloughing off the illusions of the past, but rather a spiritual vision and hero-system that is surreptitiously symmetrical to the moralistic religiosity of conservatives. Hence what we observed to be the Bobos' crypto-conservatism. Brooks writes:

> The Bobos take a utilitarian view of pleasure. Any sensual pleasure that can be edifying or life-enhancing is celebrated. On the other hand, any pleasure that is counterproductive or dangerous is judged harshly. So exercise is celebrated, but smoking is now considered a worse sin than at least 5 of the 10 commandments. Coffee becomes the beverage of the age because it stimulates mental acuity, while booze is out of favor because it dulls the judgment. You can go to the beach near naked in a skimpy bathing suit and that is normal, but if you neglect to put on sun block to protect against skin cancer, people are astonished. It is admirable to eat healthy, but we use the word *guilt* more often in connection with unhealthy foods—high fat, high sodium, or high calorie—than in any other context.

[160] Ibid., pg. 796.

> Contemplative pleasures, like taking a long bath are admired, but dangerous pleasures like speeding on a motorcycle are disdained, and driving without a seatbelt is positively immoral. Sports that are aerobic, like cross-country skiing and Rollerblading, thrive, while sports that do little to improve cardiovascular health, like pool, bowling, and Ping-Pong, are low class.[161]

Viewed superficially, the Bobos are merely enlightened hedonists who both enjoy the pleasures of the moment while also assuring that those pleasures persist into the future. And yet they are also rather moralistic and judgmental, promoting a new social hierarchy revolving around this enlightened hedonism. Charles Murray observes:

> The culture of the new upper class carries with in an unmistakable whiff of a "we're better than the rabble" mentality. The daily yoga and jogging that keep them whipper-thin are not just healthy things for them to do; people who are overweight are less admirable as people. Deciding not to recycle does not reflect just an alternative opinion about whether recycling makes sense; it is inherently irresponsible. Smokers are not to be worried about, but to be held in contempt.[162]

Seen in the context of the mutation counter-narrative, this contempt signifies more than idle snobbery. As we saw, the buffered distance secularizes the spiritual significance that the movement of religious Reform had already transferred from the lived experience of the sacred to the disciplining of the individual will in the service of social order and prosperity. And the Bobos ethos is this spiritual significance secularized, liberalized, and taken to its logical conclusion. Hence the Bobos' curious combination of moralism and naturalism. Just like liberalism generally, naturalism developed, not from any mere subtraction of "certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge," but as part of the buffered distance, which *moralizes* naturalism as an affirmation of a hero-system, of the disengaged strategic agent for whom the acknowledgment of natural causality is a source of moral and spiritual significance. This is why "smoking is now considered a worse sin than at least 5 of the 10 commandments" and why "driving without a seatbelt is positively immoral."

Bobo utilitarianism is an *assertion of virtue*. The Bobos understand themselves as *contributors* to a broader order, the "order of mutual benefit." And smokers, the overweight, and ping pong players stand accused of flouting this order. The recklessness of driving without a seatbelt is a violation, not only of one's rational self-interest, but of the broader civilizational ideals from which self-interest derives its meaning. Sunk in their quasi-medieval squalor and coarseness,

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[161] David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: the New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), pg. 199.
[162] Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010* (New York: Crown Forum, 2012), pg. 84.

these people are oblivious to the extended chains of social interdependence that make up the order of mutual benefit, hindering that order by clinging to their lax and disorganized folkways—now overcome by the Bobo dispensation. While the Bobos see themselves as driven by individual enlightenment, Brooks shows this enlightenment to be the uniformization, homogenization, and rationalization of buffered distance.

The Bobos' regimes of "rigorous exercise, self-disciplined eating, getting a full night's sleep, and leading a careful, productive life" are, Brooks writes, "ways to encourage moral behavior through the backdoor." Those "who follow them are leading lives of disciplined self-restraint," albeit "in the name of their bodies instead of their souls."[163] But it is only in consequence of a subtraction account that this "backdoor" *could have come to qualify* as a backdoor—that is, as something unacknowledged and surreptitious. Seen in the context of the mutation counter-narrative, however, that "backdoor" is the compression of the spiritual and the secular into a new whole, the process whereby the moral and spiritual valences that formerly attached to the soul became secularized, compressed into our physicality. That is why Bobos are indeed "New Victorians," as Himmelfarb would say. They are the beneficiaries and heirs, rather than the antipodes, of the original Victorians whom they have the luxury of disdaining as benighted.

Himmelfarb complains that Victorian "virtue" connoted a sense of gravity that our own "values" lack.[164] Hence the Victorians' attention to the "small morals" of life, like table manners, conversational etiquette, and proper appearance, which served as concrete reminders of their broader ideals.[165] But Brooks exposes the Bobos as devoted to their own "small morals." Hence the driver in the "Latte Town" of Burlington, Vermont who stood at the intersection patiently waiting for Brooks to complete his daydreaming and cross the street, on the premise that behind the wheel of a car he was ethically inferior to a pedestrian, even a dithering one.[166]

The Bobos think themselves too enlightened for old-fashioned virtue—as opposed to, say, the morality of equal respect. This is an illusion, however. The spiritual and the secular are just more thoroughly compressed for them than they were for the Victorians. Bobo virtue is simply more thoroughly embedded in a pragmatic, secular agenda—like environmentalism in the case of

[163] Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise*, pg. 216.
[164] Himmelfarb, *The De-Moralization of Society*, pg. 11-12.
[165] Ibid., pg. 22
[166] Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise*, pg. 103.

Brooks's endlessly forbearing Burlington motorist. This only disguises without eliminating the moralistic seriousness that attaches to such commitments. And this is why conservatives see symmetry where liberals see asymmetry. If conservatives are unimpressed by environmentalist virtue, this is because they interpret it through the lens of the mutation counter-narrative and so conclude that this Burlington motorist's supposedly higher "social consciousness" is merely the ideological rationalization for his subordination to the buffered distance and its extended chains of social interdependence. The Bobo believes he has achieved a special unvarnished naturalistic lucidity. But he is in fact beholden to a hero-system premised on the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, and so no more "enlightened" than the conservatives who guzzle gasoline with a clear conscience.

Once again discerning symmetry where liberals see only asymmetry, Brooks observes that under the Bobo regime even counter-cultural sado-masochism has been "codified in rules and etiquette," with participants' interactions now highly regulated by these codes. Though these "may not be the same as the etiquette that governed behavior in a 19th-century parlor… in their relentless demands on self-control, they weirdly mimic those social codes."[167] But this mimicry ceases to be puzzling once we abandon subtraction account and recognize the sedimentation of the past in the present, recognize the religio-moral origins of what now passes for a culturally neutral individualism.

The Bobos understand themselves as enacting internally-imposed codes rather than heteronomously submitting to external ones. Unlike evangelical Christians, they reject the idea that sexuality exists to serve God's transcendent purposes. On the other hand, Bobo sex "can't be just a fun thing between the sheets" but must also be "a profound thing between the ears," must be something "safe, responsible, and socially constructive." Even the "most animalistic activities are now enshrouded with guidebooks, how-to videos, and magazine articles written by people with advanced degrees."[168] These strictures reveal that Bobos aren't ultimately any more libertarian than the evangelical Christians they despise. The difference is that their more "nuanced" set of sexual strictures originate in a more thorough internalization of the buffered identity, which generates its own "progressive" compulsions. What was formerly understood to be the transcendent purpose of sex has become compressed into sexuality itself, rendering it compulsively

[167] Ibid., pg. 191-92.
[168] Ibid., pg. 194.

purposive as the embodiment of our highest virtues. As we observed at this chapter's outset, the "loose" system of morality isn't really so very loose. And this is because what liberals uphold as ordinary human desire shorn of religio-metaphysical illusions has actually *incorporated these very illusions into itself*, incorporated the asceticism that was once set in opposition to that desire. The "naked man in bed expressing his sexuality" is no more authentic or self-transparent than the knight in the "full regalia of his role" because he proceeds forth with his own regalia—guidebooks, how-to videos, and magazine articles. Here as elsewhere, what presents itself as the transcendence of all hero-systems is merely the deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry thereof.

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There is clearly a strong element of hyperbole, overgeneralization, and caricature in Brooks's depictions, as he surely recognizes and intends. But the satire is not, as Nunberg believes, mere "pickings," the whimsical or arbitrary mocking of liberals on the basis of purely personal, politically irrelevant tastes and pretensions. On the contrary, the hyperbole, overgeneralization, and caricature are an insurrection of subjugated knowledges. As mere caricature, Brooks's portraits lie "beneath the level of scientificity or cognition." Despite this, they also serve as *under-theorized articulations of the mutation counter-narrative*, which also illuminates many recognizably political disagreements. The personal is political because both are different ways of exposing the contingency of the buffered identity, the unarticulated philosophical upshot of conservatives' caricatures.

Nunberg argues that the intellectual decline of conservatism is illustrated in the contrast between William F. Buckley, who famously quipped that he would rather be governed by the first 2000 names in the Boston phone directory than by all the Harvard faculty, and his heir at the *National Review*, Richard Lowry, who in a novel twist on that quip remarked that he "would rather be governed by two thousand motorcycle riders than all the Volvo drivers in the United States." True or not, Buckley's remark was serious political commentary about the role of intellectuals in public life. By contrast, "Lowry's remark has no real political content at all."[169] In their strategy of "guilt-by-brand-association," conservatives would link themselves to products like motorcycles, NASCAR races, football, and beer, while linking liberal blue-staters to products like Volvos, skiing, vacations in Nantucket, white wine, and fancy coffee drinks. But consumer

[169] Nunberg, *Talking Right*, pg. 69.

preferences are unreliable indicators of actual voting behavior, argues Nunberg. Though conservatives would "assign" motorcycle riding and NASCAR to the political Right, there are in fact two Harley-Davidson dealerships in San Francisco and a NASCAR competition in Sonoma County. This is because "the NASCAR organization realizes that even those of us who live in places like Northern California, Delaware, Chicago, and the Boston Area may find it thrilling to watch a string of 750-horsepower cars roar by at 140 miles an hour, whatever our views on Social Security privatization."[170]

However, while guilt-by-brand association may not reflect any strong correlations between voting behavior and consumer preferences, it is revealing as a symbol of conservative resistance to the buffered distance. What, after all, is the exuberance of chugging cheap domestic beer at a NASCAR track or monster truck competition but a symbolic proxy for the unselfconscious coarseness of the medieval who, not yet disciplined into a peculiarly courtly rationality, lived in a world defined by squalor, danger, and physicality? And what is the more refined pleasure of sipping white wine or latte at an art gallery but a contemporary variant of the ways of court? The latter's emphasis on "good taste" and its "growing sensitivity to nuances of rhythm, tone, and significance" would clearly be out of place at the NASCAR track—someplace where the spiritual and the worldly have *not* been compressed into one another, where ordinary human desire has *not* been imbued with a new spiritual significance.

In identifying themselves with NASCAR, motorcycles, and the like, and identifying liberals with more effete interests, conservatives are simply protesting the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, scapegoating those who have most thoroughly internalized this identity as its root cause, which actually lies in historical forces rather than human intentions. As we saw in Chapter Two, Mike Gallagher believes that liberals despise the "power and thrust" of gas-guzzling V-8 engines. In urging environmentally-friendly but impotent electric cars upon their fellow Americans, liberals are asking us "to stop hitting the accelerator—on our cars, on our ambitions, on our appetites, on everything." Here as elsewhere, what may seem like an empty ad hominem is in fact anything but that. For what is the "power and thrust" celebrated by Gallagher if not a symbol of the unrestrained and un-subdued affective-instinctual structure of the pre-modern self? What is liberals' break on the accelerator but the muting and subduing of that structure within the buffered identity? *This* is how conservatism "makes medievalism modern,"

[170] Ibid., pg. 79-80.

as Robin says—by projecting onto the contemporary scene the basic *structure* of the conflicts through which the modern emerged out of the medieval.

If conservative claimants of cultural oppression tout their church-going as much as their ostensibly cruder recreational proclivities, this is in order to assert that they *stand outside* of the secular-spiritual compression atop of which liberalism developed, to assert that the religious and the secular have *not* been compressed in their own case. The extent to which church-going and NASCAR can be correlated empirically may be debatable, and has doubtlessly been exaggerated in conservative polemics. But whatever the truth of the matter, the mutation counter-narrative explains how the two preferences are related conceptually and cosmologically, as part and parcel of an under-theorized articulation of that very narrative. It is on this plane that Lowry's quip carries political significance, as one more protest against the civilizational repressions chronicled by the mutation counter-narrative. If this protest cannot be readily translated into clear policy prescriptions, this is not because it is apolitical, but because the political protest is of such magnitude as to be civilizational.

As Frank observes, attacking the personal tastes and pretensions of liberals has become the stock in trade of conservative writers. And this is because they seek to erode the prestige of the buffered identity by exposing the *supra-personal* element in those personal tastes and pretensions, to discredit that identity as the disingenuous contradiction of a hero-system predicated on the transcendence of all hero-systems. Hence Brooks's observation that Bobos strive to "suffer for beauty" through strenuous high-altitude outdoor experiences. The Bobos "mutilate the body for environmental transcendence" and in doing so express the same impulses that once prompted monks to fast, flog themselves with chains, or build "forbidding monasteries on the rocky outcroppings of Wales."[171] The Bobos do not subscribe to any formal theological doctrine demanding that the body be mutilated for the sake of environmental transcendence. But if they can dispense with traditional religious values, this isn't owing to any superior secular lucidity, but because, here too, those values have been compressed into their secular identities with unprecedented thoroughness. The ascetic renunciation that was once at home in the monastery has been secularized and built into ordinary life. And this is the intuition that Brooks's caricature is intended to capture.

[171] Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise*, pg. 209-10.

Nunberg characterizes the overarching theme of conservative claims of cultural oppression as "an America divided into two nations by differences in values, culture, lifestyle." And this is indeed their official text. But underneath that text is a subtext addressing itself, not to unbridgeable differences, but to continuity and symmetry, a subtext that articulates liberalism and conservatism as *various derivations of the same human constant*, a hero-system. Brooks observes:

> We Bobos have taken the bourgeois imperative to strive and succeed, and we have married it to the bohemian impulse to experience new sensations. The result is a set of social regulations constructed to encourage pleasures that are physically, spiritually, and intellectually useful while stigmatizing ones that are useless or harmful. In this way the Protestant Work Ethic has been replaced by the Bobo Play Ethic, which is equally demanding. Everything we do must serve the Life Mission, which is cultivation, progress, and self-improvement.[172]

Brooks outs himself as a Bobo in referencing "We Bobos." But this is a qualified and ambiguous confession, because Brooks thereby announces himself as someone who, though participating in the Bobo dispensation, is also capable of recognizing it *as* a dispensation. Brooks stands outside of the Bobo ethos in order to discern a hero-system where liberals see only the ordinary human desire that remains upon casting aside religious and metaphysical illusion. From this vantage point, he recognizes that "individualism" simply *under-describes* the Bobos, because it omits the disciplinary character of their ethos. The Bobos think themselves authentic free-spirits standing above the spirit of seriousness. But qua hero-system, their endless cultivation, progress, and self-improvement is fundamentally symmetrical with the Code of the Gentleman. The Bobos are *beholden* to, *disciplined into*, their Life Mission no less than conservatives are beholden to, disciplined into their inherited moral and religious traditions.

Whether the Bobo is perusing sex manuals, waiting on dithering pedestrians, or embarking on strenuous outdoor adventures, the message is that he is, no less than the Gentleman, "waited for by all the tasks placed along the way." He too operates within a field of social meanings whose "mute demands" permeate his very agency, vitiating the claims to disengaged self-possession upon which his identity is premised. The less thoroughly buffered Gentleman subordinates personal inclination to duty in all spheres of life. By contrast, the Bobos are, Brooks says, "trying to build a house of obligation on a foundation of choice."[173] They may "adhere to dietary restrictions and the like with extraordinary rigor," but "somehow it is a rigor without submission."[174] Such is

[172] Ibid., pg. 200.
[173] Ibid., pg. 228.
[174] Ibid., pg. 243.

possible because the historical process at whose forefront the Bobos stand has already built obligation into choice, effecting a submission so total as to be lost from sight. In carrying his Code on his person, the Gentleman is implicitly reminded of the impulses that would prompt him to transgress it—reminded of the anarchic will of free men and, therefore, that "there are severe limits to the degree in which sin and disorder can be done away with in this world." But the Bobos who carry no code receive no such reminders. For they have *become their code*. And therein lies the bogusness of liberal claims to superior cognitive autonomy, which conservative claims of cultural oppression everywhere strive to expose.

"Conservaphobia" is the buffered identity's *structural repugnance toward porousness*—whether this be the patriotism "just shining through people's faces" at Sarah Palin rallies, the intuitive self-assurance of the traditional housewife, or the steely determination of the Gentleman. This repugnance is why conservatives feel they are being attacked, not simply for their ideas, but *in their being*. And they respond by attempting to expose *the* buffered identity's status as a hero-system, its *porousness with respect to its ideal of itself as buffered*, the nonexplicit engagement with the world that undergirds this identity's articulated disengagement from the world. Conservatives are ultimately reacting, not to any antithetical ideas, but to an antagonistic form of agency. And so they seek to disarm this agency of its prestige by imputing to it the very thing which it opposes in them—the enchanted world of premodernity, submission to an unchosen background of social meanings. The Bobos disavow the embodied feelings of the higher of which conservatives stand unashamed. But conservatives' "deeper, instinctive ways of knowing" tell them that these embodied feelings are being disingenuously lived in sublimated and intellectualized form even as they are denied by liberalism's official self-conception as the transcendence of all hero-systems, and that these feelings find more honest embodiment in the unalienated wholeness and intuitive wisdom of the ordinary American.

If conservatives sometimes react to liberalism with ad hominem attacks instead of facts and arguments, this is because it is the former that address the source of their grievances, which isn't liberals' ideas but their presumptions to a more self-transparent and self-regulating form of human agency. Conservative attacks on the "personal tastes and pretensions" of liberals are *correctives* to the unearned rhetorical advantage that accrues to liberals by virtue of the fact that their Beckerean pseudopods attach to practices admitting of strictly pragmatic rationales—like healthy food, aerobic exercise, and also scholarly gravitas. This compression of the spiritual and

the secular enables liberals to pass off a historically constructed way of being as essential human nature, as just ordinary human desire liberated from religious and metaphysical illusion. But maintaining this appearance is a liberal privilege. If liberals can disdain conservatives' preoccupation with the "merely symbolic" and charge that it comes at the expense of "substantive" issues, this is owing to the extent to which the symbolic has been compressed into the substantive within the buffered identity. This is an unearned luxury from the conservative perspective. And it is this inequality that drives them to scour the minutiae of liberals' "personal tastes and pretensions" in search of whatever "wrinkles" in that compression, like puritanical hostility to smoking, might *betray it as a compression*—might reveal that the symbolic has been covertly compressed into the substantive rather than courageously transcended.

Ad hominem reasoning cannot be disentangled from reasoning about the "issues" because the issues are always being employed to promote opposing ideals of self. The subtext of the arguments we marshal for or against various policies or values is always to impute ideological opponents with a deficit of self-transparency, to suggest that they have failed to achieve the fully realized human agency we enjoy. This is what makes the ad hominems theoretically relevant. They do not directly address ideas, but they are windows into structures of the interlocutors' self-understanding, the unspoken backdrop against which the ideas are articulated and understood. Ad hominem rhetoric is not an intellectual distraction, but an attempt to articulate an ontology of the human condition, which is what conservative claims of cultural oppression ultimately do.

PART THREE
IMPLICATIONS

Chapter Seven

The Ultimate in Sophistication

Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande was anthropologist E.E. Evans-Pritchard's famous study of the witchcraft-centered culture of the Azande tribe of the Congo. Evans-Pritchard discovered that witchcraft is a perennial problem in Zande life. Believing as they do that some of their neighbors are secretly witches who use their powers to harm or undermine others, Azande devote considerable energy to identifying witches through a variety of oracles. After discovering the one responsible for their misfortunes, they then entreat him to desist from further mischief, when necessary threatening him with disrepute or retaliatory magic. Like other western investigators, Evans-Pritchard took it for granted that witchcraft is a superstition, he disagreed with anthropologists who characterized the "primitive" thought of the Azande as somehow pre-logical or mystical.[1] Rather, he concluded that Zande thinking displayed a consistent logic that was amenable to rational analysis, which he was undertaking to provide. Azande do not simply believe whatever they will but rather evaluate empirical evidence according to a set of rules that guide their inferences and conclusions.

But while the Zande mind wasn't mystical or pre-logical, Evans-Pritchard describes the Azande as compartmentalizing their beliefs and relying on *ad hoc* explanations to a degree that will perplex the Western observer. The "poison oracle" was a prominent example of this. Azande feed a poison called *benge* to a fowl and then pose yes/no questions to it, specifying in advance that survival signifies "yes" and death signifies "no," or vice versa. As each question is posed twice, the investigator will receive contradictory "responses" as often as not. But the Azande could not be brought to doubt the efficacy of the oracle and would instead trace inconsistent responses to the sabotage of witches or breaches of taboo. Azande's tendency to compartmentalize their beliefs furthermore caused them to overlook the full significance of what they already know.[2] Realizing that a fowl's size and constitution are factors in its survival, Azande calibrated the dose

[1] *See* Steven Lukes, "Relativism in its Place," in *Rationality and Relativism*, eds. M. Hollis and S. Lukes (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), pgs. 268-69.
[2] E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarenden Press, 1976), pgs. 149–50.

of *benge* to reflect these. And likewise aware that some batches of *benge* are more potent than others, they administered the doses accordingly. But Azande would stop short of considering the broader implications of what they appeared to already understand, the possibility that the oracle's "answer" was entirely a function of these natural factors and had nothing to do with the questions posed.

This kind of compartmentalization was at its most egregious when Azande engaged in post-mortem examinations of deceased persons' intestines in search of black "witchcraft substance," in order to posthumously convict or exonerate the deceased of witchcraft. Given the Zande belief that witch-status is inherited patrilineally, it follows that only a few such examinations within the tribe will suffice to conclusively identify every witch in the village, nullifying the outcome of some earlier oracular consultations and obviating the need for any further ones. Nevertheless, Azande persisted in their oracular inquiries as though the identities of witches remained an open question, when those identities appeared settled on *their own premises*. Having brought this problem to the Azande's attention, Evans-Pritchard observed that they "see the sense of the argument but they do not accept its conclusions."[3]

This rejection of straightforward logical deduction will strike the scientifically-minded Westerner as unreason pure and simple. But the philosopher Peter Winch questioned this diagnosis:

> …the Azande when the possibility of this contradiction about the inheritance of witchcraft is pointed out to them, do *not* then come to regard their old beliefs about witchcraft as obsolete. 'They have no theoretical interest in the subject.' This suggests strongly that the context from which the suggestion about contradiction is made, the context of our scientific culture, is not at the same level as the context in which the beliefs about witchcraft operate. Zande notions of witchcraft do not constitute a theoretical system in terms of which Azande try to get a quasi-scientific understanding of the world. This in turn suggests that it is the European, obsessed with pressing Zande thought where it would not naturally go—to a contradiction—who is guilty of a misunderstanding, not the Zande. The European is in fact committing a category-mistake.[4]

The European observer commits a category-mistake because he assumes that Zande oracles constitute a more primitive and flawed version of his own science. But Winch argues that they constitute a distinct practice, a form of mythico-symbolic expression by which Azande orient

[3] Ibid., pg. 3
[4] Peter Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society," in *Rationality*, ed. Brian Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pg. 93.

themselves socially and ritually toward others and the wider universe. Zande post-mortem examinations may bear a superficial resemblance to our own scientific experiments, but their total cultural context reveals that they are a different kind of enterprise. And if Azande *understand themselves* to be engaged in ritual expression rather than science (or pseudo-science), then they are simply not engaged in science–even if aspects of their outward conduct resemble what we call an autopsy. The fact that they are unperturbed by what the European sees as an unambiguous theoretical contradiction indicates that they are not primarily in the business of theorizing. And this is why it is an unfair ethnocentric distortion to criticize them for having somehow *failed* to achieve an end, theoretical consistency, which was never their concern in the first place—just as it would be criticize to criticize an impressionistic painter for failing to paint a realistic paining. The physical features of their post-mortem examinations, opening up intestines and scrutinizing their contents, underdetermines these examinations' *meaning*, which is a function Zande purposes, not those of the Western theorist who studies them.[5]

It was natural that Westerners should unselfconsciously superimpose their own categories upon Zande practices. But this superimposition—and hence the judgment that the Azande are scientifically immature—revealed more about the Western observer than it did about the Azande and other "primitive" people. The theoretical and technological prowess of Western culture had, Winch argued, impoverished our own symbolic lives while inuring us to those of others. Our "blindness to the point of primitive modes of life is," Winch argued, "a corollary of the pointlessness of much of our own life,"[6] our alienation from those features of the human condition that Azande more fully acknowledge. If Westerners cannot recognize their category error, this is because it is "extremely difficult for a sophisticated member of a sophisticated society to understand a very simple and primitive society: in a way he must jettison his sophistication, a process which is itself perhaps the ultimate in sophistication."[7] Theorizing is a sophisticated activity. But it requires something more than mere sophistication—the "ultimate in sophistication"—to understand Zande practices in the context of Zande purposes, which are not captured by the language of theory. "Jettisoning" our sophistication doesn't mean rejecting

[5] Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 1990).
[6] Winch, *Understanding a Primitive Society*, pg. 106.
[7] Ibid., pg. 102.

science. But it does mean rejecting a parochial scientism that fails to recognize the presence of a different kind of rationality operating underneath what appears like theoretical irrationality.

The upshot of my argument thus far is that a similar kind of criticism can be leveled against the liberal elites and their understanding of conservative claims of cultural oppression. Indeed, Lee Harris's qualified defense of the populist conservative against the contempt and exasperation of the "cognitive elites" is profitably viewed as a politicized variant of Winch's argument, a defense of the ostensibly "primitive" populist conservative against the scientistic ethnocentrism of the liberal culture. Just as the Azande saw "the sense" of Evans-Pritchard's argument without feeling compelled to accept its conclusion, so Harris's populist conservative also "sees the sense" of the argument that there is a contradiction between his support for Medicare and his visceral hostility toward "socialized medicine," or between his insistence on small government and his expectation that America remain the world's preeminent power. If he does not accept the conclusion that he must therefore reconsider his views, this is because, just like the Azande, he has "no theoretical interest in the subject." This is why "the ostensible issues are always secondary," why he is not "particularly interested in honing beautifully crafted logical arguments," as Harris observes. The populist conservative is not, as Winch would say, "try[ing] to get a quasi-scientific understanding of the world," but rather endeavoring to preserve the endangered virtues of the ornery American, to which conservative claims of cultural oppression give symbolic expression.

The "cognitive elites" excoriate these ornery Americans for their failure to seek reflective equilibrium or expound the details of concrete policy proposals. But paraphrasing Winch, we might say that it is these elites, "obsessed with pressing [populist conservative] thought where it would not naturally go—to a contradiction," who are "guilty of a misunderstanding." The conservative populist isn't interested in theoretical consistency, but in preserving a particular character type against the ordering impulses of the liberal elites, in preserving a hero-system. If liberals cannot understand his resentment and resistance, this is because they view these through the lens of their own theoretical culture, which reveals theoretical contradictions and but not the virtues that generate those contradictions, the way of life wherein they *make sense*. The cognitive elites have the sophistication to discern the populist conservatives' logical fallacies. But only by jettisoning this sophistication can they achieve the ultimate in sophistication, which is to recognize that these fallacies are *beside the point* in the context of the populist conservative's overall way of being.

If Westerners' inability to understand the point of "primitive" ways of life is the corollary of the pointlessness of their own lives, then what the cognitive elites condemn as the populist conservative's nihilism and obstructionism reflects the elites' own failure to understand the conservative culture on its own terms, through categories indigenous to the conservative way of life. This way of life is premised, not on logic and evidence, but on the symbolic expression of virtues to which the elites are insensible. This is why Harris attacks the elites for their failure to recognize that we "need genuine diversity, not pseudodiversity, a real diversity of temperament, of attitudes, of character types."[8] The nuance and detachment of the professor should be respected,[9] but so too should be the temperamental recalcitrance of the ornery American, who preserves America's forgotten virtues against a hostile order.[10] It is to be expected that cognitive elites will judge ordinary Americans by cognitive standards. But the "ultimate in sophistication," Harris is suggesting, is a wider view of history and human nature that provides a broader perspective on the full panoply of human potentialities. To recognize this would be to jettison one's sophistication and achieve the ultimate in sophistication.

This is precisely what the mutation counter-narrative allows us to achieve, because to jettison one's sophistication is to transcend the epistemological framework, which that narrative exposes as the correlate of a particular identity. Conservative claims of cultural oppression may not make sense to liberals as "disinterested representations." But this is because they are *symbolic articulations of a certain mode of nonexplicit engagement with the world*, of the historical contingency and social artificiality of the buffered identity. This is precisely what the epistemological framework occludes from view. William Barrett observes:

> In modern philosophy particularly (philosophy since Descartes), man has figured almost exclusively as an epistemological subject—as an intellectual that registers sense-data, makes propositions, reasons, and seeks the certainty of intellectual knowledge, but not the man underneath all this, who is born, suffers, and dies. Naturally, the attempt to see the whole or integral man, in place of the rational or epistemological fragment of him, involves our taking a look at some unpleasant things.[11]

[8] Lee Harris, *The Next American Civil War: The Populist Revolt Against the Liberal Elite* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), pg. 218.
[9] Ibid., pg. 219.
[10] Ibid., pg. 208.
[11] William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1958), pg. 296.

The ethnocentrism of liberals consists in the fact that they look upon conservative claims of cultural oppression through the lens of the "epistemological subject" and then conclude that these claims are epistemologically deficient. But these claims are in fact a counter-cultural assault upon that very lens. They constitute an effort to articulate what lies underneath the "epistemological fragment" of man and thereby reveal this as a derivation from something more primordial, which cannot itself be understood in epistemological terms. This is cosmological orientation and the hero-systems it supports. Liberals cannot understand conservative claims of cultural oppression because their very identities blind them to this human constant and therefore to the fact that conservatives are defending one cosmological orientation against the imperiousness of another, resisting the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity in favor of an earlier, comparatively "pre-modern" form of consciousness. Conservative claims of cultural oppression are not a theoretical system, but conservatives' attempt to articulate this conflict, to articulate their under-theorized understanding of the mutation counter-narrative, which is precisely what liberals in their rationalism cannot process.

As we will now see, the epistemological framework suppresses, not only an anthropologically thicker description of conservative claims of cultural oppression, but also the normative implications of that thicker description. Conservative claims of cultural oppression raise a question about whether liberalism is vitiated by some disguised indeterminacy which, once exposed, would require liberals to cognize conservative grievances. And I will here be explaining how the epistemological framework occludes this indeterminacy from view, and so suppresses the questions it raises. To recognize these questions is to achieve the ultimate in sophistication, and this is our aim here.

1. Expressive Moderation

Dan Kahan observes that liberals lose their customary reluctance to abridge individual freedom absent compelling evidence of a behavior's harmfulness when the issue is gun control. Gun control gets defended on utilitarian grounds, with the commonsense suggestion that the ready availability of firearms creates a risk of death and injury. But common sense can mislead, and Kahan notes that, according to economist Steven Levitt, "having a swimming pool in one's backyard is a hundred times more lethal for a child than having a gun somewhere inside one's

home."[12] If gun control advocates were principally motivated by a utilitarian yearning to prevent empirically demonstrable harms, then they should as good utilitarians shift their limited resources away from gun control toward regulating backyard swimming pools. But most gun control advocates will not undertake this kind of career change, whatever the data turn out to be. And this indicates that there is something disingenuous about their utilitarian rationales. Gun control advocates do wish to reduce harms, but their assessments of harm reflect cultural commitments that are irreducible to harm reduction. As symbols of "patriarchy and racism, indifference and distrust,"[13] guns are an affront to their egalitarian and communitarian sensibilities. And this is why they pay attention to guns rather than swimming pools.

Liberalism aspires to a form of discourse that, having been purged of all contestable conceptions of the good, proceeds in terms that can resonate with the entire range of diverse worldviews found in a modern, pluralistic democracy. But Kahan argues that this aspiration to a culturally-neutral legal regime is unattainable, because the human mind is cognitively illiberal. Our perception of particular harms and benefits is a function of values more robust than is acknowledged in our utilitarian rationales. For it is on the basis of just these values that we assess what the harms and benefits actually are. This is why egalitarians and communitarians will perceive environmental danger more readily than free-market individualists, because regulating this danger is fully congruous with regulating the "commercial activities that generate inequality and legitimize the unconstrained pursuit of individual self-interest." By contrast, free-market individualists will be slower to recognize environmental danger because "they cherish [the] markets and private orderings" that will be disrupted by environmental regulation and worry "that excessive gun control will render individuals unable to defend themselves, a belief congenial to the association of guns with individualist virtues such as self-reliance, courage, and martial prowess."[14] In both cases, harm-assessments are being informed by cultural commitments that cannot simply be wished away. This is why Kahan objects to liberalism, not on metaphysical or political grounds, but on cognitive ones, because it calls upon us to do the impossible—to "make, interpret, and administer law without indulging sensibilities pervaded by our attachments to highly contested visions of the good."[15]

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[12] Dan M. Kahan, *The Cognitively Illiberal State*, 60 Stan. L. Rev. 115, 135 (2007).
[13] Ibid., pg. 134.
[14] Ibid., pg. 123.
[15] Ibid., pgs. 116-17.

Such indulgence—the equation of moral vice with physical danger and moral virtue with health and prosperity—was undisguised in pre-modern societies, where natural disasters were attributed to religious impiety or moral transgression.[16] But Kahan believes that these kinds of association remain with us in modern life, subtly informing all manner of ostensibly hard-nosed empirical debates, including global warming, nuclear power, drug policy, and gun control.[17] There is no escaping this predicament, which is a byproduct of modern life itself:

> We moderns are no less disposed to believe that moral transgressions threaten societal harm. This perception is not, as is conventionally supposed, a product of superstition or unreasoning faith in authority. Rather it is the predictable consequence of the limited state of any individual's experience with natural and social causation, and the role that cultural commitments inevitably play in helping to compensate for this incompleteness in knowledge. What truly distinguishes ours from the premodern condition in this sense is not the advent of modern science; it is the multiplication of cultural worldviews, competition among which has generated historically unprecedented conflict over how to protect society from harm at the very same time that science has progressively enlarged our understandings of how our world works.[18]

The "cognitive illiberalism" that was manifest in pre-modern cultures is the natural byproduct of our cognitive limitations as finite human beings. Our limited handle on the facts and of their causal interrelationship compel reliance on partisan cultural commitments to fill in inductive gaps, which must be plugged up somehow in the course of promulgating law and social policy. Hence our natural tendency to "view behavior that denigrates our moral norms as endangering public health, undermining civil order, and impeding the accumulation of societal wealth."[19] Disagreements that should ideally be strictly empirical have remained ideological because we simply lack the cognitive wherewithal to update our beliefs in response to new evidence without "recourse to the very same cultural heuristics that have generated... [our] existing beliefs."[20] Most people aren't scientific specialists and cannot readily assess the opposing science that is constantly laid at their feet by various activists. And so their own reliance on science—the decision to trust one expert or study rather than another—will always be guided by something other than science, their moral/cultural worldviews. Such recourse being inescapable, the view that "science will inevitably pull these cultural authorities into agreement with themselves reflects unwarranted optimism."[21]

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[16] Ibid., pg. 118.
[17] Ibid., pgs. 131-42.
[18] Ibid., pg. 119.
[19] Ibid., pg. 117.
[20] Ibid., pgs. 121-22.
[21] Ibid., pg. 124.

With cognitive illiberalism being our fate, Kahan argues that we would do well to abandon the pretense of hard-nosed empiricism in our policy debates and instead acknowledge our cultural partisanship. Abstention from ideological self-indulgence being impossible, the proper response to ideological discord isn't some impossible ideal of state moral neutrality, but "expressive overdetermination." Whereas the public reason defended by Rawls and other liberals requires political actors to "discharge the duty of civility by appealing to the 'overlapping consensus' of justifications common to all comprehensive views," expressive overdetermination turns this principle on its head and asks that this duty be discharged "by self-consciously constructing a discourse of overlapping dissensus comprising a plurality of justifications distinctive of the plural and opposing worldviews held by society's members."[22]

As an example of expressive overdetermination, Kahan cites France's national abortion law as related by Mary Ann Glendon:

> That law made abortion legal not "on demand," but "for a reason." A woman seeking to terminate her pregnancy was obliged to certify that doing so was necessitated by a condition of "emergency" sufficient to justify overriding the fetus's "right to life." This provision affirmed the worldview of religious traditionalists, who had opposed abortion on demand as expressively denigrating the sanctity of life. At the same time, the law made the individual woman's certification of "emergency" dispositive; it provided for no legal review of the basis or adequacy of it.[23]

Kahan believes we can achieve workable solutions to divisive social problems and temper ideologically driven cultural conflicts by devising laws and policies that, rather than presenting themselves as morally and culturally neutral, lend themselves to multiple moral/cultural interpretations, and so afford official recognition to the diversity of worldviews that must be appeased in a pluralistic democracy. This is exactly what the French law attempted to do. Expressive overdetermination means we agree not "to engage in forms of advocacy calculated to render laws and policies univocal in their meanings."[24] Rather than unconsciously projecting our cultural allegiances onto policy disputes under the guise of a public, non-sectarian reason, we should under the principle of "expressive candor" strive to self-consciously articulate our cultural worldviews, in order to ensure that they, but not they alone, are appeased by suitably crafted legislation. Such legislation can be expected to temper the resentment that is bound to arise

[22] Ibid., pgs. 145-46.
[23] Ibid., pg. 146.
[24] Ibid., pg. 145.

whenever we feel that the state has endorsed a worldview inimical to our own, and so it will facilitate the rational discussion that this resentment now impedes.

This is practicable, Kahan argues, because most people are "expressive moderates." While they will zealously oppose laws that symbolically denigrate their cultural worldviews, they are usually ready to support laws that can be variously interpreted as vindicating both their own and others' worldviews.[25] Because most people's need for cultural identity affirmation is largely defensive in nature, expressive politics need not be a zero-sum game.[26] If they have become just that, this is owing to our habit of denying rather than acknowledging and appropriately channeling our partisan allegiances. Cognitive illiberalism generates partisan animosity, and therefore empirical blindness, not because most people are ideological zealots, but because they resent the conceit with which their ideological opponents attempt to impose a moral orthodoxy under the guise of value-free reason.[27] People naturally respond to this pretense in kind, pushing laws and policies designed to promote their own orthodoxies under a veneer of scientific neutrality. The end result is a self-perpetuating cycle of "illiberal status competition" where cultural groups employ the machinery of the state to broadcast symbolic messages denigrating their opponents' worldviews and identities, with each repartee lending more fuel to the fire, propelling the parties further and further along a downward spiral.[28] The purpose of expressive overdetermination is arrest this descent. It is a formula for easing us into expressive moderation and replacing a vicious cycle with a virtuous one. Being assured that a policy will not be employed to symbolically denigrate their worldviews and identities, expressive moderates will be more willing to focus their energies on narrowly pragmatic and empirical questions, as they can now rest assured that the answers to these will not be used against them, whatever they turn out to be.

* * *

Insofar as Kahan is arguing that there is always a hero-system at play underneath facially disengaged ratiocination, his analysis is consistent with the one I have been advancing. Of particular relevance is his observation that even debates which proceed without any overt manipulation of cultural symbols nevertheless have a symbolic/cultural dimension. Even bare

[25] Ibid., pg. 149.
[26] Ibid., pg. 149.
[27] Ibid., pg. 118.
[28] Ibid., pg. 154.

statements of fact can be deployed in ways that exalt some cultural identities at the expense of others.[29] Cultural warfare isn't an idle distraction which we can just refuse to indulge, but the perennial subtext of public debate, obtruding itself even in ostensibly non-cultural debates about "bread-and-butter" issues.

But while Kahan's argument is clearly sophisticated, it fails to achieve the ultimate in sophistication. And this is because Kahan's very attempt to preempt "illiberal status competition" is itself an instance of that competition. For the ideal of "expressive moderation" upon which that attempt is premised is itself *expressive of the buffered identity* taken to its logical conclusion. Far from being neutral, the ideal serves to uphold that identity and its epistemological framework as the essential human nature in relation to which everything else is a mere distortion. Liberalism's very attempt to overcome parochialism and sectarianism therefore remains tainted by them, because expressive moderation is the outgrowth of the "original spiritual vision" revealed by the mutation counter-narrative.

The expressive moderate is at his core an "epistemological subject," as Barrett says "an intellectual that registers sense-data, makes propositions, reasons, and seeks the certainty of intellectual knowledge." Kahan recognizes that human beings are imperfectly rational, of course. But his expressive moderates possess a strategic/epistemological faculty that, while finite in its capabilities, is perfect within its own sphere—enjoying an existence that is non-ideological in its essence. Hovering above the strategic/epistemological faculty is an ideological faculty, to which the former will sometimes defer when incapable of proceeding by its own devices. To the extent there remains an open question as to things' causes, various cultural heuristics give resonance to causal hypotheses that appear to vindicate our ideological visions. But this means that the ideological faculty is of only secondary importance. The ideological faculty is to the epistemological faculty what Plato's "spirited" auxiliaries are to his rationalistic Guardians, a mere adjunct. Kahan relegates ideological commitment to the periphery of our agency structure, casting it as a last resort which, though necessary as a practical matter, is extrinsic to the core of our being. Our "attachments to highly contested visions of the good" are mere adjuncts serving to fill in cognitive gaps arising from our merely intellectual limitations, adjuncts to a strategic agent exercising his epistemological functions in pursuit of non-sectarian goods—public health, civil order, and prosperity. These goods cannot be *realized* without occasional recourse to sectarian

[29] Ibid., pg. 130.

commitments, but they can be *identified* independently of these. This is why Kahan objects to liberalism on cognitive rather than metaphysical grounds. Kahan accepts that hero-systems are an inescapable aspect of the human condition. But this is only because they are the "predictable consequence of the limited state of any individual's experience with natural and social causation," and not because they define human nature as such.

This is consistent with what we have come to recognize as the core impulses of liberalism. Kahan's call for expressive moderation through expressive overdetermination is ultimately a prescription for containing anthropocentricity and recognizing ourselves as strategic agents to the extent our flawed nature permits. Kahan recognizes that our ethically and cosmologically thicker commitments cannot be put out of play entirely. But he believes that they can be tempered in a way that allows us to more closely approximate the strategic ideal of a self-possessed, disengaged consciousness—a consciousness that can distinguish between the subjective world of human meaning and the objective world of cause and effect, and so register the laws of the latter without interference from the former. We may be deeply invested in our ideologies, but there is always the possibility of ideological divestment, and expressive overdetermination is a formula for achieving some measure of it—for weakening the grip of Beckerean pseudopods in order to operate within a more symbolically neutral environment. Being assuring that the social meanings glommed on to by our pseudopods are attached will be validated by the state, we will have the equanimity to stand at a greater distance from them and acknowledge their springs in our own psychological needs, our awareness of which will further fortify our commitment to expressive moderation. Kahan eschews the *direct* pursuit of the strategic stance through ideological neutrality, and instead proposes to achieve it *circuitously*, through a regime of expressive overdetermination and expressive moderation.

But Kahan's prescription is more sectarian than he recognizes. His call for expressive moderation illustrates the tendency among liberals to *intellectualize* what we call "worldviews" or "conceptions of the good," to view these as things that are, like the excarnated religion promoted by Religion Reform, "in the head." Thus conceived, they are either legitimate subjects of public debate and sensible motivations for voting behavior or else the potential targets of political manipulation, as when voters are suckered into sacrificing substantive interests for the sake of symbolic ones. They are either opinions whose discussion must be confined to the private sphere or else expressive needs that, being recalcitrant to such confinement, must be maximally

segregated from substantive (empirical) concerns and negotiated on a separate plane in a way that minimizes any spillover into the substantive sphere—the goal of expressive overdetermination.

But not having internalized the buffered identity as thoroughly as liberals, conservatives resist this intellectualization. Their worldviews exist, not in their heads, but in the world itself. Kahan contends that the difference between modern and pre-moderns isn't moderns' immunity to the distortive influence of cultural worldview on empirical deliberation, but the *number* of potentially distortive worldviews that are potentially in play. Whereas pre-modern cultures were homogenous, modern ones are pluralistic. But the difference runs deeper than this. As Taylor observes, in archaic societies "what we might call a construal of the moral/spiritual is lived not as such, but as immediate reality, like stones, rivers, and mountains."[30] Pre-moderns' "construal of the moral/spiritual" was enfleshed rather than excarnated, and so they cannot see it in the abstract, intellectualized terms preferred by liberals, as a kind of self-indulgence whose requirements have been projected onto what is actually a "neutral environment." What *Kahan* can conceptualize as a "construal of the moral/spiritual" that has been given its due by the wording of an abortion law is for conservatives lived in the "immediate reality" of an abortable unborn child. The personhood of the fetus isn't an opinion about the fetus, a merely expressive need, but something that is "just there" in the fetus. This is why conservatives must reject expressive moderation, because they reject the identity that would enable them to see their political commitments as expressive needs in the first place.

Jeremy Waldron writes that liberals' celebration of pluralism requires them to "assume that all ethical commitment has a common form: that there is something like *pursuing a conception of the good life* that all people, even those with the most diverse commitments, can be said to be engaged in."[31] But not everyone is disposed to abstract away from their concrete ideals and experiences and rise to this homogenizing vantage point, which is itself the parochial ideal of the buffered identity. What liberals call a "conception of the good life" is, for others, too intertwined with their sense of self to be classified as the species of a genus to which others are also entitled. Hence the liberal's dilemma:

> Faced with these possibilities, the liberal has a hard choice. Either he concedes that his conception of political judgment will be appealing only to those who hold their commitments in a certain 'liberal' spirit. Or he must look for a form of social order in

[30] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), pg. 12.
[31] Jeremy Waldron, "Theoretical Foundations of Liberalism," in *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 147 (Apr. 1987), pgs. 127, 144.

> which not only those with different ideals, but those with different views about the legitimacy of imposing their ideals, can be accommodated. Since the prospects for a social order of this kind are not very promising, the former more robust response seems the only one available. But if this line is taken, we must abandon any claim about the 'neutrality' of liberal politics. The liberal will have to concede that he has a great many more enemies (real enemies – people who will suffer under a liberal dispensation) than he has usually pretended to have.[32]

Liberals attempt to evade this hard choice, however, by in one way or another *moralizing* the refusal to hold one's commitments "in a certain 'liberal' spirit" as self-indulgence or mean-spiritedness, as a brute and ultimately gratuitous rejection of the self-restraint that liberals readily impose on themselves. Non-liberals are intemperate people who refuse the "expressive moderation" that is enough to satisfy others. And this means that whatever harms befall them under a liberal regime are the consequence of their own gratuitous obtuseness, not the liberal regime itself, whose demands are reasonable given the kinds of beings we truly are—buffered selves given to expressive moderation. This is why the liberal doesn't consider his opponents to be "real enemies" and can see himself as "neutral" notwithstanding Waldron's challenge. Liberals see themselves as neutral because they see their prescriptions as emanating logically from the perspective of the strategic agent operating in a "neutral environment" purged of anthropocentric contamination. This perspective being essential human nature liberated from teleological confinement, there can be no real reason for refusing it, and real enemies have real reasons.

But the mutation counter-narrative reveals that the reasons *are* real. Conservatives' resistance to the neutral environment of the strategic agent isn't gratuitous self-indulgence or a quirk of the authoritarian personality, and rather reflects human nature's default porousness, which is being targeted by the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. *These* are why liberalism has real enemies. Though pluralistic on its face, expressive moderation constitutes one more demand for the heightened affective-instinctual control of the buffered identity and its secularized asceticism. Kahan doesn't seek to put our affects wholly out of play, but it is in the same ascetic spirit that he seeks to create conditions under which they can be suitably regulated *by being recognized as affects*. He thus attempts to impose what is a particular disciplinary regime—an "austere ethics," if not of belief-formation, then of belief-expression, and really of belief-conceptualization.

[32] Ibid., pg. 145.

But conservatives reject this regime, which is why the French abortion law cited by Kahan would be patently incapable of appeasing American pro-lifers. This isn't only because what is being held out as a compromise between pro-lifers and pro-choicers is in its *function* a regime of abortion on demand but, just as significantly, because the "emergency" certification requirement would resonate with American pro-lifers as a hollow, transparently patronizing overture to the conviction that a fetus is a moral person. The ideal of expressive moderation would essentially turn the legislative process into a group therapy circle. For the French abortion law implicitly characterizes the motivations that drive pro-lifers as akin to the emotions that would be aired therein. The expectation is that the group's participants learn to trace their worldviews to their idiosyncratic psychological proclivities. Each participant may express his stance toward abortion without censure, in return for which he must acknowledge that his political commitments are ultimately expressive needs, which others need only validate *as expressive needs*. But pro-lifers must see this as the ultimate insult, as the "illiberal status competition" of the dominant liberal dispensation, because expressive moderation is just another way of pushing the buffered identity and its ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. What conservatives see a discrepancy between liberal theory and liberal practice consists in the fact that liberalism can be tolerant of diverse beliefs only because it first normalizes certain "excarnated" *ways of believing* while stigmatizing those who refuse this normalization as having refused the "duty of civility."

This vitiates liberal neutrality in conservative eyes. Kahan recommends that laws be crafted to avoid insulting the sensibilities of different cultural constituencies. But what qualifies as an insult is itself a function of these sensibilities—that is, a function of whether one lives one's "construal of the moral/spiritual" as a construal or as immediate reality. The ultimate in sophistication is the sophistication to recognize this, to recognize that the broad-minded tolerance ostensibly signaled by expressive overdetermination is, in its deeper subtext, a form of symbolic *aggression* against those who refuse the excarnation of the buffered identity—just one more expression of this identity's intellectualized, sublimated cruelty. While Kahan defends "expressive candor," his prescriptions are less than candid, because they are yet another contribution to the "censorship of fashion" of insinuated ridicule, which mocks and trivializes through its very claims to understanding and tolerance.

Expressive moderation may temper sectarian discord among those in whom the buffered identity has become second nature. But this identity is itself a source of sectarian discord for

others, who can see this identity as indeed *second* nature, a superimposition on human nature's default state. Liberalism is compromised by illiberalism, not only cognitively and epistemologically, but also cosmologically and physiologically, because an "original spiritual vision" has been built into liberalism's most basic, pre-cognitive impulses. If liberals fail to attain the ultimate in sophistication, this is because they cannot recognize how the level of abstraction at which they conceptualize the disjunction between the sectarian and the non-sectarian is itself a sectarian phenomenon, a product of excarnation and the spiritual vision that animates it. What liberals represent as their expressive restraint is, as conservatives must see it, an expressive *indulgence*, an assertion of the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity against those who resist it. Most people may indeed be expressive moderates. But this is because they have been *trained and disciplined into that disposition*, and because that disposition has become a source of its own spiritual satisfactions. One of these satisfactions is what Kahan calls "the duty of civility," which expressive overdetermination and the overlapping consensus each seek to discharge in their own way. And this is why liberals are, in the very act of demanding civility, engaged in the greatest incivility of all, the incivility of imposing their own historically constructed form of agency as through it was essential human nature liberated from illusion.

2. The Amygdala Theory of Conservatism

The same liberal ethnocentricity can be discovered in what Goldberg decries as the "always new science of conservative phrenology"—the study of political attitudes' origins in our biological substratum—which he believes is deployed by liberals to defame conservatives as mentally defective. Like Kahan's call for expressive moderation, the new conservative phrenology is characterized by a certain sophistication which disguises an absence of the ultimate in sophistication. As with Kahan, this is because the privileging of the epistemological subject obscures what are the *supra-epistemological implications* of the discourse, elides how cultural warfare is a struggle, not only between opposed beliefs, but more importantly between opposed *ways of being*. In reducing conservatism to narrowness and dogmatism, the new conservative phrenology obscures how conservativism functions as a form of resistance against the civilizing process and its culmination in the buffered identity. In concealing this, it illustrates from another perspective how liberals can, as Waldron says, pretend to have far fewer real enemies than they

actually do. I will survey the new conservative phrenology in this section and then unravel its broader philosophical significance in the next one.

The key insights of the field are summarized in Chris Mooney's *The Republican Brain*, which offers an intriguing physiological explanation for why conservatives may be less disposed toward "expressive moderation" than liberals. Mooney reports that magnetic resonance imaging reveals that whereas conservatives tend to have a larger right amygdala, the evolutionarily more ancient part of the brain that generates immediate flight or fight responses to threatening stimuli, liberals tend to possess more gray matter in the anterior cingulated cortex (ACC), the evolutionarily newer system that suspends the amygdala's automatic responses in order to assess facts and detect errors.[33] Whereas conservatives tend to be more instinctive and given to immediate reflex actions, liberals are more reflective and cognitive, able to suspend automatic fear responses in order to undertake a more careful evaluation of the facts. The ideology of conservatives, says Mooney, is "reflected in their *physiology*." Every human, just like every animal, possesses a "fear system" capable of "rapid-fire defensive reactions." But that system is stronger, more predominant among conservatives.[34]

The physiological origin of political disagreement was confirmed by a study in which patrons exiting a bar were flagged down and offered blood alcohol tests in exchange for completing a short questionnaire about their political beliefs. The researchers discovered that alcohol shifts us to the right politically, as blood alcohol level was correlated with the expression of more conservative views among self-described liberals and conservatives alike.[35] The explanation, one researcher suggested, was that "people's cognitive architecture is more consistent with conservative ideology, because that's the way brains are built."[36] Conservatism, then, may represent the more "natural" human (and animal) state that is to various degrees suppressed in liberals—with the dis-inhibiting effects of alcohol temporarily resetting them closer to the default setting where evolutionarily older rapid-fire reactions overwhelm the ACC.

This "amygdala theory of conservatism" was supported by a University of Nebraska study, which discovered that tough-on-crime, strongly pro-military conservatives "have a more

[33] Chris Mooney, *The Republican Brain: The Science of Why They Deny Science—and Reality* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), pg. 111.
[34] Ibid., pg. 114.
[35] Ibid., pg. 108.
[36] Ibid., pg. 109.

pronounced startle reflex, measured by eye-blink strength after hearing a sudden loud noise." Conservatives also exhibited greater "skin conductance"—a moistening of sweat glands indicating sympathetic nervous system arousal—when shown threatening images like maggots in an open wound or a large spider on someone's face.[37] By contrast, "[i]ndividuals with measurably lower physical sensitivities to sudden noises and threatening visual images were more likely to support foreign aid, liberal immigration policies, pacifism, and gun control."[38] The hypothesis was also corroborated by an Italian study demonstrating that conservatives more than liberals displayed "automatic selective attention to negative stimuli." When shown a series of positive and negative words in different colors, conservatives proved less able to recall the colors that accompanied negative words—like "vomit," "horrible," "disorder," and "disgust." They were more than liberals distracted by the negativity, and so became less attentive to their surroundings.[39]

Mooney argues that conservatives' larger amygdalae affect how they process information, including political information. Liberals and conservatives differ, not only in the contents of their beliefs, but also in the rigidity with which they hold them.[40] A large body of studies across many countries confirms that "conservatives tend to have a greater need for closure than do liberals."[41] Whereas the preeminence of the ACC in liberals gives them an "Open personality," the more robust amygdalae of conservatives give them a "Closed personality." Given its "high need for closure," this personality-type will tend to "*seize* on a piece of information that dispels doubt or uncertainty, and then *freeze*, refusing to admit or consider new information."[42] This is why so many conservatives could have insisted against all the evidence that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and that Saddam Hussein colluded with Osama bin Laden, "finding themselves unable to escape the quagmire of unreality even after several years had passed."[43] It is also why conservatives tend to "select themselves into belief-affirming information streams" like Fox News or right-wing talk radio,[44] which shield them against the "belief challenges" leveled by what they dismiss as the liberal media.[45] Conservatives' angry defensiveness before inconvenient truths is

[37] Ibid., pg. 113.
[38] Cited from Jonah Goldberg, *The Tyranny of Clichés: How Liberals Cheat in the War of Ideas* (Sentinel 2012), pg. 209-10.
[39] Mooney, *The Republican Brain*, pg. 261.
[40] Ibid., pgs. 10, 71.
[41] Ibid., pg. 69.
[42] Ibid., pg. 69.
[43] Ibid., pg. 46.
[44] Ibid., pg. 158.
[45] Ibid., pg. 166.

the predictable consequence of their specific neurological make-up. With their stronger amygdalae pressing for immediate reactions and their weaker ACCs unable to restrain them, conservatives are less able to suspend judgment. Being more tolerant of ambiguity and given to integrative complexity, however, the Open personality of liberals is "much more accepting of change and new ideas," much more ready to suspend judgment in the absence of evidence or to alter judgment with the arrival of new evidence.

Mooney doesn't deny that there exist intellectually sophisticated conservatives who know how to construct arguments and cite evidence. But even here the ACC is subservient to the amygdala, because these sophisticated conservatives are merely "smart idiots" who employ their sophistication to rationalize what they already want to believe. This was confirmed by a study showing that college-educated conservatives are *more* skeptical of climate change than their less educated brethren.[46] By contrast with these "smart idiots," sophisticated liberals are just plain smart. Unlike conservatives, they can apportion their beliefs to the weight of the evidence, weigh counterarguments, and modify their views accordingly.[47]

Being human, individual liberals may go astray here and there, as when their countercultural impulses lead them to air false claims about vaccination, nuclear power, fracking, or the efficacy of holistic medicine. But all is not equal between liberals and conservatives. Liberal ideologies will seduce some liberals some of the time. But the liberal psychology and culture operate as effective checks against the cognitive derelictions of individual liberals. Liberal ideologies do not generate large followings because the Left's psychology of disobedience and anti-authoritarianism ensures that those making empirically unsupported claims "will be challenged, sometimes quite vigorously or even viciously."[48] Whereas conservative elites encourage their followers' motivated cognition, their liberal counterparts can be counted on to condemn whatever hokum grows out of their own ranks.[49] This is rarer among conservatives, whose "pro-authority biases" drive them to be "more unified and supportive of their political 'team.'" Conservatives are "less willing to pick a fight with their friends, less likely to issue a corrective when they need to issue one, less motivated to step out of rank and call out bogus

[46] Ibid., pg. 48.
[47] Ibid., pgs. 232, 185.
[48] Ibid., pg. 234.
[49] Ibid., pg. 185.

assertions."[50] By contrast, liberals do not place a premium on obedience and group solidarity.[51] Being "children of the Enlightenment," they "don't bow to authority, or pledge allegiance to a team."[52]

This Enlightenment heritage is why even the most ideologically passionate liberals "remain allied with scientists, who just aren't going to put up with any nonsense in their fields of expertise." Liberals and scientists are usually on the same side of the issues because liberals' Open personality—with its curiosity, tolerance, and flexibility—disposes them toward the scientific method, compelling a respect for scientists that is rarer among conservatives.[53] Whereas conservatives routinely dismiss science and expertise, it is "hard, psychologically," says Mooney "for liberals to buck what scientists say, and to withstand the intellectual beating that is sure to follow if they do."[54] By contrast, conservatives' Closed personalities land them in overwhelming conflict with the scientific consensus on a host of issues.[55] Hence the wide "expertise gap" between liberals and conservatives in the modern world.[56]

Seeking to close this gap, conservatives now foster their own "counterexpertise to thwart mainstream knowledge."[57] Sustained by think tanks and other well-funded institutions, this counterexpertise sustains "an alternative reality on the right," providing conservatives with the "evidence" and "arguments" needed by their ideologically motivated cognition.[58] Having seceded from the common reality occupied by liberals and independents, conservatives have "their own 'truth,' their own experts to spout it, and their own communication channels—newspapers, cable networks, talk radio shows, blogs, encyclopedias, think tanks, even universities—to broad- and narrowcast it."[59] All these serve the "belief affirmation and ideological activation"[60] that ultimately drives conservatives, cloaking the promptings of their amygdalae as rational responses to bedrock truth. Being embodied human organisms, liberals have their own neurologically driven psychological needs to satisfy. But those needs include "the need for cognition and the need for

[50] Ibid., pg. 83.
[51] Ibid., pg. 227.
[52] Ibid., pg. 218.
[53] Ibid., pg. 236.
[54] Ibid., pg. 226.
[55] Ibid., pg. 180.
[56] Ibid., pg. 84.
[57] Ibid., pg. 182.
[58] Ibid., pg. 145.
[59] Ibid., pg. 3.
[60] Ibid., pg. 138.

accuracy, as well as the need to distinguish oneself from others and stand out, to be unique rather than part of the herd."[61] Liberals are as attached to their core values emotionally, but these values happen to include "the Enlightenment belief that if you can't get the facts right, you can't solve the problem and make the world better."[62]

At the same time, these Enlightenment convictions have also kept liberals from truly understanding conservatives. Against all the evidence, liberals persist in the naïve faith in the rationality, or potential rationality, of conservatives, believing that the right, properly formulated argument will somehow, someday bring them around. Though this hope has been dashed time and again, many liberals retain it. As children of the Enlightenment, they have projected what is a specific cultural dispensation —the demand for reasons, arguments, and evidence—onto human nature as such, including the conservatives in whom this faculty has yet to be liberated. But this is a distortion, Mooney argues. Conservatives' amygdalae cannot simply be argued away, and liberals will never succeed in enlightening conservatives without first taking this into account. This would involve, not logically tighter dialectic, but defusing conservatives' natural fear and defensiveness toward the unknown and untried. And this means being more attentive to the pre-rational, identitarian motivations to which the children of the Enlightenment give short shrift.

* * *

As we already began to see in a previous chapter, George Lakoff has some recommendations about how this project might be undertaken, how liberals transcend the limitations of their traditional Enlightenment worldview and become more astute politically. Lakoff argues that conservatives have succeeded in gradually nudging so many "biconceptuals" to the right because they recognize better than liberals that "politics is not just about policy and interest groups and issue-by-issue debate."[63] Understanding this, conservatives could enact "cognitive policies" aiming to "change brains in a conservative direction."[64] Embracing the mythic, metaphorical, and emotional aspects of politics, they constructed a language that actively frames particular policy choices in accordance with Strict Father morality, promoting, not only the

[61] Ibid., pg. 227.
[62] Ibid., pg. 218.
[63] George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (The University of Chicago Press 2002), pg. 19.
[64] George Lakoff, *The Political Mind: Why You Can't Understand 21st-Century American Politics with an 18th-Century Brain* (Viking, 2008), pg. 169.

specific policies at issue, but also the frameworks of metaphor into which other controversies will be automatically subsumed.[65] Hence slogans like "tax relief," which evoke the plight of the beleaguered "model citizen" and thus discourage taxpayers from seeing themselves as nurturers contributing to the public good.[66] Hence too the "war on terror," which in activating a fear response also activates the broader conservative worldview by inculcating the need for a strong authority figure and protector.[67] Conservatives have known how to skillfully deploy a set of images and symbols that activate the conservative disposition by increasing the "synaptic strength of the neurons in the circuitry characterizing conservative thought" while correspondingly inhibiting the progressive synaptic circuitry. In doing so, conservatives caused Strict Father morality to become "neurally bound" with specific issues,[68] often exploiting traumatic events like 9/11 in whose aftermath the synaptic connections of human beings are susceptible to reconditioning.[69]

Meanwhile, the rationalistic and technocratic bent of liberalism has alienated many Americans. By remaining tied to an "Old Enlightenment" framework according to which reason is "conscious, literal, logical, universal, unemotional, disembodied,"[70] liberals have shown themselves out of touch with the actual springs of our political allegiances, inadvertently reinforcing liberalism's reputation as foreign and elitist.[71] The American public may not agree with conservative policies. However, those policies are never evaluated in the abstract, but always in the context of particular frames whose resonance for us is a function of the broader neural systems they activate. And conservatives have been adept at systematically cultivating those systems which serve their cause.

Though cognitive science has amply discredited the Old Enlightenment view of reason, we have yet to digest the full implications of what we already know:

> It should come as no surprise then that the ideas that our embodied brains come up with depend in large measure on the peculiarities of human anatomy in general and on the way we, as human beings, function on our planet and with each other. This is not surprising when discussed in vague abstractions, but it is remarkable in detail: even our ideas of morality and politics are embodied in this rich way—those ideas are created and carried

[65] Ibid., pg. 170.
[66] Ibid., pg. 239.
[67] Ibid., pg. 126.
[68] Ibid., pgs. 108-13.
[69] Ibid., pg. 125.
[70] Ibid., pg. 1.
[71] Ibid., pg. 55.

> out not merely by the neural anatomy and connectivity of our brains, but also by the ways we function bodily in the physical and social world.[72]

It follows from this rich embodiment that people's moral and political views cannot be altered as will by argument alone, because what we experience to be the force of an argument is always bound up with our broader social and physical functioning as embodied organisms.[73] Our political attitudes emerge out of synaptically encoded moral narratives, which possess a dramatic structure comprised of heroes, villains, victims, helpers, and so forth. And this is in turn undergirded by an emotional structure which binds the dramatic structure to positive and negative emotional circuitry. Feelings like anger, fear, and relief are responses to developments within the dramatic structure—such as villainy, battle, and victory.[74] This is why we feel elated when our political candidate wins and depressed when he loses. The candidate's fate has been neurally integrated with our dopamine circuitry, which is activated by his victory and suppressed by his defeat.[75] We aren't born with these narratives, but their foundations become physically encoded in our brains quickly enough and constitute the lenses through which we see others and ourselves.[76] Our choice of political candidate can sometimes change. But the "deep narratives" that ultimately drive our choices are strongly resistant to change.[77] These have been synaptically encrypted into our physiology and cannot be altered absent a transformation in our broader brain structure.[78] To the extent change is possible, this will be, not because arguments have changed our minds, but because language has changed our brains, because the right words and images have strengthened some synaptic connections while weakening others to the point that political reorientation becomes possible.[79]

Liberals wonder how so many economically struggling conservatives can vote against their rational self-interest. But the "New Enlightenment" Lakoff advocates challenges the primacy of self-interest as understood by classical liberalism.[80] Although all organisms are "self-maintaining" in that they "have to breathe, move, eat, avoid being harmed or killed, and so on,"[81] this organismic self-maintenance is not the same thing as "having as many goodies as possible." Liberals

[72] Ibid., pg. 10.
[73] Ibid., pg. 10.
[74] Ibid., pg. 93.
[75] Ibid., pg. 28.
[76] Ibid., pg. 33.
[77] Ibid., pg. 38.
[78] Ibid., pg. 59.
[79] Ibid., pg. 231.
[80] Ibid., pg. 203
[81] Ibid., pg. 204.

sometimes associate conservatism with raw egoism. But self-interest isn't a self-contained motivation and is rather defined by the broader metaphorical moral system of which it is a part.[82] If conservatives celebrate the free pursuit of economic gain, this is in the name of Strict Father morality, because this has been conceptualized as a fount of "moral strength," the self-reliance and self-discipline that uphold authority against external and internal evils.[83] Economic self-interest is pursued, not out of any culturally neutral egoism, but as a sign of, and reward for, having upheld "Moral Order."[84] The same can be said of Nurturant Parent morality. If nurturers sometimes nurture themselves, this is no mere egoistic self-indulgence, but the *sine qua non* of nurturing others.[85] The development of human potential, in oneself as well as in others, is a moral calling within Nurturant Parent morality.[86] And this is what gives the self-interest of liberals its definition.[87]

All this, argues Lakoff, is something that conservatives appreciate intuitively. Being more constrained by the Old Enlightenment, the rationalistic Left is preoccupied with point-by-point debate of concrete utilities. By contrast, conservatives are more attuned the holistic manner in which human brains actually function, more attuned to the pre-rational roles of moral metaphor and narrative[88]: "Conservatives are fond of suggesting that liberals don't understand what they say, that they just don't get it. The conservatives are right."[89] In rejecting the Old Enlightenment, Lakoff endorses some classic conservative assumptions. Amy Wax observes:

> Those who think culture matters are partial to a view of human motivation, choice, personality, and moral life that makes "enlightened" intellectuals uneasy. The rich picture of human motivation embraced by conservative traditionalists like Oakeshott and Burke necessarily resists systematic description. These thinkers challenge a materialist view that sees persons as "rational actors" who are motivated by self-interest and who operate through reasoned calculation. Rather, they observe that people are often moved by values, emotions, ideologies, moral expectations, and group identity, and sometimes take decisions that appear self-defeating, unpredictable, and at odds with rational deliberation.[90]

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[82] Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, pg. 95.
[83] Ibid., pg. 35.
[84] Ibid., pg. 68.
[85] Ibid., pgs. 119, 122.
[86] Ibid., pg. 137.
[87] Ibid., pg. 131.
[88] Lakoff, *The Political Mind*, pg. 12.
[89] Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, pg. 24.
[90] Amy L. Wax, *The Conservative's Dilemma: Traditional Institutions, Social Change, and Same-Sex Marriage*, 42 San Diego L. Rev. 1059, 1091-92 (2005).

The New Enlightenment, then, is not so very new for conservatives. But while Lakoff appears to agree with conservatives' psychological premises, he doesn't believe these truly validate the conservative cause. Human beings may not always be motivated by rational self-interest. But there is such a thing as our rational self-interest, and Strict Father morality is disconnected from it. As we saw in Chapter Four, Strict Father morality does not "keep one in direct touch with human flourishing at the most basic level of experience." It "gives priority to forms of metaphorical morality… over experiential morality" and so is uprooted from "the nonmetaphorical, literal, directly experienced foundation of all metaphorical moral systems." Notwithstanding the often irrational, fact- insensitive nature of human beings, progressive values are the more rational, fact-sensitive ones. But the human mind being what it is, these values cannot be directly inculcated by strictly rational means, through facts and arguments alone, and rather require liberals to cultivate *the kind of idealism that equips us to recognize the facts*, the kind of metaphorical moral system that can direct us to, or at least coincide with, the non-metaphorical foundations of human flourishing. And this is Nurturant Parent morality. Like Kahan's expressive moderation, Lakoff's New Enlightenment represents an effort to discover mechanisms through which our rationalistic ideals can accommodate the ineluctably irrational, anthropocentric aspects of ourselves. In the one case as in the other, the solution isn't to repudiate reason wholesale, but to adopt a more sophisticated understanding of reason's limitations, itself an act of reason.

While conservatives have a superior instinctive appreciation for the holistic, idealistic character of political deliberation, Lakoff hopes that progressives can achieve a theoretical understanding of it and then play the game as it must be played and has always been played. If progressives are to prevail, this will be by deploying "language, images, and narratives that positively activate the progressive worldview, while acting negatively to inhibit the effect of the conservative worldview."[91] Rather than fixating on head-to-head arguments focused on the logical minutiae of contested questions, progressives can gradually nudge biconceptuals toward progressivism by first talking to them about issues where they are already progressive—for example, progressive religious values like caring for the poor or progressive community values like helping neighbors—in order to sow the synaptic seeds for a broader progressivism.[92]

[91] Lakoff, *The Political Mind*, pg. 120.
[92] Ibid., pg. 114.

Manipulative though it might seem, this strategy does not betray liberalism's Enlightenment roots. In its broadest sense, Enlightenment means respect for facts. And it is a fact that our embodied reason is "shaped by our bodies and brains and interactions in the real world," and that our conscious thinking is "shaped by the vast and invisible realm of neural circuitry not accessible to consciousness."[93] Being part of the "permanent furniture of our brains," narrative and metaphor cannot be erased and replaced by "cold, hard reason." We can, however, become more aware of this furniture, better able to make intelligent use of it.[94] The New Enlightenment is simply a rational response to discoveries that could not have been anticipated in the Eighteenth Century, and is ultimately consistent with the Enlightenment's original promise.

3. The New Enlightenment

But does the New Enlightenment truly redound to the liberal cause? Or does liberals' grasp of its implications remain distorted by Old Enlightenment prejudices—just like Kahan's sophistication about cognitive illiberalism remains distorted by his rationalism? As we shall now see, the nature of this distortion is revealed by conservative claims of cultural oppression, which embody the ultimate in sophistication that the New Enlightenment thus far lacks.

What Mooney calls the "amygdala theory of conservatism" comports with the mutation counter-narrative in crucial respects. As we have seen, the buffered identity emerges from the porous one through the suppression of the wilder instinctual and affective oscillations of the pre-modern self, with its immediate fear responses to an uncertain, often hostile environment. And conservatives' greater "skin conductance" and more pronounced "startle reflexes" can be viewed as the modern residue of this pre-modern personality structure. Responding to what Elias describes as "the incurable unrest, the perpetual proximity of danger, the whole atmosphere of this unpredictable and insecure life," this personality structure was very often in the grip of immediate fear responses. The amygdala theory of conservatism therefore reveals the biological substratum, not only of conservative (and liberal) thinking, but also of the changes in the overall human make-up chronicled by the mutation counter-narrative. These changes involved the progressive imposition of a new discipline, and this now turns out to be the disciplining of the amygdala by

[93] Ibid., pg. 13.
[94] Ibid., pg. 36.

the ACC. We cannot travel back in time to medieval Europe in order to measure its amygdalae against our own, of course, but the amygdala theory of conservatism provides concrete physiological correlates for what I have described as the progressive buffering of the human agent. We might say that the mutation counter-narrative historicizes the amygdala theory of conservatism, just as the amygdala theory of conservatism neurologizes the mutation counter-narrative.

This is why the New Enlightenment can both illuminate and be illuminated by conservative claims of cultural oppression. As saw in an earlier chapter, Sean Hannity charges that liberals are prepared to bring "the full force" of their "rhetorical firepower" to bear in their attacks against conservatives. And the New Enlightenment suggests that the metaphor of "firepower" reflects an accurate intuitive appreciation of the neurological stakes, where the usual distinction between force and persuasion is dissolved. Mooney criticizes the traditional Enlightenment view that beliefs are "somehow disembodied, suspended above us in the ether." Having misunderstood the nature of beliefs in this way, we imagine that "all you have to do is flip up the right bit of correct information and wrong beliefs will dispel, like bursting a soap bubble." But the truth is that our "[b]eliefs are *physical*," and that "[t]o attack them is like attacking one part of a person's anatomy, almost like pricking his or her skin (or worse)."[95] If liberals shrug off the suggestion that they are engaged in an "assault" against conservatives and their values, this can only be because they remain under the spell of the Old Enlightenment, imagining that beliefs are "suspended above us in the ether" and therefore immune from assault. Frank writes that when conservatives complain of their "persecution" by liberals, what they actually mean here is "not imprisonment or excommunication or disenfranchisement, but criticism," like editorials expressing disagreement with them.[96] But *understood naturalistically*, this "criticism" can be a rather intrusive thing, an endless pricking away at conservative identities that slowly erodes the synaptic strength of the neural connections underpinning Strict Father morality. This is surely a kind of "assault," which is why the New Enlightenment endows conservative claims of cultural oppression with a new credibility.

In a talk addressing whether conservatives can "reclaim the culture," Goldberg concluded his remarks by advising his audience of young conservatives:

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[95] Mooney, *The Republican Brain*, pg. 37.
[96] Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2005), pg. 213.

> Be happy… right. There is nothing, nothing that pisses off the Left more than a happy conservative. It violates all the things that they believe in… The place where liberals win the most, where the Left wins the most, is at the level of claiming that to be a truly realized and happy and joyous person you have to be on the Left. And the amazing reality is how utterly untrue that is.[97]

Liberals will surely dispute that the misery of conservatives figures so prominently on their agenda. What pisses them off, they will retort, is racial, sexual, and economic inequality, not the possibility of joyous conservatives. And where they have prevailed, this has been by offering solutions to just these problems, not by marketing liberalism as the superior therapy, as Goldberg seems to be suggesting. However, the New Enlightenment places Goldberg's allegation in a new light, as a premonition of liberalism's ultimate aims. For the victory of liberalism would mean the unraveling of the social structures that sustain conservatives' synaptic make-ups. And to deactivate these is also to deactivate those persons constituted by them, conservatives. This may not be tantamount to imprisonment or disenfranchisement. But understood naturalistically, it is an attack on the foundations of the self. And this cannot make for a happy conservative. Liberals may not actively relish the misery of conservatives. But their tacit agenda of synaptic rewiring has that misery as its corollary, a hopeful sign that conservatives' synaptic networks are becoming unraveled and devitalized. This is why Goldberg can urge happiness upon conservatives as a kind of political act, because he is implicitly operating within the framework of the New Enlightenment.

Lakoff is correct that organismic self-maintenance isn't identical to the rational self-interest of *homo economicus*. But the requirements of organismic self-maintenance go well beyond mere breathing, eating, and physical safety and encompass the preservation of the neural patterns that sustain our hero-systems and identities. As we have seen, liberals will dismiss these as merely "symbolic" concerns. But Becker observes:

> Anthropologists have long known that when a tribe of people lose the feeling that their way of life is worth-while they may stop reproducing, or in large numbers simply lie down and die beside streams full of fish. Food is not the primary nourishment of man, strange as that may sound to some ethological faddists.[98]

> [S]hort of natural catastrophe, the only time life grinds to a halt or explodes in anarchy and chaos, is when a culture falls down on its job of constructing a meaningful hero-system for its members. The depopulation of Melanesia earlier in this century, as well as the loss of interest by the Marquesan Islanders in having children, did not puzzle anthropologists: in

[97] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3WLlHN6Q8k
[98] Ernest Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning* (New York: The Free Press, 1971), pg. 76.

> the face of inroads from white traders and missionaries upon everything that gave them a sense of value, the islanders simply gave up.[99]

These are extreme cases, clearly. Culturally oppressed though they may be, conservatives are not about to stop reproducing and lie down to die besides streams full of fish. Nevertheless, the anthropological record serves to blur the neat lines that liberals would draw between the merely symbolic and the truly substantive, revealing the ways in which they are profoundly intertwined. And this is consistent with the New Enlightenment. Mooney writes:

> If we have strong emotional convictions about something, then these convictions must be thought of as an actual physical part of our brains, residing not in any individual brain cell (or neuron) but rather in the complex connections between them, and the pattern of neural activation that has occurred so many times before, and will occur again. The more we activate a particular series of connections, the more powerful it becomes. It grows more and more a part of us, like the ability to play guitar or juggle a soccer ball.[100]

This neural activation is why conservative claims of cultural oppression are sincere rather than contrived. What liberals would dismiss as conservatives' "vague premonitions of erosion or unraveling" of some ethereal social fiber is, translated into non-anthropocentric terms, the gradual unraveling of a neurologically encoded heroic narrative, the erosion of its synaptic strength at the hands of a hostile cultural environment that fails to activate, and indeed works to de-activate, the synaptic connections that underpin conservatives' identities and hero-system. These connections are as much a part of us as are our limbs, organs, and bank accounts. Such harms may not be clearly visible and incontestable, like the harms of famine, disease, or stagnating wages. But this does not make them any less "real" in the context of the sophisticated scientific understanding of human nature to which Lakoff and presumably all liberals aspire.

While liberals' commitment to non-anthropocentricity keeps them from accepting Strict Father morality's concerns about "Moral Order" at face value, it also provides them with an alternative language in which those concerns can be *reconceptualized non-anthropocentrically*. Grievances that might be dismissed as "merely symbolic" are, neurologically speaking, as substantive as anything. Lakoff charges that Strict Father morality prioritizes metaphorical morality over experiential morality. But Strict Father and Nurturant Parent moralities are equally "experiential" at this most basic of levels. The *ideals* of Strict Father morality may be subjective and metaphorical. But that morality *itself—qua* neurological system integrated into embodied

[99] Ibid., pg. 112
[100] Mooney, *The Republican Brain*, pg. 36.

organisms—is not. The highest ideals of Strict Father morality may not track human flourishing in the direct sense that Lakoff associates with Nurturant Parent morality. But the *frustration* of Strict Father morality can have consequences for some people's flourishing. Frank writes that while conservative polemics against liberalism "might get the facts wrong, they get the subjective experience right."[101] This is an Old Enlightenment distinction, however, because the New Enlightenment tells us that the subjective experience is correlated with certain facts that are just as tangible as the economic realities that liberals privilege as uniquely "substantive." This is why the New Enlightenment gives conservative claims of cultural oppression a new credibility that they lacked under the old one.

If Mooney and Lakoff fail to see this, this is because their analysis is compromised by the epistemological framework, which always militates against a deeper understanding of conservative claims of cultural oppression. Mooney casts the "alternative reality on the right" and its "counterexpertise to thwart mainstream knowledge" as expedients serving some general need for "belief affirmation and ideological activation." But these phenomena are more profoundly understood as specific *responses* to the prestige of the buffered identity, to the particular social and cultural conditions under which this identity is neurally activated. Conservative counterexpertise exists to advance, not only deeply held beliefs, but also something deeper than deeply held beliefs. It is the assertion of one cosmological orientation against another—not the brute refusal of certain "disinterested representations," but a protest against certain forms of "nonexplicit engagement with the world," as Taylor says, or against certain ways of "function[ing] bodily in the physical and social world," as Lakoff says.

Mooney characterizes conservatives' quest for "ideological activation" as a special defensiveness vis-à-vis cherished convictions, but this activation is ultimately the defense of one affective-instinctual structure against the imposition of another. It is the activation, not only of a belief-system, but of a hero-system, the activation of the entire organism against social meanings that threaten to undermine it. Fixating as he does upon the "epistemological fragment of man," Mooney must trivialize a cosmological grievance and physiological protest against the civilizing process as petulant defensiveness vis-à-vis certain consoling dogmas. However, conservatives' larger amygdala is politically relevant, not only because it engenders a higher need for closure, but also because those amygdalae are being targeted by the disciplines and repressions of the buffered

[101] Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, pg. 137.

identity. The latter may be second-nature to, and unnoticed by, those with more gray matter in the ACC. But for others, they constitute an alien imposition, a transgression against human nature's default setting. Hence Harris's ornery American, whose protests will be misunderstood by those lacking this ultimate in sophistication.

Sophisticated though they may be, Mooney and Lakoff both fail to achieve the ultimate in sophistication because both overlook *the supra-epistemological implications* of a naturalistic, neurologized political science. This reveals a conflict, not only between rival systems of belief-formation, but more primordially between the rival human make-ups of which these belief-systems are expressions. Though Mooney ostensibly follows Elias in contextualizing "changes of ideas and forms of cogitation" within broader changes in the "overall human make-up," his scientism reduces the latter to the status of an *explanation* for the former. And so he cannot see how it is the actual subject matter of political controversy. Liberal advocates of a New Enlightenment may have repudiated the Old Enlightenment view of reason. But just like Kahan, they retain the Old Enlightenment view *of man* as first and foremost a reasoning being, as an epistemological subject. And so they necessarily misunderstand conservatives, who as relative pre-moderns see what lies underneath the epistemological fragment of man.

* * *

As we saw in Chapter Two, Mike Gallagher claims to have studied liberals the way Jane Goodall studied chimpanzees, in order to meticulously document all the things that liberals love to hate. And this comparison is fully consistent with the New Enlightenment. Drew Westen writes:

> The differences between the human brain and the brains of our primitive ancestors (and many contemporary animals) lie mostly in addition to the original brain structures, which continue to guide emotion, motivation, and learning. This fact led Charles Darwin to place some species on our family tree whom we might consider rather poor relations. It led Sigmund Freud, a neurologist by training, to view our extraordinary capacities to love, create, and understand ourselves and the universe as a thin veneer—as we will see, only a few millimeters thick—over primitive structures that motivate our most extraordinary achievements and our most "inhuman"—that is, distinctively human—atrocities.[102]
>
> The capacity for rational judgment evolved to augment, not replace, evolutionarily older motivational systems. The emotional systems of simpler organisms are "decision-making" systems that initiate approach, avoidance, fight, or flight. The neural circuits activated

[102] Drew Westen, *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007), pg. 51.

> during complex human decision making do not function independently of these more primitive systems. Freud analogized reason to a hapless rider on a horse, who does his best to channel and control the large beast—pulling it this way and tugging it that way—but ultimately, the power resides in the horse, not the rider. The rider could always get off, but he wouldn't get very far on foot.[103]
>
> Freud had some good reasons to fixate on instinct theory. As a neurologist, he understood well that the cerebral cortex that was responsible for the heights of human accomplishment evolved atop some seedy structures, whose primitive demands it could only cover like cheap neural perfume.[104]

Conservatives' refusal to accept liberalism at face value originates in the visceral intuition that liberalism is just "cheap neural perfume," because its ostensibly universalistic ideals have as their unacknowledged subtext the privileging of some human make-ups over others, the self-perpetuation of some neurological configurations at the expense of the alternatives. Liberals' ultimate goal is, as Lakoff says, to deploy "language, images, and narratives that positively activate the progressive worldview, while acting negatively to inhibit the effect of the conservative worldview." And this is the concrete, biological bottom line in relation to which liberals' high ideals are cheap neural perfume. If conservatives decline to recognize liberals as disinterested seekers of all that is good, true, and beautiful, this is because that goodness, truth, and beauty are "only a few millimeters thick," mere epiphenomena of liberals' organismic self-maintenance and drive to promote a culture that promotes it.

C.S. Lewis argues that naturalism undermines the very possibility of truth because our judgments instantly lose all meaning the moment we believe that they can be explained "without remainder, as the result of irrational causes." For "[w]henever you know that what the other man is saying is wholly due to his complexes or to a bit of bone pressing on his brain, you cease to attach any importance to it."[105] This conclusion will be disputed by many philosophers. But we need not enter these contentious theoretical waters in order to draw out another, more modest implication of naturalism. And this is that someone who elected to conceptualize the traditional contest of political ideologies naturalistically, in terms of the "neurological advantages" which these ideologies conferred on different groups—and then erected a new, second-order political ideology on this basis—would *not* just be airing a vague cultural grievance. On the contrary, the

[103] Ibid., pgs. 62-63.
[104] Ibid., pg. 80.
[105] Qt. in Stephen D. Smith, *The Disenchantment of Secular Discourse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), pg. 200.

grievance would be as "substantive" as they come. Such is the inner meaning of conservative claims of cultural oppression, whose ad hominem temper reflects conservatives' intuitive appreciation for the physiological embeddedness of political ideology.

Richard Rorty writes that Wittgenstein "naturalizes mind and language by making all questions about the relation of either to the rest of the universe *casual* questions, as opposed to questions about the adequacy of representation."[106] Conservative claimants of cultural oppression are instinctive Wittgensteinians. They are concerned, not with the adequacy of liberal representations about truth and justice, but with these representations' causal effect on conservatives and the conservative culture. Liberals believe they unlike conservatives "stick to the issues." But what appear like discrete issues are unconsciously bound up with the promotion of certain human make-ups to the detriment of others. Liberal tolerance conceals this from itself, conceals the biological bottom line, which on a very primitive yet very real level eviscerates much of what liberals believe separates them from the conservatives they dismiss as unprincipled and disingenuous. Every animal, writes Nietzsche, "instinctively strives for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can expend all its strength and achieve its maximal feeling of power." And every animal "abhors, just as instinctively and with a subtlety of discernment that is 'higher than all reason,' every kind of intrusion or hindrance that obstructs or could obstruct this path to the optimum."[107] This is the underlying symmetry to which conservatives but not liberals are viscerally attuned, the root of the "liberal hypocrisy" that oppresses conservatives at every turn. If conservatives cannot articulate the underlying nature of this hypocrisy and so come off as confused or disingenuous, this is because they detect it with a "subtlety of discernment that is 'higher than all reason.'"

One major irony of conservative claims of cultural oppression is that while conservatives may formally oppose naturalism as the faithlessness of secular humanists, their very resentment toward those secular humanists expresses an intuitive *naturalistic* appraisal of political life. Correspondingly, one major irony of liberalism is that while liberals officially celebrate the scientific worldview, they *cannot take their naturalism to its logical conclusion,* to the point where it would reveal the symmetries that conservatives appreciate intuitively. Where more Platonically-

[106] Richard Rorty, *Contingency , Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pg. 15.
[107] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), pg. 107 (Essay 3, Sec. 7).

minded liberals see reasoned deliberation in pursuit of the good, conservatives intuit synaptic activation or de-activation. This isn't how conservatives put it, of course, but the intuition is implicit in their basic, pre-reflective, pre-theorized sense of their relationship to liberals. Gallagher's reduction of liberals to a tribe of chimps is no idle cheap shot, but a stark illustration of how conservatives viscerally process political discourse.

These differences follow logically from the mutation counter-narrative. Given their less "advanced" position along the civilizing process, conservatives are animated by a more visceral appreciation for the continuities between the animal and the human and accordingly process the human in more animalistic terms. And given their *more* "advanced" position along that process, liberals are more disposed to *deny* the animal. As we saw, this denial is a convention of the peculiarly courtly rationality, and liberals may uphold this convention even when it conflicts with their commitment to science and naturalism. This differential positioning is why liberals and conservatives are destined to talk past one another, why conservatives are always detecting some kind of covert sectarianism lurking behind liberals' professions of pluralism and tolerance, and why liberals are always incredulous before these suspicions.

Macedo concedes that there is grain of truth in the argument that the limited, merely civic liberalism he defends cannot readily be distinguished from a comprehensive liberalism that aspires to inculcate liberalism as a personal, and not purely civic, virtue. Macedo defends "equal liberty, critical independence, an awareness of the world and its operations, and the ability to reflect on one's particular convictions and aims for the sake of doing justice"[108] on merely civic grounds, as requirements of good citizenship. But he recognizes that these civic ideals have implications for people's private lives as well. Merely civic arguments for religious toleration, for example, will gradually influence religion itself, pushing its theological content in a non-fundamentalist direction. In the real world, the practice of civic tolerance will stimulate many people to think autonomously about their ultimate convictions, even if civic liberalism does not officially endorse this as an ultimate ideal of human flourishing. For these reasons, Macedo acknowledges that "some of the distinctions that separate a civic liberalism from a comprehensive liberalism are fairly subtle."[109] For liberalism can be "neutral with respect to ideals of life as a whole only in the very

[108] Stephen Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), pg. 239.
[109] Ibid., pg. 239.

limited sense of not relying on the justifiability of any particular comprehensive ideal or view of the whole truth."[110] It cannot guarantee a level playing field for all conceptions of the good. Nevertheless, Macedo rejects the suggestion that civic liberalism is just comprehensive liberalism in disguise, and that the latter is simply more candid about the actual scope of its ambitions. Though subtle, the distinction between the two liberalisms is real, because "political liberalism stands for a measure of restraint that would be unnatural for one committed to a vision of the good life as a whole informed by autonomy or individuality."[111] Civic liberalism may not be neutral in its impact, but that impact is limited by its neutral principles, which are therefore genuine.

Macedo's distinction between civic and comprehensive liberalisms is perfectly sound as an academic matter and may indeed impose real restraints on what government actors can say and do to promote the liberal virtues. Nevertheless, the distinction will carry little "cash value" at the neurological level, where some people's synaptic networks are not such as to support the distinction between critical thinking *qua* requirement of good citizenship and critical thinking *qua* highest good. This is why fundamentalists believe that liberal educators covertly promote "secular humanism" even when these educators insist that critical thinking skills are ideologically neutral. If the distinction between the two liberalisms can seem genuine to liberals, this is because their more intellectualized and excarnated cosmological orientation endows the distinction with a visceral reality that will not be felt by others—whose physiologically embodied identities do not dispose them toward the kind of abstraction that seems natural to academic liberals. Hence, they will not distinguish the issue of justifications from the issue of ultimate impact, as does Macedo. And this is why the "subtlety" of his distinctions cannot but strike many conservatives as disingenuous. The point is not simply that civic (or political) liberalism and comprehensive liberalism converge upon one another in many of their long-term *effects*, as Macedo and Rawls both acknowledge, but that the two liberalisms are for many conservatives indistinguishable in their *meaning*. While civic or political liberalism may entail a measure of restraint that would be unnatural to a comprehensive liberalism, that restraint will not be appreciated by those who feel only the frustration of their cosmological orientation, the imposition of the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity against their default human dispositions.

[110] Ibid., pg. 179.
[111] Ibid., pg. 175.

The problem is illustrated in Amy Gutman's and Dennis Thompson's argument that "any claim fails to respect reciprocity if it imposes a requirement on other citizens to adopt one's sectarian way of life as a condition of gaining access to the moral understanding that is essential to judging the validity of one's moral claims."[112] The question posed by conservative claims of cultural oppression is whether the distinction between the sectarian and the non-sectarian is itself inescapably sectarian, because how we define a "way of life" is itself a function of our "way of life" *qua* biological constitution. As we saw earlier, liberals conceptualize a "way of life" in more intellectualized, excarnated terms, as, say, a "comprehensive conception of the good." But conservatives understand it in a less intellectualized, more enfleshed fashion, as one's nonexplicit engagement with the world. Liberals conceptualize a worldview as "in the head"—as a set of ideas, opinions, convictions, and so forth. But to borrow from Taylor, conservatives live their "construal of the moral/spiritual" as "immediate reality." Being more naturalistic and animalistic, conservatives experience what they may *call* a "worldview" as "the ways we function bodily in the physical and social world," to borrow from Lakoff. Against this backdrop, liberals' more rationalistic definition of sectarianism—as a certain form of intellectual justification—will be seen as a sectarian ruse, because it expresses what is but *one way* of functioning bodily in the physical and social world.

However they be defended philosophically, liberal ideals subserve what are, *neurologically speaking*, sectarian goods, subserve certain kinds of synaptically encoded heroic narratives to the exclusion of others. This is why the liberal may "have to concede that he has a great many more enemies (real enemies – people who will suffer under a liberal dispensation) than he has usually pretended to have," as Waldron warns. Lakoff observes that the main battlefield of the culture wars is the brain itself,[113] and all the distinctions on whose basis liberals can imagine themselves non-sectarian dissolve at this most primitive yet eminently real of levels. Yet this never makes its way into liberals' assessment of the equities. And this is why conservatives are forever unimpressed by sophisticated liberal syllogism. As we saw, Smith charges that liberals' "artificial" conception of harm—which discounts psychic and communal harm—conceals real injuries and marginalizes some conceptions of the good life. And the reason this conception is artificial is

[112] Amy Gutman and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge: Harvard Univesity Press, 1996), pg. 57.
[113] Lakoff, *The Political Mind*, pg. 1.

liberalism's refusal to take its naturalism to its logical conclusion, to the point where it would reveal the symmetries that conservatives grasp intuitively.

* * *

The harm-principle's defenders do not deny that its actual application can involve some difficult judgment calls. Jeremy Feinberg, the harm principle's foremost expounder in our time, writes that "any legal system determined to 'minimize harm' must incorporate judgments of the comparative importance of interests of different kinds so that it can pronounce 'unjustified' the invasion of one person's interest of high priority done to protect another person's interest of low priority."[114] Our interests must be classed according to their level of "vitality," and an interest qualifies as more vital to the degree it is important to the success of an individual's "whole interest network."[115] Only by understanding this can we make the trade-offs required to minimize harm.

Consistently with this, Feinberg distinguishes between mere hurts and actual harms. Though hurts are genuine evils to be avoided, they are not in themselves cognizable under the harm principle. Something can qualify as a bona fide harm only insofar as it prevents us from pursuing some interest.[116] And mere hurts do not do so. "Unhappy mental states" like "unpleasant sensations (evil smells, grating noises), transitory disappointments, wounded pride, hurt feelings, aroused anger, shocked sensibility, alarm, disgust, frustration, impatience, restlessness, acute boredom, irritation, embarrassment, feelings of guilt and shame, physical pain (at a readily tolerable level), bodily discomfort, and many more"[117] do not normally disable our broader interest network. And so they do not qualify as harms that the state may undertake to prevent under the harm principle. Even our strong wants, standing alone, are insufficient to create an interest whose frustration constitutes a legally or politically actionable harm. These wants' frustration may leave us with powerful feelings of disappointment. But our interests are defined, not by subjective feelings of disappointment, but by a good's objective instrumental value for our whole network of interests.[118]

[114] Joel Feinberg, *Harm to Others* (Oxford University Press, 1984), pg. 35.
[115] Ibid., pg. 205.
[116] Ibid., pg. 48.
[117] Ibid., pg. 45.
[118] Ibid., pg. 42.

Feinberg defends liberty in the same way. The suppression of liberty, the diminution of our options, is not in itself a harm if the options in question aren't ones we intended to pursue.[119] Nevertheless, liberty qualifies as "a basic welfare interest"[120] encompassed by the harm principle, because it constitutes a vital "breathing space" that assures us of alternative options should our desires or circumstances change.[121] Liberty is a "cushion" against possible future invasions of our welfare interests. And so we all possess a derivative interest in maintaining more of it than we can presently make use of,[122] an interest in having as many open options as possible with respect to various kinds of action, omission, and possession.[123] Just like harm, liberty can be quantified according to its relationship to our "whole interest network." Options may be more or less "fecund." More fecund options lead to more future options, and less fecund options lead to fewer future options. Our options can therefore be compared to the various switches on railroad tracks within an interlocking maze of tracks. Like a railroad track intersection, the importance of an option can be measured according to how many further options it facilitates.[124] And this can guide us when trade-offs between the liberties of different people are required.

The New Enlightenment problematizes Feinberg's analysis, however. What if the "railroad tracks" in question refer, not to any easily delineated courses of action to be potentially traversed by clearly identifiable individuals, but to the more obscure "neurological tracks" that get traversed within those individuals' brains? It might then turn out that a liberal social order is abrogating the liberty of conservatives, not because they are prevented from attending church or saluting the flag, but because it inhibits the neurological activity that would render these activities fully meaningful. Hence Gelernter's complaint that liberalism has deprived Americans of the "unselfconscious patriotic pleasure" that once came with praising their nation. If the liberal elites' conception of harm is "artificial," this is because a sufficiently sophisticated understanding of human neurology would ambiguate what liberals understand to be a clear line between mere hurts and genuine harms. What can be verbally dismissed as a mere hurt—including political, social, and cultural hurts—could well constitute a serious impediment to our entire interest network understood at this deeper level. Our articulated assessments of what does and does not abrogate individual liberty may

[119] Ibid., pg. 212.
[120] Ibid., pg. 206.
[121] Ibid., pg. 212.
[122] Ibid., pg. 207.
[123] Ibid., pg. 207.
[124] Ibid., pg. 208.

poorly track the conditions of *neural* liberty. But these are, for physiologically embodied agents like us, as important as anything could be.

This is a truth to which the "children of the Enlightenment" are insensible. As we observed with Lakoff, it is easier to accept the New Enlightenment on a theoretical level than to recognize its concrete ramifications. This blindness is in fact an intrinsic feature of liberalism, a product of its Old Enlightenment lineage. Describing the sensibilities of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, Carl Becker's *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* explains:

> They are citizens of the world, the emancipated ones, looking out upon a universe seemingly brand new because so freshly flooded with light, a universe in which everything worth attending to is visible, and everything visible is seen to be unblurred and wonderfully simple after all, and evidently intelligible to the human mind—the mind of Philosophers.[125]
>
> They were out for the cold facts, out to spoil the game of the mystery-mongers. That species of enthusiasm was indeed to be banned; but only to be replaced by an enthusiasm, however well concealed beneath an outward calm, for the simple truth of things. Knowing beforehand that the truth would make them free, they were on the lookout for a special brand of truth, a truth that would be on their side, a truth they could make use of in their business. Some sure instinct warned them that it would be dangerous to know too much, that "to comprehend all is to pardon all." They were too recently emancipated from errors to regard error with detachment, too eager to spread the light to enjoy the indolent luxury of the suspended judgment.[126]

This Enlightenment legacy remains with us and is the reason why liberals cannot take their naturalism to its logical conclusion—to the point where conservative claims of cultural oppression make sense, to the point where the ideals of liberalism can be meaningfully appropriated by conservatism. Today's liberals are, as in the Eighteenth Century, "out to spoil the game of the mystery-mongers." But as "children of the Enlightenment" they too are warned by "some sure instinct" that "it would be dangerous to know too much." To take naturalism to its logical conclusion is to acknowledge the layer of human experience that dissolves the dichotomy between the "merely symbolic" and "substantive interests," or between "cultural grievances" and "tangible issues." But this, liberals refuse to see. To "comprehend all is to pardon all," and as liberals will not pardon conservative claims of cultural oppression, neither can they afford to comprehend them. Like the philosophers of the Eighteenth Century, liberals are "on the lookout for a special brand

[125] Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pg. 34.
[126] Ibid., pg. 42.

of truth, a truth that would be on their side." This is a truth that would vindicate a hero-system, vindicate the buffered distance. And so their very identities require them to position conservatives as benighted people who, mystified by the "merely symbolic," cannot distinguish between mere hurts and actual harms.

Notwithstanding this special brand of truth, naturalism taken to its logical conclusion reveals that *nothing* is merely symbolic. Westen reports an experiment at the University of Michigan comparing male students from Northern and Southern states where an associate of the researcher would "accidentally" bump into the subjects and then walk off into another room without apology, half the time throwing out an insult as well. Northerners displayed virtually no physiological reaction to the staged incident, but both cortisol and testosterone levels jumped dramatically in Southern males.[127] Was the offense here purely symbolic, or did the experiment reveal it to be substantive? Offense to honor might seem like a mere "hurt," the artifice of a merely metaphorical Strict Father morality (or the Code of the Gentleman), and so an intangible self-indulgence for whose costs the "victim" bears full responsibility. As the saying goes, sticks and stones may break our bones but words (and unatoned bumps, one should add) will never hurt us. But this common sense is less a conclusion of hard-nosed empiricism than an illustration of liberalism's impulse to preempt conflict by artificially simplifying the stakes—the eighteenth-century philosophers' concealed enthusiasm for the "simple truth of things," their conviction that "everything worth attending to is visible" and that everything visible is "unblurred and wonderfully simple after all." By contrast, the New Enlightenment tells us that much that is worth attending to is *not* visible.

This places what liberals dismiss as conservative conspiracism and paranoia in a new light. Michael Savage charges that feminists like Barbara Boxer, Diane Feinstein, and Hillary Clinton seek to monitor "[t]hose dark, subliminal motives lurking behind what you say," and not only these, but also "your facial expressions and body language, too."[128] These accusations might be dismissed as Hofstadter's "obscure and ill-directed grievances and frustrations, with elaborate hallucinations about secrets and conspiracies." But properly understood, Savage's anxieties are fully consistent with the New Enlightenment and its naturalistic sophistication about human

[127] Westen, *The Political Brain*, pg. 128-29.
[128] Michael Savage, *The Savage Nation: Saving America form the Liberal Assault on Our Borders, Language, and Culture* (Plume, 2002), pg. 38.

beings. As Lakoff says, our conscious thinking is "shaped by the vast and invisible realm of neural circuitry not accessible to consciousness." And what Savage casts as liberals' inquisitorial desire to monitor the inner lives of conservatives is the anthropomorphization of this invisible realm, its translation into the language of intent and conscious design. A transformative liberalism seeks to subtly transform *people*. So it is to be expected that the more shadowy, but ultimately deeper, springs of our being will form part of its transformative subject matter. This is precisely what Savage is sensing.

Westen reports that an emerging body of research shows that emotions are contagious, because "when we watch other people do or feel something, neurons became active in the same regions of our brains as if we were doing or feeling those things themselves."[129] This too helps explain conservatives' visceral sense of cultural oppression. As discussed in Chapter Two, Jay Nordlinger observes that whereas liberals "can go a long time without brushing up against someone who's conservative," conservatives "are more used to being around liberals, because liberals have dominated everything in our lives." This strikes liberals as histrionics and hallucination. But the domination Nordlinger alleges may be transpiring in the "brushing up" itself, in the neurological mirroring described by Weston, which is not unreal just for being invisible to the naked eye of liberals. While everyone's emotions are presumably contagious to some degree, the prestige of the buffered distance may have rendered the direction of neuronal influence asymmetrical in favor of liberalism, yielding a form of oppression which has little to do with how many branches of government Republicans happen to be controlling at the moment.

Westen believes that in repeatedly linking the words "values" and "morality" to right-wing positions on sexuality, abortion, war, and guns, Republicans have built their own neural infrastructure into the brains of progressives. The networks of association underpinning the conservative lexicon have "metastasized their way into the neural tissue of the left."[130] But the conservative intuition is that the buffered identity has metastasized its way into *their* neural tissue. Whatever the success of their buzzwords, it is conservatives who are being colonized by the civilizing process, by the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. Hence their sense that Americans have internalized the dictates of the liberal culture in contravention of their own nature and that this "Stockholm Syndrome" threatens to deprive them of the resolve, and indeed

[129] Westen, *The Political Brain*, pg. 288.
[130] Ibid., pg. 190.

the very language, by which to resist liberalism. While liberals are the foremost carriers of the buffered identity in its most advanced iteration, conservatives have internalized that identity to a significant degree. And this is why they must feel perennially besieged by "liberalism," haunted by the sense that it has usurped something which is theirs. They are struggling against the liberalism that lies within as well as the liberalism that lies without, and it is this that animates their sense of liberalism's unrelenting imperiousness.

The problem with what Lakoff calls the "Old Enlightenment" isn't just that it overlooks the role of moral metaphor and narrative in political deliberation, but that its conception of reason as conscious, literal, logical, universal, unemotional, and disembodied induces liberals to *radically overestimate their ability to accurately track oppression*, leaving them "sublimely confident," to borrow from Goldberg, that their conscious categories track everything important. But the New Enlightenment suggests that we may know very little about what distinguishes bona fide "experiential" moralities form moralities that "do not keep one in direct touch with human flourishing at the most basic level of experience," as Lakoff says.

Scruton writes that the sum of our articulate views is the "shallow part of our being."[131] And the principles through which liberals distinguish their universalistic tolerance from the sectarian narrowness of conservatives belong to precisely this part of our being, because these principles overlook the totality of man in favor of an "epistemological fragment" of him. Only what lends itself to the conventions of liberal articulacy will be recognized as real, and this is why conservatives are prepared to flout those conventions. Their resistance to the buffered identity may assume the form of "obscure and ill-directed grievances and frustrations." But this obscurity too follows from the New Enlightenment, reflecting the limits of our conscious reason. "Man, like every living being, thinks continually without knowing it," writes Nietzsche, and "the thinking that rises to *consciousness* is only the smallest part of all this—the most superficial and worst part—for only this conscious thinking *takes the form of words*…"[132] Understanding conservative claims of cultural oppression requires looking beyond words in order to see the conflict of cosmological orientation that the words articulate, for this is where the oppression at issue transpires.

[131] Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), pg. 11.
[132] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pgs. 298-99 (Sec. 354).

Unlike the bumps and invective studied by the Michigan experiment, the cultural oppression alleged by conservatives does not lend itself to the kind of controlled experimentation that would allow us to rigorously quantify actual injury. But this epistemological hurdle does not justify peremptorily dismissing the cultural harms claimed by conservatives as unreal. If liberals are nevertheless tempted toward this dismissiveness, this is because they are, like the eighteenth-century philosophers "too eager to spread the light to enjoy the indolent luxury of the suspended judgment," because they have "an enthusiasm, however well concealed beneath an outward calm, for the simple truth of things." What conservatives decry as the arrogance of the liberal elites is the contemporary expression of this legacy, of the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, which in concealing the actual wellsprings of human motivation also conceals the ways in which those wellsprings can be frustrated or injured.

The simple truth of things for the elites is that their supposed "assault" on conservatives and their traditional values consists in mere words, and not any real violations of real rights. But as we observed with Nietzsche in Chapter Four, "[a]lmost everything we call 'higher culture' is based on the spiritualization of *cruelty*, on its becoming more profound." Cruelty has merely "become more refined," for while its older forms "offend the new taste," the "art of wounding and torturing others with words and looks reaches its supreme development in times of corruption." Perhaps we live in just such times, times in which language and culture can exercise a coercive force that previously required sticks and stones. The First Amendment and our liberal democratic framework presuppose some distinction between speech and conduct, of course. But we should not mistake a pragmatic distinction for a metaphysical one, as though speech and conduct transpire within distinct realms of being one of which exists only in the ether. If one cannot, as Lakoff argues, understand twenty-first century politics with an eighteenth-century understanding of the mind, then perhaps our understanding of political persecution needs to be updated as well. Political persecution as it appears to the naked human eye might be a highly flawed barometer of political persecution as it transpires synaptically—in the "dark, subliminal behavior lurking behind what you say," as Savage puts it.

To be sure, things like gay marriage, flag-burning, sexually explicit Hollywood movies, a multilateral foreign policy, and the welfare state do not have any immediately paralyzing effect on most conservatives, who notwithstanding their cultural oppression still manage to go about their day-to-day lives. This is why Macedo can assure us that while his transformative liberalism's aim

of transforming people may seem illiberal, its methods are "*gentle* rather than oppressive, influencing people's deeply held beliefs without coercion or force."[133] But the distinction between the gentle and the coercive may—just like Feinberg's distinction between hurts and harms—carry less cash value on the neurological level than in the context of everyday "common sense."

If some people are deeply recalcitrant to liberalism's transformative project—that is, to the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity—then we should expect that Macedo's gentleness will give rise to a certain diffuse, unappeasable resentment that feels itself eminently justified notwithstanding that it cannot explain itself cogently to the conscious mind. The ultimate source of the aggrievement isn't any unambiguous cases of flagrantly illiberal coercion—the fundamentalist interpretation of conservative claims of cultural oppression—but the cumulative neural impact of liberal "gentleness," none of whose causes are egregiously illiberal or even consequential when considered individually. This diffuse resentment is precisely what animates conservative claims of cultural oppression, which must exaggerate, distort, caricature, and sometimes falsify in order to generate tangible symbolic reference points for grievances that would otherwise lack any linguistic medium whatsoever.

When Ben Shapiro charges that conservatives are being "bullied" by liberals, this is in the same sense that feminists feel bullied by patriarchy. Feminists who protest patriarchy are not necessarily alleging any calculated backroom conspiracies to keep women down. They are describing, not a plot but what they understand to be a "complex ecology of domination and subjugation," as Sommers puts it,[134] which cannot be reduced to some discrete set of enumerable transgressions. Naomi Wolfe writes that "[t]he beauty backlash against feminism is no conspiracy, but a million separate individual reflexes… that coalesce into a national mood weighing women down; the backlash is the more oppressive because the source of the suffocation is so diffuse as to be almost invisible."[135] And in a similar vein, conservatives feel weighed down by a national mood of conservaphobia, suffocated by liberalism through the cumulative effect of "a million separate reflex actions" all serving to reinforce the buffered identity, activating certain neural make-ups while devitalizing others.

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[133] Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust*, pg. 137.
[134] Christina Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?: How Women Have Betrayed Women* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), pg. 80-81.
[135] Ibid., pg. 228.

Yet these million separate reflex actions never enter liberals' utilitarian calculus. And the reason is that this calculus has the liberal identity as its unstated premise. Smith observes that immediately after establishing "utility as the ultimate appeal on all ethical questions," Mill issues the caveat that this means "utility in the largest sense, grounded in the permanent interests of man as a progressive being." Only what interferes with *these* interests can qualify as a genuine harm, as the loss of genuine freedom.[136] Mill did not deny his elitism and indeed wrote that "it is hardly necessary to say" that his doctrine "is meant to apply only to human beings in the maturity of their faculties"[137] and is inapplicable to "those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage."[138] But what Mill *could say* can go without saying now actually goes without saying among contemporary liberals, who also take their own sensibilities as the measure of real harm and real freedom. They do not straightforwardly argue that conservative claims of cultural oppression may be ignored because they do not issue from "progressive beings" like themselves. But this judgment is implicit in the dismissive indignation and peremptory dismissal with which these claims are greeted. Liberals' descriptive claims about what qualifies as a "real" harm disguise what are covertly prescriptive claims in favor of the kind of person for whom the descriptive claims hold true—progressive beings who, possessing more gray matter in the ACC and smaller amygdalae, could never be seriously perturbed by things like the decay of traditional values. If these harms do not qualify as "real," this is because those who suffer them have been accorded a lower *social* reality, as relics of a barbarian past who cannot be allowed to muddy the clear blue waters of liberalism.

* * *

The heavenly vision of the eighteenth-century philosophers is precisely what could be expected of a hero-system that disguises itself as the transcendence of all hero-systems. Mooney identifies the "liberal culture" with scientific skepticism. But the mutation counter-narrative reveals that the naturalistic outlook developed, not only as a conception of the world but also as an *ideal of authentic selfhood and properly human dignity. This* is what the "children of the Enlightenment" are ultimately striving to uphold. Taylor observes that while the practitioners of

[136] Steven D. Smith, *Is the Harm Principle Illiberal?*, 51 Am. J. Juris. 1, 26-28 (2006).
[137] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton University Press 2005), pg. 144.
[138] Ibid., pg. 144.

science view themselves as "motivated fully by epistemic considerations… a big part of the motivation resides in the prestige and admiration surrounding the [scientific] stance itself, with the sense of freedom, power, control, invulnerability, dignity, which it radiates."[139] And it is the need to bask in this stance—the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity—that compels liberals to see conservative claims of cultural oppression as confused and contrived. Being inflected by the buffered identity, the Enlightenment's particular brand of empiricism isn't culturally neutral, and was rather crafted in reflection of a hero-system. Its function is to uphold a set of social meanings that will ratify the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity as essential human nature, as the "true self" that lies dormant or suppressed among the unwashed masses. The light with which Becker's "emancipated ones" believed the world was freshly flooded is none other than this, none other than the buffered identity. This identity is not an actual datum of experience, but rather the silent, unquestioned backdrop against which experience, including the meaning of harm, is now conceptualized, transforming whatever falls outside it into the object of scorn and incredulity.

Frank writes that the conservative "Backlash" is sustained, not by "the precise metrics of sociology," but by "contradictions and tautologies and huge, honking errors," by the "blunt instruments of propaganda."[140] It reveals that "American conservatism depends for its continued dominance and even for its very existence on people never making certain mental connections about the world, connections that until recently were treated as obvious or self-evident everywhere on the planet."[141] But we have been examining a set of mental connections that *liberals* never make. Liberals may have "Open personalities." But this personality is necessarily "closed" vis-à-vis its ultimate premise, the supremacy of a particular human type and hero-system. Liberals can dismiss conservative claims of cultural oppression as contrived only because they refuse to recognize the violence entailed by this ultimate premise. With *the buffered identity and its epistemological framework having shaped the meaning of liberals' naturalism*, liberals cannot not take that naturalism to its logical conclusion and recognize the epistemological subject as the expression of a supra-epistemological imperative, of a hero-system that comes at the expense of

[139] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 286.
[140] Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, pg. 19.
[141] Ibid., pg. 248.

another one. If conservatives are, as Lakoff observes, fond of saying that liberals "just don't get it," this is what they just don't get.

On one level, the New Enlightenment recognizes the "epistemological fragment" of man to be just that, a fragment. But just like Kahan, Mooney and Lakoff treat this fragment as the core in relation to which the rest of man should be understood. They recognize the irrational in human nature. But they reduce this irrationality to the coefficient of adversity with which the epistemological subject must reckon, and so they cannot see it as a reason to move beyond the epistemological framework itself and achieve the ultimate in sophistication. This would be to recognize that the issue is not the epistemological subject but what lies underneath it, not dogma but dopamine, the activation of the neural circuitry that sustains us in our hero-systems. This is what the culturally inflected naturalism of liberals cannot see. It cannot see, with Nietzsche, that:

> The body is a great intelligence, a multiplicity with one sense, a war and a peace, a herd and a herdsman.
>
> Your little intelligence, my bother, which you call 'spirit', is also an instrument of your body, a little instrument and toy of your great intelligence.
>
> You say 'I' and you are proud of this word. But greater than this – although you will not believe in it – is your body and its great intelligence, which does not say 'I' but performs 'I'.
>
> What the sense feels, what the spirit perceives, is never an end in itself. But sense and spirit would like to persuade you that they are the end of all things: they are as vain as that.
>
> Sense and spirit are instruments and toys: behind them still lies the Self. The self seeks with the eyes of sense; it listens too with the ears of spirit.
>
> The Self is always listening and seeking: it compares subdues, conquers, destroys. It rules and is also the Ego's ruler.
>
> Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage – he is called the Self. He lives in your body, he is your body.
>
> There is more reason in your body than in your best wisdom. And who knows for what purpose your body requires precisely your best wisdom?[142]

This is why "the ostensible issues are always secondary," as Harris says, why the populist conservative isn't particularly interested in crafting finely-honed arguments. Liberals may disdain conservative claims of cultural oppression for the "little intelligence" they appear to display. But I have been arguing that this "little intelligence" is merely the "the little instrument and toy" of a "great intelligence." And this great intelligence is conservatives' under-theorized understanding of the mutation counter-narrative. That understanding is under-theorized because it is ultimately

[142] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), pgs. 61-62.

a *physiological* intelligence, the physiological memory of the civilizing process, conservatives' "subjugated knowledge" of the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. These may be poorly articulated by mere "sense and spirit," but the threat is viscerally discerned by the Self that lies behind them. And this is why conservatives' amygdalae do what they do.

If our modern consciousness cannot recognize itself as but an instrument operating in the service of a vaster intelligence, this is owing to the *covertly Christian character of our Enlightenment heritage*, which the New Enlightenment must also overcome. John Gray writes that humanism is "a secular religion thrown together from decaying scraps of Christian myth,"[143] one of which is free will, whose origins lie in the Christian faith against which humanists rail.[144] Liberals' ostensibly secular and hard-nosed dismissals of conservative grievances partake of just this contradiction. Their sense that conservatives could just discard their claims of cultural oppression if they simply woke up one day and resolved to become mature adults is one of those decaying scraps of Christian myth, free will, to which liberals cling as tenaciously as conservative Christians cling to their Bibles. The buffered self and its ethos are simply the secularization of the Christian soul, which now receives salvation from liberalism and its struggle against all that tempts us away from the true freedom it signifies.

But this secularized Christianity is as much in conflict with the New Enlightenment as its religious predecessors were with the old one. Frank writes that the "Backlash" provides conservatives with a "ready-made identity" they find "so compelling that they have internalized it, made it their own, shaped themselves according to its attractive and uniquely American understanding of authenticity and victimhood."[145] But this identity, I am here arguing, could not have been thus internalized absent a neurological substratum that facilitates it. Human beings may have been blank slates under the Old Enlightenment, but they are not under the new one. If this ready-made identity is so compelling, this is because it lends confused expression to something *real*, even if that reality is recalcitrant to the conventions of liberal articulacy. This is what the New Enlightenment *should* teach liberals—not that conservatives are more closed-minded, but that politics is ultimately about something deeper than the conscious mind.

[143] John Gray, *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2007), pg. 31.
[144] Ibid., pg. xi.
[145] Ibid., pg. 158.

4. A Preferred Basket of Liberal Values

Macedo lists as liberal virtues "a reflective, self-critical attitude, tolerance, openness to change, self-control, a willingness to engage in dialogue with others, and a willingness to revise and shape projects in order to respect the rights of others or in response to fresh insight into one's own character and ideals."[146] In a similar vein, Rawls defines liberal virtue as "reasonableness and a sense of fairness, a spirit of compromise and a readiness to meet others halfway."[147] These virtues are unobjectionable in the abstract and when taken at face value, which is how Macedo and Rawls take them. But they also have a dark underside arising from the very nature of the buffered identity. This is why Taylor's criticizes a certain kind of "normalizing" humanism that

> hides from itself how great the conflict is between the different things we value. It artificially removes the tragedy, the wrenching choices between incompatibles, the dilemmas, which are inseparable from human life. It creates the impression that all good things come together effortlessly, but it only achieves this by denaturing and downgrading some of the goods which stand in the way of the preferred basket of liberal values… By discrediting the refractory drives as pathological or under-developed, civilizing humanism implies that the proper human fulfillment will be, for the "normal," conflict-free. An untroubled happiness attends this normalcy, because nothing important need be sacrificed for it.[148]

> Such a humanism spawns reductive understandings of human nature that fail altogether to recognize wide ranges of human motivation: the search for meaning, for self-affirmation, the demands of dignity and the wounds of humiliation, not to speak of the wilder ranges of sexual desire and the love of battle. They see them as either containable peccadilloes, or in their more threatening forms as pathology. Thus they fail altogether to measure the real costs of suppressing them or stamping them out. They take the (in Foucault's sense) normalized for fulfilled human beings.[149]

Liberalism's "stealth and subterfuge" ultimately consists in this normalization. What we observed to be liberals' selective naturalism is but the corollary of liberals' commitment to naturalizing the buffered identity as essential human nature. For that selective naturalism serves to obscure what are the human *costs* of superimposing that identity over our default porousness and its characteristic impulses—patriotism, manliness, openness to the sacred and to anti-structure. These become seen, not as genuine values, but as unfortunate "glitches" in the untroubled normalcy of the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. What Lasch condemns as upper middle-

[146] Qt. in Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, pg. 161.
[147] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pg. 163.
[148] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 635.
[149] Ibid., pgs. 641-42.

class liberals' "hygienic conception of life" is the imperative to sanitize and "scrub out," either empirically or conceptually, all evidence of resistance to the civilizing process, all evidence of its costs and social artificiality. To this end, liberalism must disguise the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity as a brute, unvarnished liberation, must disguise molding and coercion as just the subtraction of confining epistemic horizons. Since the truth only sets us free, liberalism itself can never be the real cause of real human conflict.

But conservatives see past this pretense. Michael Savage is refusing a "preferred basket of liberal values" when he dismisses "anger management" as yet another liberal ruse:

> So, what can I do? That's the way I am. My vocal cords are what they are. And the fact of the matter is, so is my testosterone level, and so is my anger and rage level. And, no, I don't plan to go to anger management classes in the very near future. I'll let God take care of that at the end of the road. Anger management comes when they put me in the ground. That's when the anger management starts. In the next world, I don't want to manage in this world.
>
> You manage your anger, Mr. Liberal, because that's another one of your liberal tricks. You find the man who gets furious and really wants to change things. You tell him he's psychotic and needs anger management. You know what I say? "Drop dead." That's what I say, I've said it since the first day. Don't try to manage me or my anger. It's not your business.[150]

In announcing that anger management begins "in the next world," Savage is also announcing his refusal of the spiritual-secular compression atop of which liberalism developed, his rejection of the civilizing process, and, correlatively, his resignation to the merely animal in man. Anger management can qualify as a "liberal trick" in the context of the mutation counter-narrative because the *concrete social meaning* of liberal ideals is to uphold, not only certain judgments, but also the secularized asceticism of the buffered identity, which means suppressing whatever elements of the personality are recalcitrant to it. Anger management isn't just a clearing away of personal illusions, but the inculcation of a particular identity by a particular culture. This is what gives Savage's anger its *political* significance, as one more expression of conservatives' under-theorized understanding of mutation counter-narrative. Perhaps the anger cannot be translated into meaningful action, or even cogent thinking, today. But its retention at least preserves the future possibility thereof, holding a candle to the buffered distance by highlighting its peculiarly courtly rationality as a contingent social construction. If liberals are blind to this layer of meaning, this is

[150] Michael Savage, *The Enemy Within: Saving America from the Liberal Assault on our Schools, Faith, and Military* (Thomas Nelson 2003), pg. 7.

because their very identities require them to dismiss the anger as pathological, or a "containable peccadillo" at best, bare irascibility without cognitive content.

But this dismissiveness is in fact a liberal privilege. Stanley Fish remarks that religious traditionalists must seek, not to reach an accommodation with liberalism, but to "rout it from the field." By contrast, liberals need not be so aggressive. For "the field, as it is presently demarcated, is already theirs." And so liberals need only be "passive-aggressive."[151] Hence liberals' perennial rhetorical advantage over conservatives. Presenting itself as a rejection of anthropocentric hero-systems, the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity seems to exude a certain passivity, the self-restraint to not impose one's subjective meanings upon a common social world. But given that this ethos is a hero-system in its own right, the passivity is covertly aggressive, part and parcel of an effort to impose one particular human make-up. This is what makes liberalism a sublimated, intellectualized, and etherealized hero-system, a hero-system disguising itself as the transcendence of all hero-system. Liberals own the field as presently demarcated because the preeminence of the epistemological framework reduces human difference to intellectual difference of opinion. This reductionism is a "liberal trick" because it preempts conservatives from articulating their underlying grievance. This is liberalism's normalizing agenda, in whose service the epistemological framework operates. Lacking a language through which to expose this trick as such, conservatives are driven further and further into irresolvable frustration and from there descend into an aggressiveness that seems to vindicate the liberal diagnosis. Liberals can assault conservatives with their very passivity, their very temperateness, because these are functioning as silent judgments in the service of the buffered identity.

This strategy can be discerned in feminist Carol Gilligan's pedagogical agenda as related by Sommers. Gilligan, explains Sommers, seeks to develop a method to counter the patriarchal social forces that have coercively masculinized boys, thus depriving them of genuine happiness. She seeks to "free boys' voices, to create conditions that allow boys to say what they know," ideally "mak[ing] their aggressiveness and need for dominance things of the past."[152] But Sommers believes that what presents itself as an emancipatory agenda essentially pathologizes millions of healthy boys. Refusing to distinguish between healthy and aberrant masculinity, these

[151] Stanley Fish, *The Trouble With Principle* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), pg. 250.
[152] Christina Hoff Sommers, *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism is Harming Our Young Men* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2000), pg. 127.

feminists "look at these insulting, hitting, chasing, competitive creatures and see them as proto-criminals."[153] Hence their opposition to games of tag, which they condemn for encouraging aggressiveness in place of cooperation.[154] With the "energy, competitiveness, and corporal daring of normal, decent males" now suspect as the seeds of violence and sexual assault,[155] the result is that "[m]ore and more schoolboys inhabit a milieu of disapproval." "Routinely regarded as protosexists, potential harassers, and perpetuators of gender inequity," they "live under a cloud of censure, in a permanent state of culpability."[156]

These opposed interpretations of Gilligan's project derive from the opposition between the subtraction account and the mutation counter-narrative, which here as elsewhere reveals the covert imperiousness of liberal ideals. Gilligan frames her project through the lens of the subtraction account and the epistemological framework, as a project of "enlightenment," the transcendence of the blinkered horizons that suppress essential human nature. She wishes to "free" boys' voices so that they may "say what they know." But conservatives see this project through the lens mutation counter-narrative, at the level of cosmological orientation. Here they smell only "cheap neural perfume" that disguises a primordial hostility to the anarchic will of free men, to manliness, to anti-structure. Gilligan is simply carrying forth the continuing agenda of all modern elites, which is to impose one or another form of "civility" upon the unwashed masses. Liberalism is merely this agenda's latest ideological superstructure.

Akeel Bilgrami observes that "civility" served as a screen behind which the early modern courts concealed their own cruelties. Defining themselves through this ideal, they saw "only the cruelties in the behavior and lifestyles of a brute populace lacking such civilities" while overlooking their own. With the courtly ethos having been later codified into the Enlightenment, its heirs could overlook that their "humanistic rationality" had incorporated courtly cruelty and blindness. And this blindness allowed them to present their ideals in "*innocently thin* terms."[157] This is precisely what Gilligan is doing in her talk of freeing boys to say what they know. For a thicker interpretation of her project reveals a more robust and less innocent agenda, which is to mold boys in accordance with the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity.

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[153] Ibid., pg. 63.
[154] Ibid., pg. 52.
[155] Ibid., pg. 14.
[156] Ibid., pg. 57.
[157] Akeel Bilgrami, "What is Enchantment?," in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, eds. Michael Warner, Jonathan Vanantwerpen, and Craig Calhoun (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), pg. 151.

Gilligan presents her agenda as one of enlightened empathy. But this is merely the veneer behind which a sublimated, intellectualized, and etherealized hero-system operates. Enlightenment is the *epistemological misinterpretation* of what is actually an attack on those parts of human nature which do not sit easily with a preferred basket of liberal values, which in one way or another impede the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. Empathy and enlightenment are merely the foreground behind which liberalism's "hidden curriculum" is implemented, ideological instruments through which to transform people into good, universalistic liberals so disciplined as to have uprooted every last trace of aggression and insensitivity, replacing these with awareness and altruism. But awareness and altruism describe liberalism in "*innocently* thin terms." Who, asks Max Scheler, can "fail to detect the secretly glimmering *hatred* against the positive higher values, which are *not* essentially tied to the "species" – a hatred hidden deep down below this 'mild,' 'understanding,' 'humane' attitude?"[158] This mild and humane attitude harbors a secret hatred because its unacknowledged target is all the human yearnings that have been excommunicated by the disciplinary society. The overconfidence and rambunctiousness of self-absorbed boys living in the moment serve Gilligan as symbols of these yearnings, and her commitment to reforming them is her contribution to this project of their excommunication. This is the basic *illiberalism* lurking underneath her preferred basket of liberal values.

This can be observed again in an incident at Vassar College, related by Sommers, where the assistant dean of students ventured that several male students who had been exonerated of false rape accusations were not the worse off for the ordeal, which should serve as an opportunity for self-exploration.[159] If the false accusations were redeemed by this opportunity, this is because feminism here stands in opposition, not only to rape itself, but to everything in human nature which could conceivably precipitate it, everything that resists the ordering impulses of the buffered identity. This is what the exonerated students would have been exploring in an effort to expose and extirpate their every last impulse toward primeval, ape-like self-affirmation. Like many examples of politically correct excesses, the dean's statements may not be representative of what most liberals believe. But they are revealing of the cosmological orientation that underpins what they believe. Representing the thoroughgoing compression of the spiritual and the secular,

[158] Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, trans. Lewis B. Coser and William W. Holdheim (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010), pgs. 85-86.
[159] Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?*, pg. 44.

liberalism builds religious asceticism into the secular realm. This isn't just about punishing wrongdoing, but extirpating the "peculiarly human emotions," which could impede the properly ordered sociability of the buffered identity.

This project is more, not less, "moralistic" than the traditionalism that liberals believe is uniquely oppressive. Conservatives insist that the anarchic will of free men be properly acknowledged, if only through the traditional values that would restrain it (e.g., the Code of the Gentleman). If liberals believe we can live without this kind of moral restraint, this is only because they believe we can extirpate what would otherwise have to be restrained. This is what the self-exploration urged by the dean was intended to facilitate. The Code of the Gentleman comes *too late* for her, because it presupposes the retention of what resists it, presupposes the resignation to the sin and disorder in opposition to which the modern dispensation defines itself. As a modern elite, the dean was working to introduce the unwashed masses to the Augustinian self-examination and self-dissection that was once restricted to the monastery.

Refusing to compress the secular and the spiritual into each other, conservatives are more likely to believe in original sin as a *doctrine*. But it is liberals who, having undertaken this compression, are more likely to translate that doctrine into an actual practice, and this means turning moral purity into an intrinsic virtue to be maximized at all costs as a counterweight to our basic sinfulness. Far from eschewing the doctrine of sin, liberals have merely secularized it, repackaging it as their opposition to a barbarian past of which conservative impulses are the contemporary residue. Conservatives understand this intuitively. If they make much ado about what seem like unrepresentative or inconsequential incidents of politically correct excess—like the Vassar dean's remarks or occasional feminist opposition to tag—this is because these occasions offer unique opportunities to expose what lies beyond the "innocently thin terms" in which liberalism ensconces itself. And this is the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity.

The peculiarly courtly rationality, let us recall, sought to banish, not only violence, but also all *reminders* of violence, like the brandishing of knives, or any indication that a meat-dish might have involved slaughtering animals. What conservatives condemn as political correctness is the contemporary, politicized legacy of that imperative. The corporal daring and aggressiveness that worry some feminists are not in and of themselves sociopathic. But they can in some contexts and at the unconscious or semi-conscious level of Bourdieu's bodily *hexis* represent an implicit *ideological* challenge to the ordering impulses of the buffered identity, broadcasting in vague and

indefinite terms what is a refusal of its disciplines and repressions, a refusal of the excarnated subjectivity and expressive moderation that shield us from the violence and disorder of a barbarian past. These are what provoke the consternation of feminists, who seek, not only to solve problems, but to eliminate the *roots* of these problems. Political correctness is a way of attacking those roots, which liberals are discerning intuitively in what they charge are the "micro-aggressions" of conservatives. But being uninterested in those roots, conservatives cannot but see political correctness as an obsession with trifles. This disagreement reflects, not the disingenuousness of one of the parties, but their differential positioning along the civilizing process. It is not a difference of opinion, but a clash of cosmological orientations.

Originating as it does in what Elias calls the "inward retraining of the instinctual impulses denied direct access to the motor apparatus," the liberal identity is tied symbolically and physiologically to ways of "functioning bodily in the social and physical world" that seem to validate the properly ordered sociability of the buffered identity. Those who have not securely internalized these ways of functioning will worry liberals regardless of what they have actually done or said, because the basic disposition to transgress against the disciplines of liberalism remains there even if not acted upon. As we saw in Chapter Four, Lakoff argues that though contemporary conservatives may not embrace the historically classic "bigoted clauses"—racism, anti-Semitism, etc.—this merely leaves more open "slots" within which new bigoted clauses may be inserted as circumstances permit. Politically correct liberals intuit the existence of these open slots, the often subtle queues indicating resistance the buffered identity. And this cannot but elicit "vague premonitions of erosion and unraveling" even when the queues lack clear political content, because the politics can always be slipped into the open slots later. Liberals must therefore close these slots preemptively, which is the meaning of political correctness. As we saw with Goldberg in Chapter Three, liberals classify as incipient racism or fascism any position that seems like "callousness of the right-wing sort." And at its deepest level, this callousness is conservatives' visceral resistance to the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, to the extended chains of social interdependence and social identification that sustain this ethos and its attendant identity. This identity being the *sine qua non* of liberal ideals, uprooting resistance to it will always be the first order of business.

This preemptive impulse is why Lasch can observe that Theodore Adorno's *The Authoritarian Personality* "revealed more about the enlightened prejudices of the professional

classes than about the authoritarian prejudices among the common people."[160] Interviewing his subjects, Adorno determined that agreement with the statement that "science has its place, but there are many important things that can never possibly be understood by the human mind" was evidence of "authoritarian submission." And the beliefs that "an insult to our honor must always be punished" and that "if people would talk less and work more, everybody would be better off" Adorno considered signs of "authoritarian aggression."[161] If views that are not facially authoritarian were nevertheless so classified, this is because reservations about the value of science and rational deliberation are, just like any residual attachments to old-fashioned notions like honor, the seeds of the unraveling of the buffered identity, the beginnings of a slippery slope that must be preempted even in its benign phases. Liberals' facially unobjectionable demands for tolerance, sensitivity, "open-mindedness" are directed, not merely at the prospect of concrete harms and injustices, but at any intimations of resistance to the ordering impulses of the buffered identity—which is what the survey respondents unwittingly betrayed.

Hence Kimball's complaint that the "feminization of society" is a "coefficient of the triumph of liberalism," whose "distrust of masculine directness is the other side of its inveterate impulse to moralize all social activity."[162] As we saw in the last chapter, "masculine directness" is a direct challenge to the properly ordered sociability of the buffered identity, the introduction of anti-structure against its ordering impulses. And liberalism's "inveterate impulse to moralized all social activity" is liberals' continuing awareness that the seeds of such a challenge could be quietly germinating anywhere. Pre-modern porousness being human nature's default setting, it is like a cancer that may be in remission but can spread again anytime with any loosening of the inhibitions that make liberalism possible. Liberals sense this danger intuitively and experience "vague premonitions or erosion or unraveling" in response. These are what spur on liberalism's inquisitorial tendencies, the imperative to expose and reform whatever human impulses might prove recalcitrant to liberalism's universalistic consciousness.

In short, liberal morality can never be as secular, hard-nosed, and "experiential" as liberals pretend. Beyond protecting concrete individuals against concrete harms, liberals must also protect

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[160] Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), pg. 453.
[161] Ibid, pg. 453.
[162] Roger Kimball, "Mill, Stephen, and the Nature of Freedom," in *The Betrayal of Liberalism: How the Disciples of Freedom and Equality Helped Foster The Illiberal Politics of Coercion and Control*, eds. Hilton Kramer and Roger Kimball (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), pg. 59.

their *morality itself* as a kind of "order of things." This must be symbolically honored in the everyday attitudes of individuals, who must be periodically tested for any signs of incipient corruption. Hence diversity and sensitivity training, modern confessionals that probe and prod people in order to elicit these signs.

Feminist hostility to tag and the like notwithstanding, it would be overstating things to say that contemporary conservatives are, like their pre-modern forbears, being literally "badgered, bullied, pushed, preached at, drilled" to abandon their "lax and disorganized folkways" and become liberals. Nevertheless, they are being subjected to a sublimated, intellectualized, and etherealized variant of this original enterprise, which is what the New Enlightenment allows us to see. Westen writes:

> [T]his process of activation of alternative possibilities outside of awareness, which is basic to human cognition, creates tremendous opportunities for stealth attacks in politics, in which a campaign uses the "cover" of a dominant interpretation of the data to provide plausible deniability for another network intentionally activated under the cover of neural darkness. This is why the Willie Horton ad was so insidious [using the murderous recidivism of a furloughed black convict to criticize Democratic presidential candidate Michael Dukakis's Massachusetts furlough policy]. The network most active by virtue of the verbal content of the ad, and the one of which most viewers were consciously aware, was the "soft on crime" network. But a second, more emotionally powerful network—about scary black men—was also activated.[163]

Here is what Max Scheler calls "organic mendacity," falsification transpiring underneath the level of conscious thought.[164] And my argument is that liberals are engaged in an exponentially subtler and more sophisticated analogue of these machinations notwithstanding their rationalistic self-conception. The verbal content of liberal argument is ostensibly directed toward "issues" and "problems." But these are, "under the cover of neural darkness," being deployed to reinforce a particular ideal of the self and delegitimize its competitors. The project need never be announced because it proceeds through Bourdieu's "imperceptible cues of bodily *hexis*," an embodied political mythology that permits social meanings and values to "pass from practice to practice without going through discourse or consciousness." The purpose of political correctness is to inculcate this mythology, to seize on concrete issues in a way that promotes a specific ideal of fully realized human nature, the ever-present subtext and undertone of liberal admonitions. If liberals feel that conservatives have histrionically exaggerated the dangers of political correctness,

[163] Westen, *The Political Brain*, pg. 93.
[164] Scheler, *Ressentiment*, pg. 49.

this is only because they are oblivious to what goes on at this level, under the cover of neural darkness. Such is the true target of conservative claims of cultural oppression and yet another reason why liberals have more real enemies than they care to recognize.

Remarking on Columbia University's plan to "initiate an awareness of difference and the implications of difference for the Columbia community," Alan Kors observes that "Columbia administrators simply did not believe that their students could work things out spontaneously," with one dean declaring: "You can't bring all these people together and say, 'Now be one big happy community,' without some sort of training."[165] The training may be a way of promoting diversity, but the diversity is simultaneously a pretext for effecting the training, which channels the ordering impulses of modern elites. Students could not be trusted to "work things out spontaneously" because the tolerance being promoted at Columbia wasn't some generic, free-floating virtue that different people might realize in different ways, but rather the concrete affirmation of the particular ethos we have been examining. Columbia's diversity trainers exude "mildness" and "understanding." But underneath these intimations lurks a secret hatred for the anarchic will of free men, which the mildness and understanding gently chip away at on the level of bodily *hexis*. Liberals do not understand conservative claims of cultural oppression because their "Old Enlightenment" conception of reason blinds them to the merely semi-conscious, pre-theoretical layer of human experience to which these claims speak. Embracing as they do with the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, liberals cannot experience them an imposition, as anything that could create real enemies. But real enemies they have. And this is why conservatives can discern the exercise of authoritarian micro-power—what Bork calls the Left's "mini-tyrannies"—where liberals see only training for enlightenment.

Liberals see only enlightenment because the subtraction account of modernity and secularity conceals the *continuities* between enlightenment and the traditional religion that enlightenment has now discredited. Nietzsche writes:

> We misunderstand the beast of prey and the man of prey… thoroughly, we misunderstand "nature," as long as we still look for something "pathological" at the bottom of these healthiest of all tropical monsters and growths, or even for some "hell" that is supposed to be innate in them; yet that is what almost all moralists have so far done. Could it be that moralists harbor a hatred of the primeval forest and the tropics? And that the "tropical man" must be discredited at any price, whether as sickness or degeneration of man or as

[165] Alan Charles Kors and Harvey A. Silvergate, *The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's Campuses* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1999), pg. 218.

> his own hell and self-torture? In favor of the "temperate zone"? In favor of "temperate men"? Of those who are "moral"?[166]

The mutation counter-narrative reveals that, as a historical outgrowth of Christianity, liberalism developed through the social *devaluation* of a certain range of ideals, a devaluation of "the primeval forest and the topics" in favor of the "temperate zone" and "temperate men." The difference between our modern, secularized society and its Christian precursors is that the moralist's "hatred of the primeval forest and the tropics" must now be disguised and surreptitious. Given that generalized invective against sinful pride no longer enjoys any cultural credibility, the impulses that once animated that invective must be repackaged, compressed into ostensibly secular concerns. And so what was once condemned as sinful pride is now lamented as the coerced masculinization of boys, who must be helped to recover the "temperate zone" of an enlightened androgyny.

Liberalism's inveterate impulse to moralize all social activity never presents itself as raw, unabashed moralism, but always as a specific response to specific social problems which few deny are real. It is only to be expected that the elites' reforming impulses will express themselves in a more scientifically sophisticated fashion in the context of a more scientifically sophisticated society, where the badgering, bullying, and drilling can be expected to assume a more circuitous and genteel form, advanced as focused correctives rather than in the name of discipline as such. But behind the focused corrective lies liberalism's "silent" or "hidden" curriculum, which seeks to "mold *people* in a manner that helps ensure that liberal freedom is what they want," as Macedo says.[167] Thus, expressive moderation advances the "temperate zone" as a corrective to counterproductive ideological discord. But as we saw, this solution presupposes of broader transformation in human beings, a training away from pre-modern porousness toward a more abstract, intellectualized, and "excarnated" conception of themselves. This is what makes the temperate zone possible and hence the goal of liberals' covert moralistic fervor. Liberalism's hidden curriculum targets not only acts but *attitudes*, whatever impulses stand in the way of what Rawls celebrates as a "spirit" of compromise and a "readiness" to meet others halfway. It seeks, not only to solve specific challenges, but to employ these challenges as platforms or object lessons

[166] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), pgs. 108-09 (Sec. 197).
[167] Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust*, pg. 15.

through which to expose the "root cause" of the problem. And this will always lie in the overall make-ups of human beings.

5. The Coulter Threshold

Brooks writes that in becoming Bobos, former Bohemians have "learn[ed] not to be too zealous about their own visions, lest they offend their neighbors, and themselves." The "raging bonfire of emancipation" of the 60s has turned into "the cupped candle of tolerance and moderation." And so the Bobos are "suspicious of vehemence and fearful of people who communicate their views furiously or without compromise," suspicious "of people who radiate certitude," which is an affront to their own "epistemological modesty."[168] On the subtraction account, this epistemological modesty is just the supersession of the hero-systems that could precipitate epistemological immodesty, the supplanting of that immodesty by the liberal virtues. But on the mutation counter-narrative, this modesty and the "expressive moderation" that enables it are the *expression* of a hero-system. They are the contemporary reconstitution of Religious Reform's hostility to "fanaticism" and "enthusiasm" and of the "austere ethics of belief formation," which fed off this hostility. What is suspicion "of people who radiate certitude" but a contemporary, secularized expression of the buffered identity's antagonism toward the embodied feelings of the higher and the threat these pose to ordinary civil authority? The Bobos are tolerant and "open-minded," not in opposition to hero-systems, but in furtherance of one, for that open-mindedness is the means by which our default porousness can be subordinated to the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. What the subtraction account conceals but the mutation counter-narrative reveals is that the liberal virtues are *derivative* upon something more primordial, the secularized asceticism of the buffered identity.

This is why conservatives do not accept these virtues at face value and instead detect a parochial ethos that is at odds with liberalism's official ideals. Lasch observes:

> Blind to their own prejudices, the children of light could not see that their own world was in many ways just as narrowly circumscribed as the worker's. If the worker spent his days in the company of "people very like himself," so did the educated classes. Their travels took them around the globe, but the internationalization of the professional and managerial mode of life meant that they encountered the same kind of people and the same living conditions everywhere they went: the same hotels, the same three-star restaurants, the same

[168] David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: the New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), pg. 247.

> conference rooms and lecture halls. Education gave them vicarious access to the world's culture, but their acquaintance with that culture was increasingly selective and fragmentary, and it did not seem to have strengthened their capacity for imaginative identification with experience alien to their own. Their educated jargon had lost touch with everyday spoken language and no longer served as a repository of the community's common sense. Academic discourse had achieved a certain analytic precision, in law and medicine and the hard sciences, at the expense of vividness and evocative power; while in fields like psychiatry, sociology, and social work, it merely distinguished insiders from outsiders and gave an air of scientific prestige to practices embarrassed by their homely origins. Academic English—the abstract, uninflected, colorless medium not only of the classroom but of the boardroom, the clinic, the court of law, and the governmental bureau—had discarded most of the earthy idioms that betrayed its provincial Anglo-Saxon past, and the spoken form of this English no longer betrayed any hint of regional accent or dialect. The bureaucratization of language indicates what was happening to intellectual culture as a whole: its transformation into a universal medium in a curious way seemed to weaken its capacity to promote public communication. The people who stood at the forefront of the "communications age" had lost the ability to communicate with anyone but themselves. Their technical jargons were unintelligible to outsiders but immediately recognizable, as the badge of professional status, to fellow specialists all over the world. The cosmopolitanism of educated specialists overcame the old barriers of local, regional, and even national identity but insulated them from ordinary people and ordinary human experience.[169]

If the "children of light" are prepared to sacrifice content to style, this is because that style serves to uphold a particular identity. They will defend their bureaucratized language eviscerated of vividness and evocative power in "innocently thin terms," as intellectual rigor pure and simple, the mark of cosmopolitan sophistication. But this sophistication performs a social signaling function the upshot of which is to communicate acceptance of the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, to signal one that one too has overcome "the promptings of the senses" and can resist the "consolations of the enchanted world" (like the earthy idioms of a provincial Anglo-Saxon past). What Lasch describes as the elites' deracination is just the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity as seen from the perspective of its costs, which the liberal dispensation cannot recognize as costs. What the elites take for intellectual rigor pure and simple is in fact intellectual rigor as inflected by the liberal culture's disciplinary impulses, its peculiarly courtly rationality, which ultimately subordinates intellectual virtue to social virtue.

In concrete practice, the reflective, self-critical attitude celebrated by Macedo and Rawls refers, not to any general capacity to evolve in response to new experiences, but to the willingness to constrain one's thoughts and feelings in deference to "educated jargon," in deference to the particular nuances, shades of meaning, and conceptual divisions that the children of light have

[169] Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, pgs. 466-67.

designated as "serious," as singularly enlightened and rational. Only then is one accredited as possessed of a "reflective, self-critical attitude," as given to "self-control," or as willing to "engage in dialogue with others," as Macedo says. In short, liberals cannot recognize that the liberal virtues are not free-standing, and are rather bound up with a thicker identity that is upheld socially through unspoken mores rather than articulated principles. The children of light may see themselves as liberated souls who have cast off the confining illusions and horizons of the past. But underneath this self-image likes a distinct culture, an indigenous "traditionalism" that is as intransigent as any.

Hence conservatives' sense of themselves as outsiders and dissidents resisting liberal hegemony. As we saw in Chapter Two, Codevilla charges that elite universities admit candidates who contribute to a "social profile that fits the school's image of itself," who demonstrate a commitment to "fit in," to be "in with the right people," and give "the required signs that one is on the right side, and joining in despising the Outs." The despised Outs include, not only avowed racists, sexists, and homophobes, but, as we began to see in the last section, whoever seems to exude the seeds of a challenge to the buffered identity and its civilizational framework. The target is anyone who, failing to properly internalize the peculiarly courtly rationality, seems less ostentatiously self-possessed and less "flexible" than it demands, "radiating" a certain conviction or vision that seems less than properly "civilized." Conservaphobia is merely the politicization of this primordial animus. But liberals cannot acknowledge this animus, acknowledge that they are motivated, not only by their announced ideals, but by a visceral revulsion toward the residual porousness of the ordinary American, toward those who resist what Lasch calls the "cosmopolitanism of educated specialists," which now defines civility for us. This revulsion is the pre-rational prehistory of liberalism, an expression of the affective-instinctual transformation that its ideals presuppose.

The significance of Freud, writes Richard Rorty, is that he "he breaks down all the traditional distinctions between the higher and the lower, the essential and the accidental, the central and the peripheral," thereby leaving us with a self "which is a tissue of contingencies rather than an at least potentially well-ordered system of faculties." It is this basic randomness that explains "why we deplore cruelty in some cases and relish it in others," why "our ability to love is restricted to some very particular shapes and sizes and colors of people, things, or ideas."[170] The hypocrisy which conservatives perennially discern in liberalism is liberals' attempt to present what

[170] Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*, pg. 32.

is a tissue of contingencies as a potentially well-ordered system of faculties. In concealing from themselves how liberalism is built atop the tissue of contingencies chronicled by the mutation counter-narrative, liberals also conceal from themselves how their ability to love is restricted as it in fact is, how their identity-affirmation requirements compel them to be despise a certain range of personalities and temperaments. Liberals may be free of some traditional social prejudices to which conservatives remain beholden. But that very freedom is the outgrowth of an "original spiritual vision." It is facilitated, not by individual virtue, but by *other* social prejudices that are only recognizable through the mutation counter-narrative. Liberals may not engage in flagrantly irrational discrimination against broad, easily identifiable swaths of the population. But their commitment to equality is nevertheless circumscribed by their hero-system, which will entail subtler, generally deniable forms of discrimination against those who refuse the "temperate zones."

This means conservatives. They feel oppressed by "liberalism" because liberalism, as Mansfield puts it, "in the end lives in the given," because "[f]or all its devotion to progress, it does not inspire greatness," and "arrives at the equality of men and women by downsizing greatness to 'individuality,'" blind to what has been lost.[171] For all their *prima facie* appeal, Macedo's liberal virtues are, in the end, prescriptions for compromising with "the given." They facilitate individual freedom, but at the price of excommunicating human impulses that resist the properly ordered sociability of the buffered identity, the given of liberalism. The buffered distance arose historically as a *refusal* of the given, a refusal of "the easy comforts of conformity to authority, of the consolations of an enchanted world, of the surrender to the promptings of the senses." And this legacy enables liberalism's self-image as the guardian of individuality against the collectivizing social illusions of a benighted past. If liberalism lives in the given "in the end," however, this is because the sense of special dignity that surrounds this stance has now *assumed a life of its own*. Having become the new given, it enjoys a social prestige that now operates independently of the struggles through which this stance originated historically. This prestige—"the cosmopolitanism of educated specialists—disguises what is a surrender to the given in an aura of courageous, emancipated individualism. Having become democratized as a ubiquitous cultural currency, what may once have been a genuine refusal of the easy comforts of conformity to authority has become the deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry thereof.

[171] Harvey C. Mansfield, *Manliness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pg. 188.

This mimicry is intrinsic to the liberal project, whose contradiction must be concealed or rationalized in some fashion. Dalrymple writes that Mill's attempt to synthesize "the romantic cult of the individual" with a "puritanical utilitarianism" had to produce an unrealistic view of human beings and the social order.[172] If that synthesis—which the Bobos strive to embody—must fail, this is because "rational control," as Mansfield says, "tries to free itself from an individual self, which it sees as arbitrary, distracting, entangling, and irrational."[173] The buffered identity grants control over, and expression to, the self. But it does so only by first simplifying that self, and then naturalizing the end-product as to conceal the process that generated it, denying human reality to whatever cannot be subsumed within its conventions. The Bobos cultivate an ethos "that celebrates, actually demands, endless innovation, self-expansion, and personal growth."[174] But the notion that these things could be summarily willed as a regimen, that all that is required here is some single-minded commitment and dedication, betrays the contradiction at the heart of the Bobo project, and the buffered identity. The latter may promote the individual against the irrational collectivizing social illusions to which conservatives are sometimes drawn. But it simultaneously suppresses that which is, or even just *seems*, irrational *within* the individual, which is an equal or greater affront to its special dignity. This is why liberalism must downsize greatness to individuality, because the seeds of greatness will always have a logic that resists its disciplines, a logic that is incompatible with the liberal virtues.

Conservaphobia is the balm with which liberalism soothes the ensuing dissonance. Allan Bloom quips that "anti-bourgeois animus is the opiate of the last man."[175] And if liberals require the opiate of anti-conservative animus, this is as a distraction from how much they *share* with conservatives, from how much their counter-culture is a culture, a set of pieties and mores to which they are fully subservient. This denial is why liberalism requires its own *Other*, a scapegoat onto which liberals' own conservatism may be projected. It is also why conservatives believe that it is they and not liberals who are the true defenders of the individual. The freedom conservatives celebrate isn't the expressive autonomy cherished by liberals, but something more concrete and menacing, all the human impulses suppressed and discredited by the disciplines and repressions of

[172] Theodore Dalrymple, *In Praise of Prejudice: The Necessity of Preconceived Ideas* (New York: Encounter Books, 2007), pgs. 42-43.
[173] Mansfiled, *Manliness*, pg. 235.
[174] Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise*, pg. 226
[175] Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), pg. 78.

the buffered identity—the anarchic will of free men in opposition to which the rational autonomy of liberals sets itself.

* * *

It was the pursuit of this conservative freedom that defined the life of now deceased conservative icon Andrew Breitbart, whose personal struggles embody the logic I have just described. Breitbart was for several years a firebrand of anti-Obama sentiment in Tea Party circles, where he was admired for his pugnacious defiance of liberal hegemony. His autobiographical *Righteous Indignation* explains that this achievement was long in the making, the outcome of a protracted struggle to arrive at the self-knowledge to defy liberalism. Breitbart had emerged from his Los Angeles upbringing as a default, knee-jerk liberal and spent his undergraduate years at Tulane University in fraternity-induced debauchery, proceeding through life in a general stupor. While the debauchery and the 2.2 GPA it entailed seemed unfortunate, Breitbart recognized retrospectively that it was precisely this indifference to academics that inoculated him against the cultural Marxism infecting academia—the fate of more diligent students. Notwithstanding his liberal socialization, Bretibart had always felt something was amiss in the anti-Americanism being promoted all around him. But his hedonism had left him fairly apolitical at this stage of his life, and so he experienced only a diffuse, ill-articulated discomfort with the liberal *zeitgeist*.

The years following graduation were marked by the same wandering aimlessness and distraction, with Breitbart waiting tables, working as a courier, and finding nothing that could invigorate his energies and lead him to assume responsibility. However, the stupor gradually dissipated through a steadily growing enthusiasm for conservative politics, as he became more and more awoken to how a minority of liberal elites had commandeered the reigns of a center-right nation. Breitbart had never been at ease with liberalism. But it took a series of events—the need to support himself financially, the influence of a conservative father-in-law, and the Clarence Thomas hearings in the Senate—to incrementally erode his socially instilled inhibitions against conservatism. With the benefit of these experiences, Breitbart eventually reached the point where he could listen to Rush Limbaugh and criticize liberals without the guilt and self-doubt with which his former liberalism had constrained him. From there he went on to become a conservative new media activist, developing a well-respected expertise at disseminating stories that would expose

both the unsavory machinations of liberals and the mainstream media's complicity in covering them up.

Breitbart's conservative *bildungsroman* reaches its narrative apex in his political coming-of-age appearance on liberal Bill Maher's television comedy talk show, where he would, outnumbered, defend the anti-Obama movement and Rush Limbaugh against charges of racism. As he had predicted, Breitbart became the target of the very tactics he had made a career of exposing. Maher, he explains, had "predetermined to make mincemeat out of me by using his winks, looks, nods, dismissive gestures, and comedy to make me the outsider."[176] At one point, Maher cut off Breitbart's response to liberal black professor Michael Eric Dyson's longwinded and pretentious argument in order to praise Dyson with "that is some motherfucking articulateness," thereby insinuating that Breitbart lacked this articulateness and eliciting the liberal audience's wild applause. Such a scenario had been the sum of all his fears, but it was also the trial by fire by means of which he finally came into his own:

> I felt something different: an almost druglike and ethereal and divine exultation. Recognition that I had been born, publicly and politically, for the first time. It was like looking into a mirror and recognizing, *This is who I am. I'm not going to tap-dance around what I believe in anymore.* Even though I had secretly believed in conservative ideas, and even though I had used different tactics to push them, and even though I had insinuated my ideas into the marketplace and effectively circumvented the Complex by contributing to the New Media, I had never been willing to stick my neck out like Rush Limbaugh or Ann Coulter or Sean Hannity. I had never been willing to stand out there and be the object of public ridicule. I had feared what it would be like, feared what retribution would come, feared what the social consternation would be, feared what the swords and the slings and the arrows and the rocks upon my body would feel like, feared a comedienne whose work I enjoyed mocking me in her presence. I had feared in both my waking and sleeping hours what it would be like.
>
> I had passed what I call the Coulter Threshold: the point where you understand that Ann Coulter and those like her are standing up for what they believe in, feeling the righteousness of living without fear of missing a dinner invite from Tina Brown for fundraisers with Steve Capus or Ben Sherwood or Steven Spielberg or Jeffrey Katzenberg—or, worse, the agony of being excoriated by those conservatives who fret that their liberal overlords will start admonishing them for keeping company with you. Feeling the thrill of sending a message to these people that we reject their worldview the way they reject ours.[177]

Breitbart had finally embraced his nature as a conservative claimant of cultural oppression *in toto*. His "almost druglike and ethereal and divine exultation" was his long-deferred reward for his

[176] Andrew Breitbart, *Righteous Indignation: Excuse Me While I Save the World* (New York and Boston: Grand Central Publishing, 2001), pg. 141.
[177] Ibid., pgs. 146-47.

initially ambivalent but increasingly steadfast struggle to resist the blandishments of liberalism. The liberals who might expect to receive prestigious dinner invitations from Steven Spielberg or be praised by Maher as articulate were people who had unlike Breitbart acquiesced in "the given," artificially simplifying themselves in accordance with a preferred basket of liberal values and thereby emerging into the properly ordered sociability of the buffered identity. These were the people who woke up for their college classes and upon graduating accumulated the symbolic capital needed to thrive within the liberal culture. By contrast, Breitbart had resisted this untroubled normalcy and embraced the entanglements of individuality, those elements of our human nature that are recalcitrant to the conventions of Bobo self-realization. Having repudiated "the given" of his liberal milieu, he was condemned to years of wandering in the wilderness like the prophet who has yet to receive his calling, years of inarticulacy, aimlessness, and confusion. Rejecting the blandishments of liberalism while still lacking an authentic moral compass to substitute, he had left one shore without a clear view of the other, and could only twist and turn in the wind, with idle curiosity and the bottle as his only refuge. Already here he was culturally oppressed, because it was the dominion of the liberal culture that had condemned him to this fate.

But this oppression was the sacrifice required if Breitbart was to achieve the higher integration that his turn to conservatism finally enabled. Conservative claimants of cultural oppression refuse to be "trained and groomed like prize puppies to be good liberals," as Gelernter says, and Breitbart had shed the last vestige of this training and grooming in himself when he refused to apologize for his conservatism in the face of the usual intimidation. It was in this moment of authenticity that he finally became reunited with his true self, the self that liberalism had previously withheld from him, becoming a beacon of hope to all conservatives who had been similarly cowed and dispossessed. Liberals may dismiss Breitbart's ecstasies as cheap identity politics. But for the conservative claimant of cultural oppression who has reached the Coulter Threshold, these ecstasies are in "direct touch with human flourishing at the most basic level of experience," to borrow from Lakoff. And this flourishing was Breitbart's liberation from the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, from the panoply of inhibitions—e.g., expressive moderation and epistemological modesty—that sustain the liberal culture.

Maher and his audience were the symbolic embodiments of this culture. And this was why defying them proved so liberating for Breitbart. His "almost druglike and ethereal and divine exultation" was his release from the secularized asceticism atop of which liberalism is built, his

reunification with those parts of the self that liberalism excommunicates in the name of social discipline. Maher's winks, looks, nods, and dismissive gestures were embodiments of this discipline, the bullying, badgering, and scolding of modern elites, and so precisely what Breitbart had to overcome in order to be fully reborn. The Bobo who looks in the mirror may see "endless innovation, self-expansion, and personal growth." But the conservative claimant of cultural oppression who finally achieves the Coulter Threshold sees *himself*. And this is because he sees that liberalism sits atop what Taylor calls "one historically constructed understanding of human agency among others." Having in Christ-like fashion suffered the stings of swords, slings, arrows, and rocks upon his body—the "full force" of liberals' "rhetorical firepower" as Hannity says—Breitbart was resurrected in the ecstasies that finally transported him fully beyond the confines of this historically constructed understanding, immersing him in a higher truth that is inaccessible to the merely articulate, inaccessible to the "epistemological fragment" of man. Only by transcending the latter could Breitbart disarm liberalism of the power it wielded over him, and this was what his ecstasies signified.

6. High-Spirited Nonconformists

John McWhorter decries the African-American Teacher's Association of New York for refusing to condemn the anti-intellectualism of disruptive inner-city black students, whom it instead idealized as "high-spirited nonconformists" resisting the repression of white middle-class values.[178] Not every liberal will go so far as to exalt disruptiveness and misbehavior as a courageous political statement. But most will insist that whatever criticisms one issues be sensitive to the historical inequalities that form the broader context of these students' alienation, which cannot be reduced to bare delinquency and malice. Facing no realistic alternative to inner city life and the racism that created it, these youths do what they must to adapt to the conditions at hand, even if this means behavior that seems self-defeating. Conservatives attribute inner city problems to cultural dysfunction. But this dysfunction is itself a product of historical inequalities that live on in the present, which is exactly what moralistic attacks on the alleged pathologies of the "black culture" elide.

[178] John McWhorter, *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (HarperPerennial, 2001), pg. 69

The same kind of argument can be made in defense of the conservative culture. For the mutation counter-narrative is the record of the *historical inequalities between liberals and conservatives*. Liberals insist that the personal and social malformations of some minority groups be understood in their total context, rather than artificially uprooted from it as bare pathology. But then intellectual consistency requires that the "root causes" of conservative claims of cultural oppression be similarly acknowledged. If understanding the travails of African-Americans means looking beyond current crime statistics toward the beginnings of African slavery in America, then we can also step back just a bit further in time to examine the rise of the modern from out of the pre-modern and the new hierarchies it spawned. From this perspective, conservative claimants of cultural oppression are no mere delinquents, but rather "high-spirited nonconformists" in revolt against the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. Whatever their irrationalities, these originate in this resistance, in what is a *political* struggle against the liberal culture.

This is what *liberals* refuse to recognize and the reason why the mutation counter-narrative enables the Right to become the Left and accuse the Left of becoming the Right. Liberals will classify as pure pathology whatever does not conform to their preferred basket of liberal values. But these pathologies can also be understood as the logical byproducts of liberal domination, of the historically constructed understanding of human agency that it imposes. It is this that generates the inequalities to which conservative claims of cultural oppression are the response. The liberalism of liberals is circumscribed by the buffered identity, by a hero-system, which is what prevents its extension conservatives. But as we will now see, what liberals excoriate as conservative pathologies must appear in a new light once that liberalism is so extended. And this is because the mutation counter-narrative allows us to *politicize* what liberals prefer to dismiss as raw irrationality.

* * *

Sowell observes that whereas 1950s intellectuals looked upon Adlai Stevenson as a paragon of their ideals, interpreting his defeat to Eisenhower as a symptom of creeping anti-intellectualism, they condescendingly dismissed Truman as an ignorant simpleton who was in over his head. The truth, however, was that Stevenson could go for months or years without picking up a book while Truman voraciously consumed fare like Thucydides and Shakespeare and enjoyed Cicero in the original Latin. If the conventional wisdom of intellectuals was so off the mark, the

explanation, argues Sowell, was that whereas Truman was "unpretentious and plainspoken," Stevenson "had the rhetoric and airs of an intellectual" and so appealed to his fellow intellectuals' vanity.[179] Sowell isn't just taking a cheap shot at intellectuals but drawing our attention to something that follows logically from the mutation counter-narrative and the origin of the modern liberal identity in a peculiarly courtly rationality. "The rhetoric and airs of an intellectual" aren't mere "personal tastes and pretentions," but *structural expressions* of a historically bequeathed hero-system. The reflexive adulation of Stevenson and the unfair denigration of Truman reveals that the linguistic and behavioral conventions from which the buffered identity originated can act upon liberals as automatic positive stimuli in just the same way that patriotism or traditional values can act upon conservatives. This is the *basic human symmetry* that conservative claims of cultural oppression are forever seeking to expose. As we saw with Gouldner, the New Class is a "flawed universal class." And this susceptibility is at the origin of its flaws.

Mooney attributes to liberals an evolved "need for cognition" and "need for accuracy," as well as a need to distinguish themselves from the herd. But what are after all *needs* can be expected to yield the "cognitive elitism" bewailed by Harris and other conservatives, producing a culture in which those trained and groomed to bear the appropriate cultural markers are anointed as "intellectual" and accorded a deference that is withheld from others who lack these markers. We know that our evolved capacity for disgust can become culturally misdirected with the consequence that homosexuality becomes viewed with a visceral repugnance that would be more appropriate for telltale signs of bacterial infection. And I am arguing that the intellectualism of the liberal elites may be vulnerable to a similar kind of cultural misdirection. Just like disgust, our evolved "need for cognition" or "need for accuracy" as embedded in the angular cingulated cortex may have been culturally harnessed to imperatives that provide the desired neurological stimuli at the cost of intellectual substance and honesty. Indeed, Mooney acknowledges that liberals find it "hard, psychologically" to buck what the scientists say. This inhibition is not the product of individual reflection, but rather a reflexive, socially inculcated responsiveness to "the rhetoric and airs of an intellectual," to the language, style, and demeanor of the New Class, which symbolically articulate the original spiritual vision of the buffered distance.

[179] Thomas Sowell, *Intellectuals and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), pgs. 206-7.

Codevilla complains that "[f]or our Ruling Class, identity always trumps truth."[180] And this might be dismissed as just a hollow ad hominem. But like all conservative claims of cultural oppression, this lament carries a richer meaning in the context of the mutation counter-narrative. Thus understood, it is a reminder that our commitment to science arose, not out of any bare yearning for the truth, but as part and parcel of a contingent, historically constructed identity for which the scientific stance serves a spiritual function. As we observed with Taylor, the practitioners of science may understand themselves as "motivated fully by epistemic considerations," but a "big part of the motivation resides in the prestige and admiration surrounding the [scientific] stance itself, with the sense of freedom, power, control, invulnerability, dignity, which it radiates." And it is precisely this stance—the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity—that fuels liberals' dismissive indignation toward conservative claims of cultural oppression. Refusing to uphold this ethos as liberated human nature, these claims must be discredited accordingly. In this way does identity trump truth, the truth of the mutation counter-narrative, of which conservatives have only an under-theorized understanding. This understanding is being expressed when Codevilla notes that the "the notion that the common people's words are, like grunts, mere signs of pain, pleasure, and frustration, is now axiomatic among our Ruling Class."[181] Those words do not respect the conventions of the peculiarly courtly rationality. And so they are assigned a merely animal status, mere grunts bereft of cognitive content, expressions of the "merely animal" in human nature. This judgment is simply a concomitant of the buffered identity, which must see its opponents in this way.

It must also *deny* that it is seeing them in this way, deny its own identitarian motivations. Operating out of a sublimated, intellectualized, and etherealized hero-system, liberals can always proceed with plausible deniability, by relying on the unstated or understated mores of the liberal culture to make their case for them. Mary Midgely observes:

> Probably few philosophers – or indeed other academics – ever realize how much of their influence is conveyed through expression and tone of voice, rather than through argument. Certain nuances of disappointment and contempt can often do more to direct a student than a ton of good argument.[182]

[180] Angelo M. Codevilla, *The Ruling Class: How They Corrupted America and What We Can Do About It* (Beauford Books, 2010), pg. 13.
[181] Ibid., pgs. 20-21.
[182] Mary Midgley, *Wisdom, Information, and Wonder: What is Knowledge for?* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pg. 101.

> Anyone who stands amazed – as most civilized people now do – at the fact that university departments of philosophy are today being steadily closed down in Britain might reflect that many of our current decision-makers, when young, made their first acquaintance with philosophy by hearing a superior voice drawl something like, 'But what could that possibly mean?' This kind of remark was not intended as a question, nor as an admission of ignorance, but as winning an argument and settling the whole issue. Merely not understanding what people said became for a time a safe passport to professional status.[183]

Midgley is describing a very specific social milieu with plenty of idiosyncrasies. But that milieu embodies with special clarity what conservatives understand to be a general feature of the liberal culture. And this is a profound *disconnect* between this culture's articulated self-conception—the "Open personality" embracing all the liberal virtues—and another, only semi-conscious level of intonations and insinuations which convey a more determinate and hence exclusionary set of values and understandings. These are the values and understandings of the buffered identity, the way in which the liberal virtues have been inflected by the specific historical forces that brought this identity into being. If this parochialism can go unrecognized, this is owing to its sublimated, intellectualized, and etherealized nature. Whereas "Moral Order" is maintained through unabashed moralization, the buffered distance is maintained through "certain nuances of disappointment and contempt." This layer of social meaning is obscured by liberals' Old Enlightenment rationalism, but it lies at the very heart of the liberal privilege that oppresses conservatives.

* * *

To the extent conservatives are anti-intellectual, one important reason is that the intellectualism of liberals is intimately bound up with these nuances of disappointment and contempt, which are ultimately expressions of the buffered distance. Given that the posture of intellectual detachment as understood in our culture carries an identitarian significance as the expression of an "original spiritual vision," it can be psychologically difficult to embrace the detachment without also accepting the broader spiritual vision, which is why conservatives may reject the detachment. Giving the "insider's perspective" on the Left's playbook, David Kahane advises his "radical conservatives":

> [I]f we call you out and demand to know—which we will, you can bet on that, it's part of the playbook—the details of your "plan," laugh and tell them to shove it and start talking

[183] Ibid., pg. 188.

> about principles. To do otherwise is to accept our premises, which means you have already lost. Instead, stick to the big picture: liberty, self-reliance, faith, freedom.[184]

If conservatives cannot discuss the concrete details of policy without accepting the Left's premises and surrendering the field from the outset, this is because to engage in disengaged deliberation may be to proceed down a slippery slope that will redound to the prestige of the buffered identity. In just the way some inner-city black youth feel they cannot be studious because this would be to "act white" and surrender to white supremacy, so some conservatives may feel that they cannot celebrate intellectualism without endorsing the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, without endorsing their own cultural oppression. In both case, the obstinacy originates in the group's subordination before a dominant dispensation. The Ruling Class, writes Codevilla, "has established itself as the fount of authority, its primacy is based on habits of deference."[185] And conservatives' anti-intellectualism is before anything else an attempt to reverse these habits, to erode the social prestige that attaches to the "rhetoric and airs of the intellectual." This is why Kahane would tell liberals to "shove it." The "it" is the buffered identity, which is being inculcated *through* liberal intellectualism—just as it is inculcated through their anti-sexism, relativism, naturalism, and many other things, as we have seen.

Conservatives refuse to see liberal intellectualism in "innocently thin terms," as mere logic and clarity, and rather intuit the thick accretions of cultural meaning in which the logic and clarity are silently embedded. This embeddedness is why Sowell can observe:

> Just as people who criticize liberalism on the basis of the actual behavior of liberals are accused of being against liberalism in its dictionary definition, so people who criticize the actual behavior of intellectuals are often accused of being "anti-intellectual" in the sense of being against intellectual pursuits themselves. Richard Hofstadter's well-known book *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* equated the two things, both in its title and in its text, where he referred to "the national disrespect for mind" and "the qualities in our society that make intellect unpopular."[186]

If it is the actual behavior of intellectuals, and not disrespect for intellect as such, that has made intellectuals suspect in our culture, the reason is that this behavior has served to embed intellect in a particular identity—Lasch's "cosmopolitanism of educated specialists"—which is anathema to the ordinary American. As we observed with Dan Kahan, ostensibly hard-nosed empirical

[184] David Kahane, *Rules for Radical Conservatives: Beat the Left at Its Own Game to Take Back America* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2010), pg. 255.
[185] Codevilla, *The Ruling Class*, pg. 86.
[186] Sowell, *Intellectuals and Society*, pg. 219.

arguments for gun control or enhanced environmental regulation can be framed in ways that gratuitously exalts certain social identities over others, and thereby alienate people from policies they otherwise could have supported. And my argument here is that something like this is transpiring with respect to the life of mind in general. Conservative anti-intellectualism is the predictable consequence of the *alienation that liberal intellectualism is designed to provoke*, a consequence of the "nuances of disappointment and contempt" through which that intellectualism announces itself to conservatives. While some conservatives will attempt to articulate and expose the hidden meaning of these nuances, many others will lack the wherewithal to do so, and so will be left with anti-intellectualism as their only recourse.

This socially-induced alienation is why Harris can argue that while the populist conservative may be in error when he rejects the theory of evolution, he is virtuous in his refusal to believe anything which he cannot genuinely understand for himself—unlike the rest of us who repeat the theory that we are descended from monkeys "by rote as if we were descended from parrots."[187] The scientists may be right. But given that few of us have the time, patience, and learning to grapple with the technical minutiae of evolutionary theory, the deference which scientists receive originates in the cultural prestige of the scientific outlook within the liberal culture. To attack that prestige is therefore to resist the liberal culture and its disciplines. And this is what conservative anti-intellectualism is designed to do. We are, writes Harris, "better off for having in our midst a large segment of the population who refuses to act intelligently," people "who won't listen to what the scientists tell them even when the scientists are right," because this "irrational resistance to a scientific outlook on life" is the only way to "prevent a world in which no other outlook is conceivable."[188] The liberal, unlike the populist conservative, "acts intelligently." But *acting* is the operative word, signifying conservatives' intuitive awareness that liberalism is built atop a historically constructed identity, a hero-system that is always being *acted out* in social life. This is what the conservative populist rejects when he acts unintelligently. Acting unintelligently is the *price* he is willing to pay in order to resist this identity, to preserve the anarchic will of free men against the technocratic values of the ruling liberal elites. And so this is a price that liberalism itself has exacted from him, itself an aspect of his cultural oppression.

[187] Harris, *The Next American Civil War*, pg. 179.
[188] Ibid., pg. 180.

The "children of the Enlightenment" cannot recognize their own complicity in fomenting conservative anti-intellectualism. But this is what follows from the critical theory of the Right, the mirror image of the critical theory of the Left. Drawing on Jacques Derrida, Chantal Mouffe argues that while our Enlightenment prejudices dispose us to see identities as pure "presence" or "objectivity," they are in fact constituted by "acts of exclusion." Power is not "an external relation taking place between two preconstituted identities" and rather inheres in the identities themselves, identities that have been shaped by a "constitutive outside" created by these acts of exclusion.[189] Liberals commit precisely this error when they mistake conservative anti-intellectualism for a pure "presence." They may see this anti-intellectualism is an intrinsic feature of the conservative personality, or the conservative amygdala, something that they just come across in conservative individuals. But this anti-intellectualism is in fact a *byproduct*, and *not* the cause, of conservative resistance to liberalism and its peculiarly courtly rationality. It has been shaped by "acts of exclusion," the nuances of disappointment and contempt through which the liberal culture targets conservatism and conservatives. What liberals believe is their intellectual superiority isn't an "external relation" with the intellectually inferior conservatives but rather the *product of power relations* that liberals will not acknowledge. Conservative anti-intellectualism is simply what can become of more porous selves within a civilizational framework dominated by the buffered identity, a function of the ways in which this identity cultivates certain human potentialities while suppressing others.

Conservatives *are* different from liberals, as Mooney insists. But as Catherine MacKinnon notes, differences are "inequality's post hoc excuse, its conclusory artifact, its outcome presented as its origin, the damage that is pointed to as the justification for doing the damage after the damage has been done."[190] The irrationalities of conservative claimants of cultural oppression are cited as evidence for the correctness of liberal judgments. But this evidence is itself the *product* of liberal judgments. While conservatives will dismiss the stereotype of conservatives as anti-intellectual as a liberal prejudice, it is more accurate to say that this prejudice is so powerful as to have become something more than a prejudice, as to have become truth, something that liberal domination has forced conservatives to internalize.

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[189] Chantal Mouffe, "Democracy, Power, and the 'Political,'" in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pg. 247.
[190] Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), pg. 8.

Foucault writes that "[e]ach society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth," the types of discourse which that politics "accepts and makes function as true."[191] The truths of liberalism are made to "function as true" because, like any artificial social hierarchy, liberalism generates its own "truth" by progressively debilitating those who would challenge it. Just as racism can "create" black criminality by limiting blacks' educational and economic opportunities and sexism can "create" femininity by enforcing female subservience, so liberalism creates conservative anti-intellectualism. This is to be expected given the "vision of the anointed" and its "pattern of seeking differentiation at virtually all costs." Conservative anti-intellectualism provides liberals with a constant backdrop of benightedness against which their own thoughtfulness may be highlighted—the *Other* in relation to which Mill's "progressive beings" can define themselves as such. This is the "total context" of conservative anti-intellectualism, the "mitigating circumstances" that should discredit liberal stereotypes about conservatives—just as the fact of historical racism should discredit conservative stereotypes about blacks. If liberals refuse to acknowledge these mitigating circumstances notwithstanding their claims to sociological sophistication, this is because identity has triumphed over truth, just as Codevilla says.

* * *

Wherever we look, the facially outlandish paranoia of conservative claims of cultural oppression has as its "root cause" the fact that intuitions pertaining to a supra-epistemological realm of human experience are being articulated through the epistemological framework which has been imposed upon it. And this works to discredit those intuitions notwithstanding that they originate in the truth of the mutation counter-narrative.

As we saw in Chapter Two, Goldberg charges that liberals conceal the ideological content of "social justice." By presenting social justice as an ineffable, Jedi-like force, they make it "impossible to argue with their most basic ideas." This charge is largely false if interpreted epistemologically, as the accusation that liberals will not acknowledge the values which drive them. To the extent liberals' values may sometimes go unacknowledged, this is for the same reason that conservatives' values may sometimes go unacknowledged, because they are being taken for granted in the context at hand, not because they are being somehow concealed. But Goldberg's charge *becomes* true once interpreted with the ultimate in sophistication—on the level

[191] Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pg. 73.

of cosmological orientation, a level that is deeper than deeply held belief. The disingenuousness which Goldberg viscerally senses in liberals pertains, not to the values that underlie their assessments of the facts, but to the cosmological orientation that underlies their values, to the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. This is why the content of "social justice" need never be revealed, because it ultimately refers to an ethos that doesn't need to be articulated in order to be understood and acted upon.

If it is impossible to argue with the Left's most basic ideas, this is owing to the fact that, as Taylor says, "you can't go on digging under our ordinary representations to uncover further, more basic representations," because "[w]hat you get underlying our representations of the world—the kinds of things we formulate, for instance, in declarative sentences—is not further representations but rather a certain grasp of the world that we have as agents in it." This grasp is our cosmological orientations. The ever-elusive "most basic ideas" of the Left cannot be argued with, not because they are being disingenuously concealed, but because *they are not ideas at all*. The Jedi-like aura that seems to envelop the liberal invocation of social justice is simply the secularized asceticism of the buffered identity, the invisible taken-for-granted backdrop of liberal ideals. The disingenuousness of liberalism is simply the disingenuousness of naturalizing that identity as essential human nature. And this is precisely the argument which the epistemological framework prevents conservatives from making—the reason why their claims of cultural oppression are an "insurrection of subjugated knowledges." Seeing this requires the ultimate in sophistication. And liberalism's perennial rhetorical supremacy is a consequence of this very high bar.

Helen Rittelmeyer was attempting to circumvent this problem when she, as discussed in Chapter Two, decided to forgo arguing for conservative values and instead sought to embody them by smoking at Yale, as a rebellion against the university's "moral consensus that the two most important things in life are for everyone to be happy and for everyone to get along." Though Rittelmeyer could not articulate the deeper meaning of her rebellion, the moral consensus she was repudiating was in fact the "order of mutual benefit" created by the ordering impulses of the buffered identity, which conservatives are always resisting in one way or another. The smoke Rittelmeyer was introducing into the world was the very same anti-structure that other conservatives seek to produce verbally, through arguments and accusations. Recognizing that the ostensible issues are always secondary to cosmological orientation, she resolved to express the

latter directly through smoking, the social meaning of which was that liberalism rests atop a contingent, culturally parochial ethos by which she and other smokers will not be beguiled.

Resentful and reactive conservative claims of cultural oppression may be. But this resentment and reactivity are being deployed as an inarticulate protest against what liberalism itself refuses to articulate, its own cosmological orientation and the costs it portends for conservatives. These claims may seem histrionic and contrived. But this is because they seek to promote the *Other* of the buffered distance, pre-modern anti-structure, the drama, boastful self-assertion, recalcitrance, and inflexibility that have been excluded from every preferred basket of liberal values. Corey Robin observes:

> Conservatives usually style themselves as chastened skeptics holding the line against political enthusiasm. Where radicals tilt toward the utopian, conservatives settle for world-weary realism. But, in reality, conservatives have been temperamentally antagonistic, politically insurgent, and utterly opposed to established moral convention. Ever since Edmund Burke, thinkers from Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Martin Heidegger have sought a more intense, almost ecstatic mode of experience in the spheres of religion, culture, and even the economy—all of which, they believe, are repositories of the mysterious and ineffable.[192]

This contradiction becomes intelligible, and is indeed dissolved as a contradiction, within the mutation counter-narrative. To the extent conservatives hold themselves out as world-weary stalwarts defending tradition against newfangled moral fashions, this is because that tradition represents a less thoroughgoing iteration of the buffered identity—the old Victorianism as opposed to the new. To the extent they instead seek out a "more intense, almost ecstatic mode of experience"—Breitbart's "almost druglike and ethereal and divine exultation"—this is in expression of the underlying impulse, the prerogatives of pre-modern porousness opened out to anti-structure. Conservative claimants of cultural oppression can feel at ease incorporating the anti-bourgeois temper of the Left into their conservatism because their claims are merely a *means* for expressing something—resistance to the properly ordered sociability of the buffered identity—that is irreducible to conservatism as such.

This is why Anderson's *South Park Conservatives* can in one chapter celebrate the coarseness and sometimes scatological vulgarity of an emerging brand of conservative comedy and in another celebrate the growing number of college students who, resisting prevailing sexual mores on campus, take a resolute stand in favor of sexual abstinence, refusing to "grow" despite

[192] Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pg. 113.

the pressures leveled at them.[193] Though superficially incompatible, the two tenors cohere as expressions of resistance to the forces of humanistic normalization, the basic impetus of conservative claims of cultural oppression, which harness traditionalism and anti-traditionalism alike in their own service. Liberals assume that these claims are a reactionary effort to "turn back the clock." But claiming cultural oppression can become a *sui generis*, self-sustaining passion that can supplement, and may even *supplant*, whatever reactionary motivations are in play. While some conservatives may claim cultural oppression in order to more effectively advance a conservative agenda, others are drawn to a conservative agenda *in order to claim cultural oppression*, because conservatism has become the only medium through which the onward march of the civilizing process may be resisted. Conservativism is the socially acceptable guise this resistance has been forced to assume, and to recognize this is to achieve the ultimate in sophistication.

[193] Brian C. Anderson, *South Park Conservatives: The Revolt Against Liberal Media Bias* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2005), pgs. 75-100, 139-62.

Chapter Eight

A Pragmatic Contradiction

This ultimate in sophistication may not have a direct logical bearing on disagreements about, say, abortion rights or gay rights. But nor is it irrelevant to understanding how these disagreements proceed in the real world. For it allows us to recognize that they transpire within a matrix of social meanings that speak to people's identities. Today's "culture wars" are a contemporary reenactment of the mutation counter-narrative, of the struggles through which the modern emerged from out of the pre-modern. The reenactment transpires, not in the substance of the various controversies, but in the *structural* relationships between opposing positions, which place the antagonists in what are latter-day variants of old roles, as either uprooted elites seeking to impose new forms of social, moral, intellectual, and religious discipline or else as "folk" struggling to protect their traditions against these encroachments. This is why a first-order, topic-based culture war centered on the "issues" could have mutated into a second-order, identity-based culture war centered on the hierarchical relationship between those who debate the issues, liberal elites and ordinary Americans. These polemics oversimplify and overdramatize. But they are over-dramatizations of a genuine drama, oversimplifications with an underlying subject-matter.

As we noted in an earlier chapter, Nunberg believes that conservatives caricature liberals as motivated by social pretension, dilettantism, or effete sentimentality because these "convoluted stories" are the only way to discredit people who aren't obviously motivated by self-interest. But I have been arguing that these caricatures originate in conservatives' naturalistic intuition that the ostensible issues are an arena for a contest of hero-systems. This is precisely what "enlightened" liberals cannot see. Taylor observes:

> The rational agent, who is capable of seeing that self-love and the social are the same, and designing a social order on this basis, has already stepped way beyond the narrow point of view of the single being that he, she is. As an agent of instrumental reason, he/she stands at the point of view of the whole, and is moved by the greatness and design of the whole. Theorists sometimes commit a kind of pragmatic contradiction in not taking account, in their theory of the human agent, of the motives which actuate them as theorists and overall planners. But this mode of transcendence is still there, and one of the motive forces behind their position.[1]

[1] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), pgs. 231-32.

The "pragmatic contradiction" of theorists is also the pragmatic contradiction of liberals, and it originates in the fact that the narrowly moral arguments through which they defend their positions also evoke a culturally thicker narrative that pits those who have realized the buffered distance against those who have not, casting liberals as enjoying agency powers unavailable to conservatives still mired in the "promptings of the senses" and the "consolations of the enchanted world." Liberals may see themselves as just "agents of instrumental reason"—"simply pragmatists, fact finders, and empiricists who are clearheaded as to 'what works,'" as Goldberg says. But then they see themselves in "innocently thin terms," because this pragmatism and fact finding presuppose a distinct "mode of transcendence" that conservatives can sense in the subtle undertones of liberal arguments. The New Class subverts all the traditional inequalities. But as we saw with Gouldner, it silently replaces these with "a new hierarchy of the knowing, the knowledgeable, the reflexive and insightful." The elitism of liberals consists in this hierarchy, which is the product, not of personal pretension, but of the historical forces that brought the modern liberal identity into being. This hierarchy is irreducible to the superiority of liberal opinions, because it announces the *superiority of liberals as human agents*, the presumption that liberals enjoy a more self-transparent and self-regulating form of agency and that conservatives are stunted in this respect. Conservative claims of cultural oppression are a reaction to this presumption—to the *one hierarchy with which liberalism cannot dispense*.

John Wilson argues that conservatives have endlessly recycled a set of powerful but misleading and one-sided anecdotes in a "ritualistic invocation of the image of leftist thought police," which is usually unsupported by the less dramatic factual details of events.[2] There may be a few grains of truth scattered throughout the conservative attack on political correctness. But conservatives' harrowing accounts of life under liberal tyranny seem to lack any sense of proportion. Savage writes that "whether they know it or not, most of our thought therapists have become part of a "one-world agenda" that exploits "seemingly genuine issues to establish control over our minds and our lives," to "make us all obedient, politically correct automatons, with similar thoughts in a uniform world where we can be conveniently herded by unicop masters."[3] Savage's

[2] John K. Wilson, *The Myth of Political Correctness: The Conservative Attack on Higher Education* (Duke University Press, 1995), pg. xv.
[3] Michael Savage, *The Savage Nation: Saving America form the Liberal Assault on Our Borders, Language, and Culture* (Plume, 2002), pg. 36.

language of choice may not be that of most conservatives. But his shrillness is consistent with the kinds of things most conservatives do say, crystallizing the aura of *unreality* which they already exude to liberals.

However, I have been arguing that conservative claims of cultural oppression as ordinarily formulated are distorted articulations of intuitions originating in an under-theorized understanding of the mutation counter-narrative. And what conservatives intuit is the existence of a social hierarchy between those who have achieved the buffered distance and thus possess "awareness" and those who have not and thus lack it. This hierarchy is never officially announced, but it is communicated at a visceral level that conservatives cannot ignore. Their claims of cultural oppression may replete with hyperbole and caricature, but they are responding to something *real*. The "one-world agenda" feared by Savage is the buffered distance, the historically constructed understanding of human agency that liberalism and the ideology of the subtraction account cannot acknowledge.

I will now illustrate these observations by examining a range of seemingly distinct controversies, in order to reveal how the ostensible issues recurrently embody this pragmatic contradiction between liberalism *qua* universalistic ideal and liberalism *qua* hero-system, between the liberal virtues and the subtle forms of illiberalism that their inculcation presupposes. Section One begins with a general examination of why conservatives believe that liberal morality is "thicker" than liberals can recognize. Having laid this groundwork, I will then proceed to further investigate this hidden thickness through a series of "case studies" covering issues like gay rights, feminism, distributive justice, criminal responsibility, racism, and progressive education. Though the surface controversies are as different as they come, these surfaces disguise subterranean layers of social meaning that all originate in the same basic conflict.

1. Meta-Censoriousness

Conservatives are driven on by the inexorable conviction that liberalism is not to be taken at face value, because what it holds out as its transcendence of conservatives' moralistic authoritarianism is just another form of moralistic authoritarianism in disguise. Thus, Goldberg charges that environmentalism grants license to a level of moral bullying that would be denounced

as totalitarian if motivated by traditional values.[4] As we also saw, Himmelfarb believes that the allegedly repressive mores of the Victorians have been replaced, not by freedom and tolerance, but by a "New Victorianism." This is a "moralistic paternalism" that seeks to prevent "hate speech," "sexual harassment," and "date rape" by requiring "employees, students, and professors to attend 'sensitivity' and 'consciousness-raising' sessions to correct their supposed racism, sexism, and homophobia."[5] In a similar vein, Bork accuses that the liberal elites seek to normalize what has traditionally been considered deviant conduct—crime, illegitimacy, and drug use—while "growing intensely moralistic and disapproving about what has always been thought normal behavior." Liberalism has redefined "what we mean by such things as child abuse, rape, and racial and sexual discrimination so that behavior until recently thought quite normal, unremarkable, even benign, is now identified as blameworthy or even criminal."[6]

These points can be framed in various ways. But conservatives all concur with Theodore Dalrymple when he writes that reading Mill and absorbing his credo does not automatically extinguish the "desire to interfere in the lives of others." There exists, argues Dalrymple, a law of the "conservation of righteous indignation," akin to the law of thermodynamics. This entails that "[a]s traditional moral prohibitions, inhibitions, and considerations are destroyed by the gnawing criticism of philosophical disputatiousness, new ones rush in to fill the vacuum."[7] This vacuum has now been filled by liberalism. It represents, not any bare elimination, or even net reduction, of moralistic censoriousness, but merely its rechanneling into novel causes. Liberals have merely adopted a "second-level censoriousness" or "meta-censoriousness,"[8] targeting the devotees of traditional morality with the same moralistic fervor for which these devotees are routinely condemned. Dalrymple's metaphor from physics captures what I have argued is conservatives' intuitive naturalistic understanding of human agency, their sense that certain unyielding human constants lie underneath the sophisticated surface rationalizations, revealing important symmetries between liberals and conservatives.

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[4] Jonah Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), pg. 19.
[5] Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), pg. 259.
[6] Robert H. Bork, *Slouching toward Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (New York: Regan Books, 1996), pg. 3.
[7] Theodore Dalrymple, *In Praise of Prejudice: The Necessity of Preconceived Ideas* (New York: Encounter Books, 2007), pgs. 68-69.
[8] Ibid., pg. 119.

Conservative claims of cultural oppression seek to expose the nature of these symmetries. Thus, Hadley Arkes dismisses as a "liberal cliché" the notion "that we are too divided on moral questions such as abortion, and when we are divided, it would be improper for legislators to legislate, for we lack common standards of judgment." How, on this principle, could liberals have supported the Civil War amendments or the Civil Rights Act of 1964, given the deep public divisions they provoked? Liberals invoke the principle of consensus to rule certain conservative policies out of bounds. But Arkes argues that this principle is a philosophical castle in the air, because there exists no consensus that we may not legislate on matters about which we have not achieved consensus: Given that "no one who invokes that rule of consensus claims to know it as a rule on the strength of a consensus," the rule is being offered "as something that seems to be true or fitting in itself."[9] Arkes's point is that *both* liberals and conservatives arrive at their moralities in this intuitive way and that liberals' claims to cognitive superiority on this front are hence meritless. Whatever their argumentative sophistication, that sophistication originates in a bare intuition of the good. Conservatives are simply more honest about this than liberals.

In a similar vein, Jean Bethke Elshtain notes that Rawls's "public reason" is defined tautologically as the reason acceptable to all "reasonable and rational" persons. Whatever their diverse worldviews, citizens must be ready "to explain the basis of their actions to one another in terms each could reasonably expect that others might endorse." But public reason is in fact a liberal ruse, argues Elshtain. Given that it is unreasonable to expect adherents of vastly divergent worldviews to agree about what constitutes reasonable argument, public reason is just a way to exclude religious reason giving without appearing bigoted. Though paraded as "neutrality," liberals' demand for "reasonableness" disguises a "liberal monism" that "values certain aspects and features of the human condition and despises and belittles others."[10] Liberals would accuse conservatives of narrow-minded intolerance, but their own intolerance can always be discovered lurking underneath their sophisticated intellectual constructs.

But where conservatives see a covert sectarianism, liberals see false equivalencies and argue that what conservatives characterize as liberalism's subterranean agenda reflects their own

[9] Hadley Arkes, "Liberalism and the Law," in *The Betrayal of Liberalism: How the Disciples of Freedom and Equality Helped Foster The Illiberal Politics of Coercion and Control*, eds. Hilton Kramer and Roger Kimball (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), pg. 115.

[10] Jean Bethke Elshtain, "The Bright Line: Liberalism and Religion," in *The Betrayal of Liberalism: How the Disciples of Freedom and Equality Helped Foster The Illiberal Politics of Coercion and Control*, eds. Hilton Kramer and Roger Kimball (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), pg. 149.

intellectual confusion, which allows them to caricature liberalism beyond recognition. Conservative arguments are directed at straw men, without which they could not survive. As we shall now see, this disagreement cannot be understood in purely intellectual terms. Here as elsewhere, the ultimate in sophistication reveals that what appears like a theoretical disagreement is in fact a clash of cosmological orientation that cannot be resolved theoretically. We will now see 1) why liberals believe the conservative critique of "liberal monism" rests on false equivalencies, and 2) how the mutation counter-narrative endows these equivalencies with a truth with which the liberal argument fails to reckon.

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Conservatives believe that in opposing the legal enforcement of morality, liberals overlook the toddler's truth that every law is premised, not only on facts, but also on values. As Justice White memorably wrote in defense of the constitutionality of anti-sodomy statutes, the "law is constantly based on notions of morality, and if all laws representing essentially moral choices are to be invalidated under the Due Process Clause, the courts will be very busy indeed."[11] Whatever its appeal, the principle that forbids the state from "legislating morality" cannot be applied consistently and is being invoked selectively in order to dismiss moral judgments with which liberals happen to disagree.

However, the liberal responds that the contradictions conservatives impute to liberalism is a symptom of their failure to recognize certain obvious distinctions. Scruton believes he detects a human constant when he confesses that "[l]ike all political beings, conservatives are for certain things: they are for them, not because they have arguments in their favour, but because they know them, live with them, and find their identity threatened (often they know not how) by the attempt to interfere with their operation."[12] But liberals believes that this declared willingness to act on visceral moral sentiment in indifference to argument collapses what Ronald Dworkin argues is the crucial distinction between morality in the *anthropological* sense and morality in the *discriminatory* sense. Though "morals" or "moral convictions" are sometimes taken to mean "whatever attitudes the group displays about the propriety of human conduct, qualities, or goals," we also recognize that morality so understood may amount to mere prejudice or aversion, and so

[11] *Bowers v. Hardwick*, 478 U.S. 186 (U.S. 1986)
[12] Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), pg. 2.

distinguish morality in this merely anthropological sense from the morality that can be defended by reasons.[13] This is "morality" in the discriminatory sense, which stands above mere prejudice and aversion. This, argues Dworkin, requires that our positions be derived from some broader principle or theory which we are prepared to apply consistently.[14] Genuine moral judgment isn't a matter of isolated intuitions, however powerfully felt or popularly held, but of a "small set of very general standards" either explicitly avowed or implicit in one's pattern of argument. Positions that do not derive from these can be legitimately dismissed as arbitrary.[15] They may be moral in the anthropological sense, certainly, but not in the discriminatory sense.

Liberals believe this distinction dissolves the contradiction that conservatives impute to them. Liberals who oppose "enforcing morality" do not oppose enforcing "morality" in the broad sense invoked by Justice White. Rather, they opposed enforcing "morality" that is merely anthropological and not discriminatory. The alternative would be, as Jeffrie Murphy puts it, to allow the majority "to do whatever it jolly well feels like-so long, at any rate, as it remembers to use the word 'morality' somewhere in its supposed justification."[16] *This* is what liberals oppose when they oppose enforcing "morality." Liberals who declare this opposition are not advocating some impossible value-free political regime, but merely conceding the meaning of the term to conservatives, who understand morality anthropologically, as a matter of traditional mores. And in defending the enforcement of "morality," conservatives aren't just making the obvious point that value judgments are inevitable but, more controversially, confessing their willingness to accept their subjective feelings as self-legitimating—as valid merely because they "know them" and "live with them," as Scruton says. This is the crucial asymmetry obscured by conservatives' false equivalences.

Liberals believe that any properly discriminatory morality contains an *empirical* element that distinguishes it from the sectarian preferences signified by conservatives' "traditional values." Arguing that "bare assertions of public morality" do not create a rational state interest under equal protection review, Peter Cicchino distinguishes legitimate arguments from "public welfare" from illegitimate ones from "public morality." Arguments from public morality should be rejected because they posit "a legitimate government interest in prohibiting or encouraging certain kinds

[13] Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), pg. 248.
[14] Ibid., pg. 249.
[15] Ibid., pg. 252.
[16] Jeffrie G. Murphy, *Moral Reasons and the Limitation of Liberty*, 40 Wm and Mary L. Rev. 947, 952 (1999).

of human behavior without any empirical connection to goods other than the alleged good of eliminating or increasing, as the case may be, the behavior at issue."[17] Moral argument that proceeds without reference to the moralized conduct's measurable causal impact on some empirically verifiable good—for example, the claim that homosexuality is harmful because it is "unnatural"—does not state a legally cognizable claim about the conduct, because it has not established an empirically verifiable connection between the conduct at issue and the empirically observable effects of regulating it.

By contrast, legitimate arguments from public *welfare* **"**defend a law by asserting that the law avoids harms or realizes goods other than the good of eliminating or increasing the behavior or characteristic that defines the classification the law creates -- for example, health, safety, or economic prosperity."[18] Having this empirical quality, public welfare arguments can be debated by people with differing worldviews. None will dispute that preserving life, preventing, disease, ending hunger, and eliminating poverty are good things. People may disagree about the naturalness of homosexuality. But when it comes to punishing homosexuality, "even the most ardent opponent of homosexuality would grant that being fired from a job or losing custody of a child are evils for those who experience those things."[19] Public morality is merely anthropological while public welfare is discriminatory, because public welfare operates under principles by which public morality is unconstrained.

Cicchino does not deny that what he dubs "public welfare" can be characterized as a "morality" in the broadest, most generic sense of the term—that is, in the sense invoked by Justice White. But it does not follow that "public welfare" is just another sectarian impulse symmetrical to the public morality of conservatives. An argument from public morality holding that "the penis and vagina are somehow uniquely and exclusively intended for human sexual intercourse" may be theologically appealing to some. But this "organ teleology" is simply "outside the realm of publicly accessible discourse in a pluralistic democracy," because it can have no appeal to those who do not already share it.[20] It will never command universal assent in a pluralistic democracy like ours, where citizens are divided by irreconcilable differences on the nature of the good life.[21]

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[17] Peter M. Cicchino, *Reason and the Rule of Law: Should Bare Assertions of "Public Morality" Qualify as Legitimate Government Interests for the Purposes of Equal Protection Review*, 87 Geo. L.J. 139, 140 (1998).
[18] Ibid., pg.
[19] Ibid., pg.
[20] Ibid., pg.
[21] Ibid., pg.

By contrast with the essentially private and subjective nature of public morality, public welfare involves "a dialogue with human experience -- an inventory and assessment of the observable effects that a given act of government will likely have on human flourishing in the real world."[22] Because only tangible harms and benefits are rooted in that human experience, the demand that legislation be justified by reference to it functions as a check against the legal enforcement of sectarian agendas. We have seen this before: The distinction between "public welfare" and "public morality" is just another way to place a check on anthropocentricity. If public welfare is non-sectarian as public morality is not, this is because it concerns itself with goods whose appeal does not presuppose a hero-system. The crucial difference between liberals and conservatives like Scruton, it seems, is that the latter refuse to thus constrain their moral judgments.

Defending Justice White's position in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, Bork dismisses the standard liberal refrain about the centrality of consent:

> There is no objection to the torturing of puppies for pleasure except that it outrages our morality. There is, indeed, no objection to forcible rape in the home or to the sexual abuse of a child there, except a moral objection. But, it will be said, those cases do not involve consent or do not involve a consent the person is mature enough to give intelligently. Those are not objections to the comparison. They are merely statements that the speaker perceives a moral distinction in consent. But the perception of a moral distinction does not affect the point being made that morality, standing alone, is a sufficient rationale to support legislation."[23]

Like Justice White and Roger Scruton, Bork is conveying conservatives' basic rejection of the anthropological/discriminatory distinction embraced by Dworkin and other liberals. For conservatives, moral intuitions rooted in general principles addressing broad categories of actions—like abrogations of individual autonomy—are intellectually symmetrical with insular, self-contained moral intuitions addressing discrete behaviors, like the unnaturalness of homosexual sodomy. Both sorts of claims, Bork is suggesting, originate in a raw, axiomatic intuition that certain kinds of conduct are immoral, and this places them on the same plane. As Craig Carr puts it, "[t]he conservative defense of decency, on the one hand, and the liberal defense of autonomy, on the other, simply display differing moral beliefs about what kinds of things should matter greatly to society in general."[24]

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[22] Ibid., pg.
[23] Robert H. Bork, *The Tempting of America: The Political Seduction of the Law* (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1990), pg. 124.
[24] Craig L. Carr, *Between Virtue and Vice: The Legal Enforcement of Morals*, 14-FALL Kan. J. L. & Pub. Pol'y 1, 20 (2004).

But liberals disagree. In dismissing autonomy as just another contestable value preference, Carr and Bork overlook liberalism's insight that autonomy is, as Lawrence Becker says, "an incomparable, unique, and superlative good."[25] Autonomy isn't just another "value" be "balanced" against others. On the contrary, it can only be limited only in order to preserve the autonomy of others.[26] Conservatives' posited symmetry between decency and autonomy fails because:

> Consider the limiting case: a conception of the good life as one of subordination, or the forfeiture of autonomy-to God, nation, family, or whatever. It is plausible to think that the value of such a life for the person involved will come from the perceived righteousness, nobility, exhilaration, or pleasure of the life so lived-of the sustained, purposive living of a subordinated life. That means preserving the value of such a life will involve the preservation of autonomy in a fairly strong form, a form in which one persistently acquiesces to being dominated. [27]

Bork's "speaker" who "perceives a moral distinction in consent" isn't just registering a subjective preference, but acknowledging a principle that anyone can recognize upon reflection. This is that autonomy is always a desideratum of realizing whatever other values we hold, and regardless of whether we see autonomy as an intrinsic value. Religious fundamentalists may not celebrate autonomous self-determination as the highest good. But they do not need to do so in order to appreciate that autonomy represents an incommensurable instrumental value for pursuing whatever they do hold as the highest good. This is why autonomy isn't just another ideal that "seems true or fitting in itself," as Arkes would say, because it is a second-order meta-value that is presupposed by ordinary first-order values.

Gerald Dworkin writes that the morality that liberalism would enforce is one concerned with "the protection of autonomy and respect for persons," and excludes as legally unenforceable those parts of morality consisting in "various ideals, such as ideals of virtue and character, certain ideals of fairness or fittingness, and ideals of sexual conduct."[28] The reason for this is that, by contrast with autonomy, "ideals of fittingness" are merely the *contents* of the different ways in which different people "implement" their autonomy, and so presuppose this broader, more encompassing meta-value, which is acknowledged even in the breach. This is why autonomy can

[25] Lawrence C. Becker, *Crimes Against Autonomy: Gerald Dworkin on the Enforcement of Morality*, 40 Wm and Mary L. Rev. 959, 966 (1999).
[26] Ibid., pg. 967.
[27] Ibid., pg. 969.
[28] Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously*, pg. 930.

ground a common political morality. One cannot pursue one's conception of the good without concomitantly recognizing the special status of autonomy. And having recognized this, one cannot then withhold this special value from others. If conservatives by contrast are content to act on values merely because they know them and live them, this is because they refuse to "step back" from their "ideals of fittingness"—subordination to "God, nation, family, or whatever" as Becker says—onto a higher plane of abstraction that relativizes these commitments to the meta-value of autonomy. *This* is the sophisticated liberalism that conservatives have caricatured beyond recognition.

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The sophisticated liberal can concede that liberals sometimes invite these caricatures. Macedo observes the existence of a tendency, both in popular culture and among theorists, to celebrate a certain "nonjudgmental, unqualified pluralism."[29] This kind of liberalism is disingenuousness because it "presuppose[s] orderings of moral values and accounts of political virtue without taking responsibility for articulating those civic values, defending them, and offering accounts of how these values should be promoted."[30] And this disingenuousness exposes liberalism to a twin set of attacks. On the one hand, liberalism is criticized for its "weak-kneed neutralism" and "moral squeamishness," its failure to defend any substantive conception of the good life.[31] But since liberalism is necessarily more judgmental in practice than in its amorphous declarations of a lofty pluralism, it is, from the other side, exposed to the charge that it is really a partisan philosophy, and so essentially no different from the sectarian agendas it ostensibly opposes,[32] a "Trojan horse" for a comprehensive conception of the good.[33]

However, Macedo argues that these opposite yet symbiotically related vulnerabilities attach, not to the best version of liberalism, but to its perversion.[34] And the solution is to assume responsibility for the substantive values which underlie, and thus determine the scope of, our pluralistic ideals. This is what I have just undertaken to do. And this examination revealed that,

[29] Stephen Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), pg. 151.
[30] Ibid., pg. 26.
[31] Ibid., pgs. 124-25.
[32] Ibid., pg. 185.
[33] Ibid., pg. 227.
[34] Ibid., pg. 125.

to the extent conservatives can dismiss "liberal neutrality" as manifestly unrealistic and disingenuous, this is only because of some liberals' overly facile rhetoric, which perverts the intellectual core of true liberalism. Undistorted, that core tells us that while liberal political morality may be "thicker" than is indicated by intellectually loose talk of a "nonjudgmental, unqualified pluralism," it remains "thinner" than the traditional moralisms that conservatives insist are symmetrical with liberalism. Whether it be called "neutrality" or something else, liberalism's relative thickness/thinness isn't just another parochial prejudice, but the playing out of logical distinctions that conservatives will not baldly reject. Martha Nussbaum writes:

> Political liberals are not skeptics: they do not hold that no position is better than any other. They simply hold that many disagreements are reasonable disagreements among reasonable people. This being the case, it is right for political society to respect those differences, as a part of what respect for persons requires. This respect for difference, however, does not lead the liberal to believe that political life should be value-free. On the contrary, respect for persons is a very basic *value* about which the political liberals are not in the least neutral. And it has implications for many other aspects of political society.[35]
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> Political liberalism asks us to value certain basic rights and liberties for all citizens. It also asks us to value certain "primary goods" that are prerequisites for leading a flourishing life. So it is easy to see that such a liberalism will have a strong interest in laws that protect those rights and liberties for all citizens, and also in laws that protect other primary goods, such as property. Laws against homicide, rape, and theft are natural expressions of the overlapping consensus….[36]

Whether or not he opts to characterize liberalism as "morally neutral," the liberal can concede that there is *a sense* in which moral neutrality is a foolish and confused idea. For every political philosophy must uphold certain values to the exclusion of others. But even if ideals like tolerance, nonjudgmentalism, and neutrality are incoherent when interpreted as the imposture of a view from nowhere, the liberal believes that, conceptualized at *another* level, these ideals are neither confused nor impracticable nor disingenuous. This is what Nussbaum is seeking to describe, values that are in one way or another implicit in our common sense understandings of morality and civility. And these point us to the "common ground" that liberals identify as "reasonable." Elshtain may be correct that "any endorsement of rules and procedures is a substantive one that embraces, if only tacitly, some version of a good life in contrast to some other."[37] But this hidden moral substance isn't just another sectarian preference, because it is founded on values—respect for persons,

[35] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton University Press, 2004), pg. 60.
[36] Ibid., pg. 62.
[37] Elshtain, "The Bright Line: Liberalism and Religion," pg. 150.

tolerance for reasonable disagreement, and the special status of "primary goods"—that all can recognize.

Conservative attacks on the covert sectarianism of the liberal culture seem disingenuous because they give short shrift to the distinctions we have just examined. Goldberg charges that environmentalists engage in the kind of moral bullying that would be condemned as totalitarian if engaged in by traditionalists. But this overlooks that whereas traditionalists bully in the name of public morality, environmentalists "bully" in the name of public welfare. This is why liberal "bullying" can be subjected to rational critique as traditionalist bullying cannot. Only the former involves a "dialogue with human experience." *This*, and not sectarian hypocrisy, is why liberals don't see environmentalists as bullies. It is also why the "New Victorianism" isn't as Himmelfarb believes just a new set of arbitrary mores on a par with the old ones. The Old Victorianism attempted to enforce certain "ideals of fittingness"—subordination to "God, nation, family, or whatever." By contrast, the consciousness raising and sensitivity training of the New Victorians promote the meta-values of autonomy and respect for persons, which conservatives will not baldly reject. Bork may be correct that liberalism attaches new valences to traditional virtues and vices. But this reflects, not the conservation of righteous indignation, but a commitment to public welfare, whose meaning must always be revised in light of new empirical evidence. To the extent things like rape and discrimination are now defined more expansively than before, this is because they are now examined in the context of the social power relations that were formerly overlooked. Conservatives can agree or disagree with liberals' accounts of these power relationships. But their disagreement—and even the *correctness* of their disagreement—does not eliminate the basic asymmetry between public reason and public welfare. This is why their false equivalences are false.

As Robert Audi observes, it "seems reasonable for a liberal democracy to build into its structure as much in the way of substantive promotion of the good as is implied in the essential premises underlying the liberal political theory by which it lives."[38] And what conservatives dismiss as liberal sectarianism is nothing more than this. The liberal virtues are no mere "ideals of fittingness" akin to organ teleologies, but the desiderata of democratic life, dispositions without which one cannot distinguish between discriminatory morality and anthropological morality,

[38] Robert Audi, *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pg. 63.

between public welfare and public morality, and between respect for autonomy and the thicker, more robust ideals which this respect tolerates. To the extent liberals become indignant at conservatives who flout the liberal virtues, this is *in the name of these distinctions*, and not as a novel outlet for a righteous indignation that must be somehow conserved. If conservatives imagine there is a conservation of righteous indignation—akin to the mindless rechanneling of matter or energy—this is only because they disingenuously refuse to acknowledge that liberal political morality is an extension of everyday moral common sense.

Jeremy Feinberg observes that conservatives will sometimes object to deep changes in their moral environment by pleading, not the intrinsic immorality of these changes, but the unfairness of subjecting them to a new moral climate to which they never consented and for which they are unprepared.[39] But what conservatives characterize as the unfairness of unwanted changes to their moral environments bespeaks a willingness to reduce others from autonomous centers of activity to mere components of those environments. And there is, Feinberg observes, "a more-than-liberal consensus that the personal interests are more important, more worth protecting in general than the external ones."[40] We can all recognize, for example, that a son's personal interest in living his own life in one way trumps his father's interest in his living his life in another way.[41] Whether they are demanding legal prohibitions or merely issuing cultural criticisms, conservatives often imply a disregard for this "more-than-liberal consensus" whenever it conflict too strongly with their visceral sentiments. But this disregard cannot be maintained consistently, because conservatives too can recognize the preeminence of personal interests over external interests in a great many contexts. The difference between liberals and conservatives, then, isn't that conservatives truly reject liberals' moral premises, but that they accept these premises selectively when they are advantageous while dismissing them as elitism when they are not.

Steven Delchin complains that "liberal neutrality's 'neutrality' is belied by the fact that it privileges a particular conception of rationality which is itself unverifiable." Liberal neutrality therefore stands on the same uncertain epistemological footing as religious faith.[42] And drawing on Leo Strauss, Christopher Gawley argues that liberal theorists "suffer from the same virus that

[39] Joel Feinberg, *Harmless Wrongdoing* (Oxford University Press, 1990), pgs. 48-50.
[40] Ibid., pg. 60.
[41] Ibid., pg. 60.
[42] Steven A. Delchin, *Scalia 18:22: Thou Shall Lie with the Academic and Law School Elite: It is an Abomination – Romer v. Evans and America's Culture War*, 47 Case W. Res. 207, 243 (1997).

they seek to eradicate—their theories require an absolutism that is irrational." These theorists "tell individuals to rely only on 'facts' (observable data) as opposed to values, yet they do not offer 'facts' as to why one should." For "what animates their theory on 'facts' is personal values."[43] This Humean argument seems unassailable. Like everyone else, liberals cannot explain how an "ought" can be derived from an "is." Nor can they deny that the value of empiricism is not itself an empirical discovery. The value of a "dialogue with reality" has not itself been derived from a dialogue with reality. And so conservatives conclude that liberal morality is a philosophical castle in the air, an object of faith and no more.

But as liberals see it, these forays into metaphysical skepticism about the ultimate status of values do not eliminate the very real differences in the moral reasoning of liberals and conservatives. Liberals' commitment to empiricism and rational consistency may not be "neutral" in the metaphysically absolute sense that would satisfy Gawley or Delchin. But it does at least require that people *submit* their judgments to realities—both logical and empirical—that are not of their own making, and this is what sets liberal morality apart. As we saw in Chapter Four, D'Souza contrasts the "in here" morality of liberalism to the "out there" morality of conservatives. But liberals believe this stands the truth on its head. It is "public welfare," not "public morality," that is the "out there" morality, because it is only public welfare that actually constrains what citizens permit themselves to think and do.

Proponents of public morality may articulate their motivations in "out there" terms, as submission to God's will perhaps, or else as loyalty to tradition. But what matters isn't the verbiage in which one's moral convictions are couched or the affects which color them—the subjective sense that they are responsive to a transcendent dispensation—but the principles which constrain their formation. And conservatives seem lacking in such principles. Scruton accuses liberals of cloaking their prejudices as "Enlightened reason." But these "prejudices" have been subjected to *tests* to which conservatives refuse to subject their own. In acting on their values only because they "know them" and "live with them," conservatives have no way of distinguishing these values from bigotry and animus other than their own say-so. It is in order to disguise this fact that they promote their false equivalencies. Macedo observes that the kind of "ultimate skepticism" according to which "confidence in public reason is really nothing more than one

[43] Christopher J. Gawley, *A Requiem for Morality: A Response to Peter M. Cicchino*, 30 Cap. U. L. Rev. 711, 746 (2002).

ultimate faith among others" can be motivated by a certain "soft intolerance."[44] And this is because ultimate skepticism undermines the distinctions that constrain intolerance, which is what conservative laments about liberalism's covert sectarianism seem designed to achieve.

Echoing this ultimate skepticism, Stanley Fish argues that while liberals would contrast their own openness with the ideological closedness of religious fundamentalists, liberal openness is itself an ideology, because it is necessarily "closed to any line of thinking that would shut inquiry down or route it in a particular direction." The choice, then, isn't between an open environment and a closed one, but between environments that are "differently closed."[45] However, this argument that openness is necessarily closed off to closedness strikes liberals as a disingenuous gambit to derive political and moral substance from an empty tautology, a feat of self-indulgent philosophical abstraction that deprives words of their usual meanings. K. Anthony Appiah remarks that to ask liberals to abstain from judgments implying intolerance of intolerance is "to exile them from genuine human engagement."[46] And this is because liberals' alleged intolerance is really only their disagreement with the views of conservatives, who parade tautologies as insights. To the extent liberals are "intolerant of intolerance," this reflects, not any gratuitous parochialism, but the requirements of any discriminatory morality, which is intrinsic to democratic life. Being rooted in this, liberal morality is no more partisan or sectarian than its *needs* to be in order to support that form of life. And this decisively distinguishes efforts to "impose liberalism" from bona fide sectarianism, like an effort to impose Protestantism at the expense of Catholicism.

Whether "moral neutrality" is the best label through which to designate those features of the liberal dispensation which distinguish it from conservatism may be open to debate. But what is certain in the eyes of liberals is that those features, however they be named, are being disingenuously papered over by the facile, anti-intellectual reductionism under whose cover conservatives propagate their illusory symmetries and equivalencies. To be sure, some liberals may adopt a highly moralistic *tone* in defense of certain "public welfare" priorities. But off-putting as this may be, the humorless abrasiveness with which liberal policies are sometimes advanced has no logical bearing on the basic soundness of liberal principles. Goldberg bewails that environmentalism grants license to a moral bullying that is not permitted to traditionalists. But

[44] Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust*, pgs. 225-26.
[45] Stanley Fish, *The Trouble With Principle* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), pg. 156.
[46] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton University Press, 2005), pg. 154.

whatever the moralistic temptations of some environmentalists, these are merely personal vices which do not vitiate the basic *structural* differences between public welfare and public morality arguments. Only by fixating on matters of personal style can conservatives paper these differences over.

* * *

These arguments seem compelling to liberals. But our question is whether this sophisticated liberalism constitutes something less than the ultimate in sophistication. Why do conservatives despite all these arguments, intuitive to liberals, discern a certain "thickness" in the liberal dispensation that liberals themselves do not recognize—a level of thickness that goes over and beyond whatever thickness is inherent to the distinctions between anthropological morality and discriminatory morality, or between public morality and public welfare, or between autonomy and ideals of fittingness. One explanation—which we have just explored—is that conservatives disingenuously deploy an "ultimate skepticism" about the epistemological status of liberal ideals as cover for their authoritarian designs, in order to discredit the principles that would impede these designs. But the other explanation—which follows from my broader argument in these pages—is that this ultimate skepticism is *the epistemological (mis)articulation of intuitions originating in the mutation counter-narrative*, and that what liberals see as conservatives' moralistic authoritarian is just another facet of their resistance to the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity.

Liberal political morality seems to involve a certain self-discipline and self-restraint that is absent among conservatives. But understood in the context of the mutation counter-narrative, these qualities merely express the secularized asceticism of the buffered identity. This is what the disguised thickness of liberalism consists in. So understand, the self-restraint is not self-restraint at all, but rather the self-affirmation of a hero-system, the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. And so what may qualify as an "out there" morality from *within* the buffered identity will be registered as an "in here" morality when perceived from without, the expression of a parochial ethos or "liberal monism," as Elshtain says. Here as elsewhere, conservative claims of cultural oppression are the logical outcome of how a more porous consciousness must process a more buffered one. Operating out of a more naturalistic and animalistic understanding of human agency, conservatives cannot but *conceptualize liberals' discriminatory morality in*

anthropological terms, as the expression of a hero-system and the imperatives of organismic self-maintenance. Hence Scruton's view that all political beings are for certain things, not because of the arguments, but because they "know them" and "live with them." If conservatives do not accept the discriminatory morality of liberals at face value, as the overcoming of conservative parochialism, this is because they understand this morality, not as a theoretical system, but as the playing out of a particular identity for which the theoretical system is a rationalization.

Being moderns who operate *within* the framework of the buffered distance, liberals see liberalism as a non-sectarian commitment to universal principles. But as relative pre-moderns operating from outside that framework, conservatives sense that these principles are "underwritten" by an identitarian subtext that liberals will not acknowledge. Scruton describes this intuited subtext:

> Now, however, we find ourselves confronted with that monstrous entity, the modern man, the person for whom all connection with an order other than himself has to be won through an effort of his own, and who looks for that order not necessarily in what is or has been, but more often in what will be or might be. His restless longing to be rid of the here and now is stilled by no religious faith, and by no patient belief in the necessary imperfection of mortal things. His transcendental urge translates itself into an all-consuming nostalgia, nostalgia not for the past, but for a future which – like heaven – can only be negatively described.[47]

Traditional hero-systems seek to instantiate some broad cosmic order. But with the buffered distance having overthrown all traditional teleologies, its heroism must be defined *through distance rather than instantiation*, through a contrast between those who are aware and those who are not, between who have realized the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity and those still mired in unreflective folkways. Inasmuch as these folkways disappear in the wake of liberalism's triumphs, the concrete content of the buffered distance must be suitably reconfigured so that a new set of practices and attitudes may become identified with the unreflective mores of a benighted past. Hence the indeterminacy discerned by Scruton. Like all hero-systems, the buffered distance must be *maintained*. And this means that the further liberalism realizes itself in action, the greater will be its need to detect ever more rarefied forms of oppression, injustice, and social blindness, whose relationship to ordinary understandings thereof must become ever more attenuated. Bork remarks that liberalism is not a "stable agenda" but "a movement away from, an impulse that must continually reinvent itself."[48] And this impulse is simply the corollary of a hero-

[47] Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, pg. 111.
[48] Bork, *Slouching toward Gommorah*, pg. 62.

system disingenuously predicated on the transcendence of all hero-systems, which must always discover new outlets through which to dramatize this transcendence. Hence the anointed's "pattern seeking differentiation at nearly any price."

This dramatization is what transpires *underneath* liberal morality and is the reason why conservatives refuse to accept that morality at face value, in the terms I delineated earlier. "Public health" seems like a legitimate state interest, a form of "public welfare" as Cicchino would say. But Goldberg observes that Hillary Clinton's *It Takes a Village* extends this concept to nearly everything. Divorce is now a public health issue because "it creates stress in children." The basics of parenting are now public health issues because "how infants are held, touched, fed, spoken to, and gazed at" determines whether our brains will be 'hijacked' by our emotions, potentially making us murderously violent."[49] And in warning of an "obesity epidemic," today's progressives have changed "the meaning of an epidemic from a public health threat that puts people in danger against their will—typhoid, poisoned food, bear attacks" to the "danger of people doing things they want to do."[50]

Needing to maintain the buffered distance, liberalism must endow old words with new, ever-more expansive connotations that are foreign to traditional usages. Such is the *sine qua non* of maintaining the buffered distance, and therefore the liberal identity. Concern about obesity and child-rearing pertain to public welfare rather than public morality. But public welfare is being employed in the service of a sectarian impulse, liberals' need to discover hitherto overlooked chains of causality on whose basis to further entrench the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, to discipline a lax and disordered populace into the "order of mutual benefit" and its responsibilities. Traditional morality also imposes responsibilities, of course. But with public welfare, public health, and kindred concepts being endlessly malleable, liberal morality can place no limits on state and institutional intrusiveness, or on personal moralism. And this is what renders liberal morality oppressive in ways that get concealed by liberalism's argumentative sophistication. The very refinement of liberal morality covers over the playing out of something more personal and primitive.

Diane Ravich observes that while textbook publishers have now removed the blatant sexism and racism that that were once the norm in most textbooks, the concept of bias has in the

[49] Ibid., pg. 350.
[50] Ibid., pg. 388.

process "become detached from its original meaning and has been redefined into assumptions that defy common sense,"[51] leading to some patently absurd, almost surreal determinations about appropriate textbook content:

> One of the stranger recommendation of the bias and sensitivity panel involved a true story about a heroic young blind man who hiked to the top of Mount McKinley, the highest peak in North America. The story describes the dangers of hiking up an icy mountain trail, especially for a blind person. The panel voted 12-11 to eliminate this inspiring story. First, the majority maintained that the story contained "regional bias," because it was about hiking and mountain climbing, which favors students who live in regions where those activities are common. Second, they rejected the passage because it suggested that people who are blind are somehow at a disadvantage compared to people who have normal sight, that they are "worse off" and have a more difficult time facing dangers than those who are not blind.[52]

A story intended to celebrate the blind for their resilience in the face of adversity was thus perversely interpreted as denigrating them. Ravich believes that this illustrates how once thoughtful adults have become "priggish, humorless, and censorious,"[53] bent on "eagerly sniffing the text for any signs of deviance from their tightly prescribed language code."[54] However, the humorless censoriousness she discerns is merely a symptom of the buffered distance and its imperative to establish ever new forms of lucidity to set against ever new forms of parochialism. With sexism and racism no longer available to fill this slot, "regional bias" has now taken their place. Liberalism isn't reducible to moral opposition to irrational prejudice because it is also an identity that must *discover* irrational prejudice in order to maintain and renew the foundations of its self-esteem, in order to dramatize the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. "Equal respect" and related ideals all serve this end.

Though the simple-minded might assume that this saga of a blind man's heroism is unambiguously laudatory, the bias and sensitivity committee had to establish itself as more aware than others that the wrong lessons might be drawn from it, more aware than others of our inexorable propensity for prejudice and bias. If censoriousness cannot be eliminated, but only replaced by meta-censoriousness, this isn't by virtue of some quasi-physical force that is always conserved, but because the buffered distance is merely the deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry of the transcendence of all hero-systems. As such, it is parasitically reliant on other hero-

[51] Diane Ravitch, *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), pg. 8.
[52] Ibid., pg. 10.
[53] Ibid., pg. 19.
[54] Ibid., pg. 57.

systems in relation to which that transcendence can be dramatized. The bias and sensitivity panel was "eagerly sniffing" texts, not for signs of deviance, but for *opportunities* to do just this, to display the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity in defiance of others' lax and disorganized folkways—here, the untutored common sense that tells us the story was benign. Meta-censoriousness *presupposes* censoriousness, which it must always discover anew in order to flourish.

This liberal meta-censoriousness is usually "well concealed beneath an outward calm" as Carl Becker says. But it is occasionally brought to the surface and betrayed to the wider world. Laurence Tribe's argument that there exists a "constitutional commitment to openness of mind" is illustrative:

> [T]he attempt to single out some images for complete suppression… seems ultimately incompatible with the first amendment premise that awareness can never be deemed harmful in itself… [S]uppression of the obscene persists because it tells us something about ourselves that some of us, at least, would prefer not to know. It threatens to explode our uneasy accommodation between sexual impulse and social custom—to destroy the carefully-spun social web holding sexuality in its place…[T]he desire to preserve that web by shutting out the thoughts and impressions that challenge it cannot be squared with a constitutional commitment to openness of mind.[55]

As we observed with Smith, liberals respond with "dismissive indignation" to the suggestion that psychic harms are "real" harms. But the social function which Tribe's assigns to free speech rests on just this suggestion. Even as he endorses the "first amendment premise" that awareness can never be harmful in itself, Tribe describes obscenity's psychological impact in a way that suggests otherwise. The argument is not that offense to sensibility is the inevitable *price* of free expression—its usual defense —but, on the contrary, that the offense is one of this freedom's *rationales*. This offense is a constitutional value because it promises to unravel that "carefully-spun social web" that holds sexuality and therefore identities in place. The essence of this constitutionally enshrined freedom, then, is our exposure and vulnerability to a certain kind of *violation*. And this is what conservatives see liberalism as promoting, the reason they feel culturally oppressed. Liberal freedom isn't just a shield against meddlesome moralists but also a sword through which to instill a positive conception of virtue—the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity and its perennial hostility to the unreflective mores of a benighted past, which are being pushed through what presents itself as a culturally neutral commitment to autonomy.

[55] Laurence H. Tribe, *American Constitutional Law* iii (2d ed.) (West Academic Publishing, 1988).

The imperatives of the buffered distance are why Himmelfarb can observe that the "dominant elites" are always trying to "push the envelope." Not satisfied with the general moral libertarianism to which the public is now resigned, the elites must moreover shock and offend by, say, producing plays depicting a homosexual Jesus Christ having sexual relations with his apostles, or by becoming "the Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature who flaunts her relations (heterosexual and homosexual) with her students as a high form of scholarship and pedagogy."[56] The Left must perennially "push the envelope" because its hostility to the cultural status quo isn't just the corollary of some moral vision of which that status quo falls short, but the very content of that vision, which is the differential rectitude and enlightenment of the anointed and the benighted.

This is what this professor's "high form of scholarship and pedagogy" is intended to dramatize. She is not merely bearing witness to the call of her conscience, but engaging in the deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry of that bearing witness, employing that conscience as the pretext through which to assail the "the carefully-spun social web" of traditionalists. Where liberals see the ecumenical meta-value of autonomy, conservatives see an ideological ruse serving to socially position conservatives as benighted. This is why they see symmetry where liberals see asymmetry. In the same sense that conservatives must be perennially on guard against contagions threatening the moral order, so liberals must be constantly alert to the myriad forms of blindness threatening the disengaged lucidity of the buffered identity. And just as conservatives will stigmatize those who are seen to embody the contagion, so liberals must stigmatize those who seem to embody this blindness. This is what liberalism's avant-garde commitments are designed to do and what liberal morality is designed to justify.

This goal is never officially announced, of course, and is rather advanced under the cover of plausible deniability. But it is implicit in the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, which conservatives understand viscerally. We can easily discern an atmosphere of traditional—"first level"—moralistic censoriousness when watching a Victorian period piece, even if the protagonists aren't explicitly moralizing. For the viewer senses that the disposition to moralize is all the same being broadcast continuously in subtle glances and intonations—Bourdieu's "imperceptible queues of bodily *hexis*." Conservatives, with their naturalistic

[56] Gertrude Himmelfarb, *One Nation, Two Cultures: A Searching Examination of American Society in the Aftermath of Our Cultural Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), pgs. 126-27.

appreciation of liberalism, encounter the same phenomenon in the New Victorianism, discerning meta-censoriousness in the subtle shades of social meaning they encounter everywhere. Conservatives are oppressed, not by an orthodoxy that acknowledges itself as such, but by what Bourdieu calls *doxa*. Whereas orthodoxy and heterodoxy both imply recognition of the possibility of alternative beliefs, the field of *doxa* refers to the pre-reflective plane of the taken-for-granted, where "what is essential *goes without saying because it comes without saying*."[57] And what goes without saying because it comes without saying is the secularized asceticism of the buffered identity, which the ostensible issues serve to symbolize. What Wilson calls endlessly recycled anecdotes of the leftist thought police are compelling to conservatives, not because these incidents are an ever-present feature of ordinary life, but because they articulate this liberal *doxa*, which is always waiting to impugn the lucidity and awareness of the ordinary American.

This assault can be either absorbed or resisted, but never simply ignored. Since anyone may in principle be blind to his biases, there can be no predicting what equality and sensitivity will demand of us next. And so there is also no predicting who is next on the target list. The "Washington, D.C. bureaucrat who was fired for using the word 'niggardly' correctly in a sentence," writes Goldberg, illustrates how the "ground must constantly [be] shifted to maintain a climate of grievance," how "the grievance politics of the American left keeps decent people in a constant state of fright," afraid to "say the wrong word, utter the wrong thought, offend the wrong constituency."[58] Given that liberalism must perpetuate itself as a hero-system, conservatives must be left forever apprehensive that they will one day find themselves on the "wrong end" of the buffered distance, conscripted into the liberal hero-system as the relic of a benighted past, as people who need to be reformed, made "aware" of what a truly discriminatory morality demands of them.

Rawls classifies a "willingness to meet others halfway" as among the liberal virtues. But conservatives believe that liberalism can never be met halfway, because liberalism will always take a step backward for every step they make forward, in order to maintain the distance upon which its self-understanding is predicated. Hence Himmelfarb's sense that in having "progressed far beyond their original intentions," movements of cultural and sexual liberation having generated a momentum that obscures their initial principles. The result is that in "an unhistorical age such as ours, even the immediate past seems so remote as to be antediluvian," so that "anything short

[57] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Peter Collier (Cambridge, 1977), pgs. 164-67.
[58] Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism*, pg. 282.

of the present state of 'liberation' is regarded as illiberal."[59] This is why liberalism can never be appeased through any batch of policy prescriptions, because the liberal advocacy of these prescriptions is secondary to a more basic impulse, liberalism's parasitic need to define itself *in opposition* to a benighted, antediluvian past whose content can always be redefined.

Liberals understand themselves to be "simply pragmatists, fact finders, and empiricists who are clearheaded as to 'what works,'" not agitators preoccupied with "pushing the envelope" or "shifting the ground" of grievances. But the New Enlightenment tells us that conscious intent and self-conception are of only secondary importance. As we know from Nietzsche, it is only the smallest part of our thinking that takes the form of words. And conservatives will not restrict their attention to mere words. Their claims of cultural oppression track, not the conscious intentions of liberals, but the basic shapes of social meaning inherent in a hero-system, the self-perpetuating organismic imperatives that are being expressed in these meanings. These imperatives may be hemmed in—or neurally inhibited, as Lakoff says—by other forces, which is why Goldberg can concede that America's distinctive cultural heritage has made liberal fascism "milder, more friendly, more 'maternal'" than its more notorious European counterparts. But the basic imperatives remain there all the same, waiting to become operational should they for whatever reason become neurally *dis*inhibited. Conservatives are *culturally* oppressed, after all. They are oppressed, *not* primarily by the conduct of liberals as individual actors, but by the structural possibilities which that conduct intimates, and by the cumulative demoralization which these intimations must engender.

Such is the origin of conservatives' "ultimate skepticism" about liberal values. Where liberals see a morality of disciplined self-restraint, conservatives see the increasingly aggressive and self-confident unfolding of the buffered distance. The latter is not in the least restrained by the gamut of liberal concepts—public health, autonomy, equal respect, and so forth. On the contrary, it is promoted by them, promoted by liberal sophistication. If conservatives accuse liberals of covert sectarianism at the same time as they will not baldly reject the distinctions upon which liberal morality is premised, this is because they see these distinctions as a bait-and-switch operating in the service the buffered identity, whose impulses liberals articulate in "innocently thin terms." Conservatives do not accept these terms. And this is why they are, as Scruton says, "for

[59] Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), pg. 249.

certain things… not because they have arguments in their favour, but because they know them, live with them, and find their identity threatened (often they know not how) by the attempt to interfere with their operation." This is the deepest, most visceral level of our selfhood, and precisely what all of liberalism's sophisticated distinctions fail to capture.

2. An Eternal Quest for Social Boundary Crossing

As the first of our case studies, we will apply these general observations to the question of gay rights and what some conservatives decry as the "normalization" of homosexuality. As we observed in Chapter Two, though these conservatives will sometimes paint the "homosexual lifestyle" as a grave threat to the moral fiber of society, they often to prefer to criticize the gay rights movement on liberal rather than conservative grounds, in the language of freedom, equality, tolerance, and diversity rather than through some highly contestable conception of moral order. They can so frame the stakes because they identify the "gay agenda," not with the extension of equal dignity to a previously excluded group, but with a parochial conception of the good life—or "lifestyle"—whose interests must be balanced against those of others whose deeply held convictions pit them against homosexuality. Gay rights being one expression of the broader cultural transformation signified by "ultra-liberalism," the question is not whether a majority is entitled to impose its tastes and values on a minority, but which of two cultures is to prevail in a zero-sum game. Thus seen, liberal supporters of gay rights are just as intolerant as their conservative opponents. What liberals call "tolerance" is merely their "liberal monism," their totalitarian will to subordinate the conservative culture to the homosexual agenda.

Liberals dismiss this diagnosis as absurd, naturally. Robert Post writes that while all rights "instantiate cultural norms" and in this respect "hegemonically displace competing norms," some rights, like First Amendment speech rights, "aim to promote norms that affirmatively embrace the value of cultural heterogeneity." And this distinguishes them from laws that work to suppress cultural conflict in the interest of social solidarity.[60] First Amendment rights do embody positive normative commitments and so are "hegemonic with respect to those who disagree with them." But they also sustain "antihegemonic domains so as to realize cultural values often associated with democracy, autonomy or tolerance." Liberals place gay rights in the same category. They are

[60] Robert Post, *Law and Cultural Conflict*, 78 Chi.-Kent L. Rev. 485, 502 (2003).

hegemonic with respect to those who oppose them, homophobic bigots. But this hegemony is purely formal, just the logical byproduct of homophobic hostility to heterogeneity. *Substantively*, gay rights are anti-hegemonic, because they promote freedom and pluralism. Warnings about the "gay agenda" conflate these two levels of analysis, mischaracterizing the formally hegemonic as substantively hegemonic. This is what makes these warnings disingenuous: They simply ignore that the oppressiveness of gay rights to traditionalists is strictly a reflection of traditionalists' desire to eliminate those rights, to oppress gays, and is not intrinsic to gay rights themselves.

The liberal argument is at its strongest when it comes to something like the constitutional nullification of anti-homosexual sodomy statutes, as in *Lawrence v. Texas*. That nullification may be formally hegemonic with respect to those wishing to monitor other people's bedroom activities, because they are now prevented from doing so. But substantively, the ruling upholds democracy, autonomy, and tolerance, because it is not prescribing what we should be doing in those bedrooms.

However, the question becomes more complicated in other contexts, such as *Romer v. Evans*. As we saw earlier, *Romer* nullified Colorado's "Amendment 2" on equal protection grounds. Promoted in reaction to municipal ordinances prohibiting anti-gay discrimination in the liberal havens of Boulder, Aspen, and Denver, Amendment 2 would have repealed those ordinances and prohibited the enactment of similar ones in the future. While the measure was defended partly on traditional conservative grounds, as expressing the public's moral disapproval of homosexuality, it was also defended on libertarian ones, as securing associational freedom, the right of Colorado's citizens to express their own *personal* moral disapproval of homosexuality through their employment and rental decisions. Amendment 2 was thus seen as creating a *substantively* anti-hegemonic domain, and the liberals who opposed it were viewed as agents of hegemony seeking to curtail the autonomous self-expression of Coloradans. While anti-gay opponents of *Lawrence v. Texas* are easily dismissed as meddlesome moralists, *Romer v. Evans* provided conservatives with an opportunity to cast liberals in that role, to once again argue that censoriousness has been replaced by meta-censoriousness.

In this section, I will 1) examine the nature of the disagreement dividing the *Romer* majority from Justice Scalia, who dissented and defended Amendment 2 as constitutional, 2) contextualize that disagreement within the mutation counter-narrative, and 3) explain how *Romer* embodies what I dubbed the meta-equal protection problem, an iniquitous cultural dispensation that grants the hero-systems of the Left protections and immunities that are withheld from those of the Right.

Here as elsewhere, the conservative outlook derives its resonance from an under-theorized understanding of the mutation counter-narrative, which here too reveals a pragmatic contradiction between liberalism *qua* universal ideal and liberalism *qua* hero-system.

* * *

The Court's primary justification for invalidating Amendment 2 as violative of the Equal Protection Clause was that it imposed a broad political disability upon an entire class of persons. Amendment 2 ran afoul of the Equal Protection Clause because it "identifies persons by a single trait and then denies them protection across the board," and because "[t]he resulting disqualification of a class of persons from the right to seek specific protection from the law is unprecedented in our jurisprudence."[61] Amendment 2 would have required the gays and lesbians opposing it to seek political redress through the state's procedures for amending its constitution—that is, only through another constitutional amendment. By contrast, other groups could continue to pursue their aims through ordinary political channels, perhaps at the municipal level where the anti-discrimination ordinances had originally been enacted. But "[i]t is not within our constitutional tradition to enact laws of this sort," held the Court, because "[c]entral both to the idea of the rule of law and to our own Constitution's guarantee of equal protection is the principle that government and each of its parts remain open on impartial terms to all who seek its assistance."[62] The issue, then, wasn't the right *conferred* by Amendment 2, the right to discriminate against gays and lesbians with legal impunity, but the right *withheld* by it, the right of gays and lesbians to rescind the rights conferred, which the Court judged had been unfairly burdened.

The Court found that Colorado failed to demonstrate any state interest that could justify this burden. The rationality of Amendment 2—which was all the state was charged with proving under rational basis review—was defended along a number of lines, including the state's legitimate interest in conserving resources, preserving traditional morality, and safeguarding the associational freedom of its citizens. But the Court was unpersuaded. While it did not take up the broader question of whether moral disapproval can ever qualify as a rational state interest, it did refuse to credit this motivation in the case before it and instead concluded that Amendment 2's "sheer

[61] *Romer v. Evans*, 517 U.S. 620, 633 (1996).
[62] Ibid., pg. 633.

breadth is so discontinuous with the reasons offered for it that the amendment seems inexplicable by anything but animus toward the class it affects."[63] With the state's purported interests having been dismissed as pretexts for animus, it was a foregone conclusion that Amendment 2 could bear no rational relationship to a legitimate state interest.

Dissenting, Justice Scalia retorted that the Court's entire line of reasoning was contrived and without legal precedent:

> The central thesis of the Court's reasoning is that any group is denied equal protection when, to obtain advantage (or, presumably, to avoid disadvantage), it must have recourse to a more general and hence more difficult level of political decisionmaking than others. The world has never heard of such a principle, which is why the Court's opinion is so long on emotive utterance and so short on relevant legal citation. And it seems to me most unlikely that any multilevel democracy can function under such a principle.[64]

The Court's thesis, argued Scalia, was incompatible with what we all recognize is a state's power to pass laws prohibiting the award of municipal contracts to relatives of city officials.[65] And it is refuted "every time a state law prohibiting or disfavoring certain conduct is passed, because such a law prevents the adversely affected group -- whether drug addicts, or smokers, or gun owners, or motorcyclists -- from changing the policy thus established in 'each of [the] parts of the State.'"[66] In other words, gays and lesbians would be in no worse shape under Amendment 2 than are smokers forced to travel to their state capital rather than city hall in order to lobby against statewide smoking restrictions. Every constitutional right places special barriers in the way of those seeking to eliminate it, and there was nothing special about this case. Given his judgment that Amendment 2 was unremarkable as a law, Justice Scalia concluded that the Court's imputation of "animus" was without legal or empirical foundation. The conclusion that Amendment 2 was inspired by "a bare… desire to harm a politically unpopular group" was "nothing short of insulting,"[67] an expression of the "law-school view of what 'prejudices' must be stamped out." The Court had simply taken sides in the culture wars, taking upon itself the responsibility of extirpating cultural values that do not resonate with the lawyer class from which its membership hailed. The slur of animus was just the cultural imperialism of the "Templars," or liberal elites, who will indulge their

[63] Ibid., pg. 632.
[64] Ibid., pg. 639 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
[65] Ibid., pg. 639 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
[66] Ibid., pg. 647 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
[67] Ibid., pg. 652 (Scalia, J., dissenting).

own "prejudices" in their own hiring decisions but then deny the same right to the "villeins," or ordinary Americans, whose tastes and values do not enjoy the same prestige.

The crux of the issue seems to be this: We do not normally think of laws that regulate smoking or gun ownership, let alone the receipt of municipal contracts, as implicating what the Court describes as a "single trait" of "persons" or a "class of individuals." These regulations ostensibly target specific activities, not persons as such. Relatives of city officials who seek out municipal contracts are, logically speaking, a "class of individuals," but they do not view themselves, and are not viewed by others, as a class in the way that gays and lesbians do and are. But then the objection to *Romer* isn't that its broad principles are inherently unworkable, but that these principles underdetermined the Court's conclusions. The hidden premise was that the wish to smoke, own a firearm, ride a motorcycle, or be awarded a municipal contract are ordinary desires whose frustration we may resent, but which do not go to the core of personhood and therefore define a social group, as does sexual orientation. Hence, they do not implicate constitutional interests of the same order. If the Court inserted a particular cultural outlook into the legal mix, it was at precisely this point, because it is this distinction that forestalls Justice Scalia's *ad absurdum* argument.

Conservatives may not find the distinction compelling, however. Why not instead view laws that implicate smoking, gun ownership, and motorcycle riding as targeting particular classes of individuals and single traits of persons and view laws that implicate homosexuality as targeting behaviors and only derivatively those who engage in them? There are plenty of gun owners who see gun ownership as integral to their identities, a source of human dignity no less important that the right to have an abortion or marry a member of the same sex. If the Court wouldn't adopt this perspective, this is because such identities are incompatible with the buffered distance. It was this that allowed the Court to treat indeterminate broad principles as determinate. It was this that established the lines which the Court implicitly drew between what goes to the core of our personhood and what constitutes an ordinary desire. If the Court's reasoning does not extend to any statewide regulations of firearms, this is because firearms are relics of our "'barbarian past," the province of "other, less fortunate peoples," symbols of the violence and impulsivity anathema to the disciplinary society.

It was only because the passions animating Amendment 2 ran so directly afoul of the buffered distance that the measure was seen as gratuitous political discrimination and not a

safeguard for individual liberty against the tyranny of local majorities, as it was defended by Colorado. If the Court could not accept the stated objectives of Amendment 2—the preservation of Colorado's traditional sexual mores—on their own terms, and rather reduced these to animus, this was because those traditional mores are but the "consolations of an enchanted world." By contrast, open acceptance of one's sexuality is "a stance which requires courage, the refusal of the easy comforts of authority." This is the hidden parochialism that Justice Scalia identifies with the "Templars" and their "law-school view of what 'prejudices' must be stamped out"—the liberal elites' power to uphold certain identities while discrediting others, to define personhood and distinguish it from pathology.

* * *

The logic of the buffered distance is articulated by Laurence Tribe's analysis of *Lawrence v. Texas*, which he argues illuminates the general trajectory of the Fourteenth Amendment and other spheres of constitutional law. Tribe notes that *Lawrence* invalidated a Texas law criminalizing homosexual sodomy on Due Process grounds when it could also have done so on Equal Protection grounds—as the statute criminalized only homosexual sodomy. But while the latter option would have announced a formal equality between heterosexuals and homosexuals, it would have done much less, Tribe argues, to undermine the broader social stigmas that maintain gays in a subordinate status. Given that sodomy is associated with homosexuality in our social imaginations, a law that criminalizes homosexual and heterosexual sodomy in equal measure would still be discriminatory inasmuch as it helped perpetuate the stigmas which anti-sodomy laws have historically attached to gays.[68]

Tribe argues that this takes us to the heart of *Lawrence*'s logic. *Bowers v. Hardwick*, which *Lawrence* overturned, framed the question before it as about the existence of a constitutional right to engage in homosexual sodomy, and then concluded that no such right existed. *Lawrence* did not simply reverse this conclusion. Instead, it reformulated the very question.[69] The problem wasn't that the state was attempting to regulate certain anatomical behaviors that were none of its business, but that it was attempting to "dictat[e] the kinds of consensual relationships adults may

[68] Laurence Tribe, *Lawrence v. Texas: The "Fundamental Right" That Dare Not Speak Its Name*, 117 Harv. L. Rev. 1893, 1905 (2004).
[69] Ibid., pgs. 1898-99.

enter" and to "channel[] all such relationships, to the degree they become inwardly physically intimate or outwardly expressive, into some gender-specified or anatomically correct form."[70] The underlying issue was not whether a certain range of physical acts was immune to government regulation, but the social dignity of the *relationships* expressed in these acts, and thus the dignity of the people in those relationships.

The "liberty" invoked by *Lawrence* was as much about equal dignity as about freedom of action.[71] For the latter was being upheld in the name of the former. While the Court ostensibly opted for due process over equal protection, the meaning of the one was being guided by the other. Indeed, *Lawrence* reveals that due process and equal protection cannot be sharply distinguished, because the theory of substantive liberty presupposed in the decision was "equality-based and relationally-situated."[72] *Lawrence* "was protecting the equal liberty and dignity not of atomistic individuals torn from their social contexts, but of people as they relate to, and interact with, one another."[73] Liberty and equality are intertwined because the liberty to engage in autonomous relationships is undermined by state-countenanced inequality, which attacks the dignity of these relationships.

Tribe further argues that *Lawrence* confirms that the Supreme Court's substantive due process jurisprudence isn't just the progressive enumeration of particular spheres of activity immune from government regulation, but more importantly the progressive articulation of a broader principle enshrining the right of individuals to freely engage in "value-forming and value-transmitting relationships."[74] The case does not stand for any general prohibition against the enactment of moral standards into law, as some have argued, because the Court was in fact taking a moral stand in defense of a specific conception of social freedom and social dignity.[75] This conception, Tribe argues, emanates from a broader constitutional narrative, already implicit elsewhere, "in which due process and equal protection, far from having separate missions and entailing different inquiries, are profoundly interlocked in a legal double helix." They represent "a single, unfolding tale of equal liberty and increasingly universal dignity" that "centers on a quest for genuine self-government of groups small and large, from the most intimate to the most

[70] Ibid., pg. 1940.
[71] Ibid., pg. 1940.
[72] Ibid., pg. 1898.
[73] Ibid., pg. 1898.
[74] Ibid., pg. 1937.
[75] Ibid., pgs. 1935-36.

impersonal."[76] This tale embodies an "eternal quest" for social "boundary-crossing," for "exchanging emotions, values, and ideas both expressible in words and wordless in the search for something larger than, and different from, the merely additive, utility-aggregating collection of separate selves." The Constitution seeks, not to insulate specific activities from specific interferences, but to sustain the social contexts in which these activities can attain their ends, where they are realized, not only as physical acts, but as sources of freely chosen value-forming and value-transmitting relationships.

These principles pose a challenge to the logic of *Romer*. Tribe would defend a conception of "equal liberty and dignity" that addresses itself, not to "atomistic individuals torn from their social contexts," but to people "as they relate to, and interact with, one another." But this tearing away from social context was exactly what was happening when the *Romer* Court concluded that Coloradans' associational freedom was insufficiently weighty an interest to justify Amendment 2. Tribe stresses the Constitution's prohibition against "ced[ing] to the state the power to determine what counts as meaningful relationships and to decide when and how individuals might enter into such relationships."[77] But the *Romer* Court's easy dismissal of Colorado's interest in its citizens' associational freedom was just such a determination. Is the workplace not, just like the bedroom, a potential source of value-forming and value-transmitting relationships? As Scalia observed, employment decisions involve all manner of judgments that do not directly pertain to the narrowly technical aspects of job performance. And this is because employers seek to maintain an atmosphere that will sustain certain kinds of value-forming and value-transmitting relationships, in which individuals contribute to rather than detract from the subtle shades of social meaning atop of which these relationships are built. The sense that others are crucially like us can be an intangible source of value even if the relevant commonalities seem silly or unimportant to outsiders, as they generally will. If maintaining such relationships must, in the case of homosexuals, involve the exclusion of heterosexuals, then why may maintaining them in some workplaces not sometimes involve excluding homosexuals?

It will be objected that workplace relationships do not involve personal intimacy. But the scope of Tribe's "single, unfolding tale of equal liberty and increasingly universal dignity" extends beyond personal intimacy. Indeed, Tribe praises *Lawrence* for disregarding "the seemingly casual

[76] Ibid., pgs. 1935-36.
[77] Ibid., pgs. 1935-36.

character of the encounter" targeted by the vacated prosecution and extending the Constitution's protections "to some brief interactions that might not ripen into meaningful connections over time - even to some that might be chosen precisely for their fleeting and superficial character and their lack of emotional involvement."[78] How then can workplace relationships be dismissed as unimportant, however fleeting and superficial they may be? Why precisely is someone's desire to share a workplace only with those who share his traditional values so much less important than the desire of gay men to have sex only with other men? Why, in other words, does the constitutional philosophy endorsed by Tribe not vindicate Colorado's defense of Amendment 2?

Tribe demands a certain kind of state neutrality toward our value-forming and value-transmitting relationships. But taken to its logical conclusion, that neutrality has implications that most liberals cannot stomach. This is why they do not take their neutrality to its logical conclusion and instead tether it to a hero-system, the buffered distance. Those who derive meaning from the company of those sharing their traditional values have not internalized the properly ordered sociability of the buffered identity. And so their freedom does not count as genuine. They are not the "progressive beings" for whom Mill's liberalism is intended.

If the associational freedom of Coloradans was insufficiently weighty an interest to satisfy rational basis review, and was indeed so weightless as to justify an inference of animus, this is because that freedom was not rooted in what Tribe celebrates as an "eternal quest" for social "boundary-crossing," for "exchanging emotions, values, and ideas both expressible in words and wordless." And what is this quest but a politicized and constitutionalized iteration of the peculiarly courtly rationality, of the "knowledge of the whole terrain, human and non-human, in which one acts" which this rationality demands? If conservatives believe they can just walk through life without coming to terms with the diversity that is America, is this not because they reject the "lengthening of the chains of social action and interdependence" that defines the civilizing process? In refusing this lengthening, they are also refusing Lasch's "cosmopolitanism of educated specialists." And so their value-forming and value-transmitting relationships count for less. As Tribe implicitly recognizes, what liberals celebrate as a purely abstract freedom from state interference is rooted in a concrete ethos, a specific conception of virtue that circumscribes whose freedom is genuine. This ethos may conduce to libertarian-sounding prescriptions in some cases, but certainly not in all, and *Romer* was an example of where it did not.

[78] Ibid., pg. 1905.

Mozilla Corporation's former CEO, Brendan Eich drew a firestorm of protest after it became known that he donated to the campaign for California's anti-same-sex marriage Proposition 8. Commenting on his forced resignation, Mozilla explained:

> Mozilla believes both in equality and freedom of speech. Equality is necessary for meaningful speech. And you need free speech to fight for equality. Figuring out how to stand for both at the same time can be hard. Our organizational culture reflects diversity and inclusiveness. We welcome contributions from everyone regardless of age, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender-identity, language, race, sexual orientation, geographical location and religious views. Mozilla supports equality for all. We have employees with a wide diversity of views. Our culture of openness extends to encouraging staff and community to share their beliefs and opinions in public. This is meant to distinguish Mozilla from most organizations and hold us to a higher standard.[79]

Mozilla acknowledges that reconciling free speech with equality can involve difficult trade-offs. But it simultaneously suggests that no trade-off was required at all. Since "equality is necessary for meaningful speech," and since the purpose of free speech is "to fight for equality," speech that opposes equality, like support for Proposition 8, is not really meaningful or purposive, not really speech at all, but something more primitive—"grunts, mere signs of pain, pleasure, and frustration" as Codevilla says. And so suppressing such "speech" doesn't really come at the expense of freedom, because only those who embrace equality are genuinely free, rational beings. Like Tribe's, Mozilla's conception of liberty is "equality-based and relationally situated." In defending its "culture of openness," Mozilla was defending, not any abstract, culturally-neutral "open-mindedness," but the kind of openness dictated by the properly ordered sociability of the buffered identity, the "rational autonomy" of the liberal elites, who have been privileged to define openness for us. This is the "higher standard" to which Mozilla was holding itself and the reason why Eich's ouster was fully compatible with its professed values. It is also what makes *Romer* compatible with Tribe's conception of liberty. The freedom offered by Tribe is not the freedom to be left alone but the freedom to be a liberal, the freedom to pursue a preferred basket of liberal values.

* * *

Barbara Flagg observes that while the distinction between moral disapproval and animus lies at the heart of *Romer*, the Court never really explained how it arrived at its judgment that that

[79] http://www.nationalreview.com/article/388896/gay-marriage-support-falling-maggie-gallagher

Amendment 2 was motivated by the latter rather than the former.[80] The Court seemed to defend that judgment as a reasonable inference from Amendment 2's overbreadth: Given that its scope was wholly discontinuous with its purported aims, only animus could explain what could not be otherwise explained. This assessment of Amendment 2's "breadth" is quite peculiar, however, and indeed seems itself wholly "discontinuous" with what the law actually did. "Overbroad" might be an accurate characterization of a law that, in the name of traditional morality, barred all gays and lesbians from important public services. But Amendment 2 did no such thing, and would have merely reestablished a state of affairs in which *individuals* could act on that morality.

It is therefore far from obvious how Amendment 2's breadth could have been judged discontinuous with the state's interests in safeguarding its citizens' associational freedom. For the actual *effect* of Amendment 2 would have been a *direct reflection* of that very associational freedom. While Colorado invoked its interest in promoting traditional morality as among the law's justifications, it was in fact seeking to enforce, not that morality itself, but rather *its citizens'* right to enforce it in a context where associational freedom is generally recognized. Amendment 2 might have been discontinuous with the state's asserted interest in associational freedom had this freedom indeed been a pretext for animus. But that is precisely where the Court begged the question, because it invoked that presumed discontinuity as the *basis* for inferring the animus whose existence it needed to establish on independent grounds. How, then, then did the Court arrive at its proper conclusions? Did it read voters' minds?

Flagg suggests that what might be formulated as a psychological question about intent is better conceived as a normative one about the purpose of equal protection review. Drawing on Cass Sunstein, Flagg argues that while the Due Process Clause is "assimilationist" in scrutinizing laws according to their conformity with traditional social norms, the Equal Protection Clause is anti-assimilationist, serving the opposite function of scrutinizing traditional practices in the name of pluralism.[81] If the Court didn't feel obligated to justify its judgment empirically, this was because the judgment flowed from the very nature of equal protection analysis: "State action undertaken for moral reasons alone is the antithesis of pluralism; it evinces no respect for the moral understanding or norms of those whom it situates as outsiders." The Court did not need to make

[80] Barbara J. Flagg, *"Animus" and Moral Disapproval: A Comment on Romer v. Evans*, 82 Minn. L. Rev. 833, 845 (1997-1998).
[81] Ibid., pgs. 849-50.

an empirical finding of animus because moral disapproval is tantamount to animus as a matter of law.[82]

But "pluralism" alone cannot explain what seems like a psychological diagnosis. As we have seen, Amendment 2 was defended as promoting a certain kind of pluralism, the associational freedom of workplaces to control their own moral environments. Hence conservatives' sense that the *Romer* decision had situated *them* as the outsiders, persons whose moral understandings are simply not entitled to respect. If *Romer* stood for pluralism, this is only because liberals' pluralism has been defined by the buffered distance. The *Romer* Court inferred animus, not to uphold an abstract pluralism, but in order to discredit the "lax and disorganized folkways" that stood in the way of the civilizing process and its complex, ever-evolving chains of human interdependence and integration. The Court imputed animus, not because it discovered any subterranean motivations, but to brand traditionalists as less than fully self-transparent and self-regulating, as having failed to internalize the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity and thus rise above the "consolations of the enchanted world"—here symbolized by traditional values.

Whereas Amendment 2's defenders understood themselves anthropocentrically, as *called upon* to resist the normalization of homosexuality and defend society's moral fiber, the Court described them non-anthropocentrically, as having been *caused* to adopt their stated positions by unacknowledged psychic hostilities, for which their "traditional values" are a disingenuous veneer. What Amendment 2's defenders understood anthropocentrically as righteous indignation elicited by a transcendent dispensation, the Court reduced to Hobbesian "annoyance," the product of adverse stimuli, a reptilian reaction masquerading as something higher. Though a "bare desire to harm" homosexuals was presented as an empirical inference about inner motives, the mutation counter-narrative traces this imputation to the *a priori* rationality of the buffered distance.

The charge of animus served a political purpose. But it was disingenuous intellectually. For the New Enlightenment tells us that particular positions resonate with us as they do because they have become "neurally bound" with more general systems of meaning-production. And conservatives' pleas that their reservations about gay rights express a system of values rather than "bare" animus are fully congruous with this thesis. Conservatives may seem disingenuous in their refusal to accept plainspoken demands for equal rights at face value, which they instead trace to the some broader "liberal agenda." But this agenda is acknowledged by Tribe himself when he

[82] Ibid., pg.

links the cause of gay rights, not to any abstract, culturally denuded notion of negative freedom, but to a particular conception of human flourishing—the properly ordered sociability of the buffered identity purged of all thick moral hierarchies.

With this conception having become the invisible, taken-for-granted background of things, its historical contingency does not figure into liberals' understanding of conservatives, who are therefore seen as irrationally hostile to "freedom." But this fails to capture the real stakes. Robert Cover writes:

> No set of legal institutions or prescriptions exists apart from the narratives that locate it and give it meaning. For every constitution there is an epic, for each Decalogue a scripture. Once understood in the context of the narratives that give it meaning, law becomes not merely a system of rules to be observed, but a world in which we live.
>
> In this normative world, law and narrative are inseparably related. Every prescription is insistent in its demand to be located in discourse – to be supplied with history and destiny, beginning and end, explanation and purpose.[83]
>
> The universalist virtues that we have come to identify with modern liberalism, the broad principles of our law, are essentially system-maintaining "weak" forces. They are virtues that are justified by the need to ensure the *coexistence* of worlds of strong normative meaning. The systems of normative life that they maintain are the products of "strong" forces: culture-specific designs of particularist meaning. These "strong" forces…. *create* the normative worlds in which law is predominantly a system of meaning rather than an imposition of force.[84]

However, different "worlds of strong normative meanings" can sometimes cease to coexist peacefully under the umbrella of modern liberalism's universalistic virtues. At this point, they become pitted against each other in a struggle to more definitively concretize the meaning of these virtues in reflection of one culture-specific design of particularist meaning to the exclusion of others. This is what was happening in *Romer*, as different sides of the culture war fought to define the stakes in reflection of their particular position along the civilizing process.

Those who embodied a more "advanced" iteration of the buffered identity implicitly deployed the subtraction account as the "epic" in which to embed the ostensibly "thin" ideals of freedom and equality. What, after all, is Tribe's "single, unfolding tale of equal liberty and increasingly universal dignity" but a subtraction story, the story of our progressive liberation from the confining illusions of a benighted past? If conservatives do not acknowledge this single, unfolding tale, this is because they understand the stakes through their under-theorized

[83] Robert M. Cover, *Nomos and Narrative*, 97 Harv. L. Rev. 1, 4-5 (1983-1984).
[84] Ibid., pg. 12.

understanding of the mutation counter-narrative. Liberals see the struggle for gay rights in "innocently thin terms," as a struggle between enlightenment and ignorance, or between hierarchy and equality. But conservatives see a conflict between the ordering impulses of the elites and the unregimented folkways of the unwashed masses. This is what allowed Justice Scalia to turn a question about the equality owed to gays notwithstanding conventional social morality into a question about the equality owed to the villeins, or ordinary Americans, notwithstanding the "law-school view of what 'prejudices' must be stamped out."

The latter question flows directly from the mutation counter-narrative. Who are Justice Scalia's Templars, after all, but the historical knight-priests who, had they lived a few centuries later, would have absorbed the courtly-ascetic ethos along both sides of their dual identities? And who are his villeins but the historical commoners who would eventually become the targets of these newly reformed elites' reforming impulses? The elites understand themselves as advancing equality, not the civilizing process. Nevertheless, what they see as a single, unfolding tale of equal liberty and increasingly universal dignity presupposes a transformation of the "whole human make-up" toward the properly ordered sociability of the buffered identity. It requires the kind of person who is well adjusted to a workplace like Mozilla, to the milquetoast, technocratic egalitarianism through which the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity is now affirmed. And this is why conservatives sense the secret machinations of a liberal agenda all about them. The *Romer* Court was adjudicating, not only rights, but even more importantly social meanings, upholding the subtraction account as the lens through which the meaning of equality is to be conceptualized.

Conservatives operate with a different notion of equality, however. Objecting to *Romer*, Graglia charges that some of the liberal Justices had slavishly prostrated themselves before Tribe and other prominent professors of constitutional law:

> The average American has never heard of Larry Tribe, but to Justice Kennedy, he is a reliable guide to the academically approved position on almost any public policy issue and, even more important, a fount on acceptable (to other academics) means for the Court to put into effect. The ordinary American has never heard, indeed, of any of the five professors of constitutional law who volunteered to offer, as they put it in their brief, "what assistance they can," to the Court in reaching its proper conclusions in Romer. To the Justices, however—many of whom can only aspire to the professors' level of constitutional sophistication and intellectual repute—they are as the New York Times' drama critic is to a playwright.[85]

[85] Lino A. Graglia, *Romer v. Evans: The People Foiled Again by the Constitution*, 68 U. Colo. L. Rev 409, 412-13 (1997).

Tribe's level of name-recognition among average Americans does not seem germane to the quality of his arguments, and therefore to the amount of attention they are owed from the Court. But the mutation counter-narrative reveals that Graglia's ad hominem is a defense of inherited "folkways" against the uniformizing spirit of modern elites, who as Taylor observes seek to "change the lives of the mass of people" and instill norms that carry "strong conviction among these elites." The five professors of constitutional law who offered the *Romer* Court "what assistance they can" were carrying forth this tradition.

It is inherent to the civilizing process that its norms spread from elite circles—where they are most at home—outward, to other social milieus where they will encounter varying degrees of resistance before becoming internalized as second-nature. Tribe and the other law professors involved in *Romer* were engaged in precisely this centrifugal project. If the relationship between the academics and the justices was analogous to the relationship between drama critic and playwright, this is because the buffered distance was the ongoing historical drama driving the controversy forward. The academics were the theorists of the buffered distances and the Justices its implementers. This is the "culture-specific design of particularist meaning" that liberals will not acknowledge and the reason why conservatives saw *Romer* as substantively, and not just formally, hegemonic. If liberals disagree, this is because they see themselves in "innocently thin terms," concealing the pragmatic contradiction between their egalitarianism and the hero-system that underwrites this commitment.

Graglia can feel no theoretical contradiction in acknowledging Tribe's "level of constitutional sophistication" while also suggesting that Tribe is an outsider who should mind his own business because he was attuned to this contradiction. Liberalism is a hero-system that mistakes itself for the transcendence of all hero-systems. And this allows liberals to hold themselves out as conservatives' moral and intellectual superiors. Under this pretense, they shield their own hero-systems from the scrutiny, scorn, and interference which they routinely mete out to the hero-systems of conservatives. *Romer* was a symbol this tendency, a symbol of the meta-equal protection problem, liberals' privileged ability to conceal what they share with the conservatives they despise.

Dalrymple recounts a "bourgeois bohemian" funeral in Paris where he stood out in his dark suit and tie. This, he assumed, must have been seen as provincial and conventional when contrasted to the casual dress of the other attendees, who appeared like they "just popped into the

cemetery after a bit of shopping in the local grocery." It would not have been difficult "to construct the bohemian argument against any kind of formality of dress at a funeral," to argue "that what counts is what people genuinely and authentically feel for and about the dear departed, not how they dress" and that "the assumption of special clothing encourages hypocrisy and pretense." But hypocrisy and pretense, writes Dalrymple, cannot be "so easily eliminated from the human repertoire." For "what started out as the rejection of convention has itself become the convention, and the adolescents who attended the funeral in their barely gentrified version of American ghetto costume will have formed the prejudice that funerals are no different, sartorially, from other gatherings, and it will not occur to them that things could be, and have been different."[86]

These Bobos understand themselves as embarked on Tribe's eternal quest for boundary-crossing, for "exchanging emotions, values, and ideas both expressible in words and wordless." But their ethos is in fact a particular way of *structuring* that boundary crossing and exchange, an endorsement of specific social meanings to the necessary exclusion of others. The Bobos see their informality as signifying a symbolically neutral environment which they freely navigate as disengaged strategic agents, the triumph of inner feeling over outer teleology. But ostensibly casual Bobos are no less than stuffy moral traditionalists given over to a field of social meanings that they are not at liberty to ignore. This is why "it will not occur to them that things could be, and have been different."

The Coloradans who sought the right to fire homosexual employees were seeking the right to regulate social meanings in their workplaces, something that the liberal elites with their "law-school view of what 'prejudices' must be stamped out" are already privileged to do. The difference is that the latter proceed under the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, which conceals this regulation. What I described in Chapter Four as the culturally parochial "gravitas" of scholars may seem like the disengaged self-possession to which the buffered identity aspires, especially when compared to the unabashed effusiveness of "red state"-brand patriotism of Sarah Palin rallies. The latter is fairly characterized as "pre-modern" insofar as it rejects the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity in order to surrender to embodied feeling of the higher. And scholarly "gravitas" is undoubtedly accompanied by a kind of self-reflexivity that is absent in these settings. Nevertheless, one would be mistaken—distortively naturalizing the features of the modern liberal identity—in interpreting this gravitas as a categorical sloughing off of the

[86] Dalrymple, *In Praise of Prejudice*, pg. 40.

conservative patriot's heteronomy, the attainment of a special maturity and self-control that eludes the latter in his rapturous abandonment. For even scholarly detachment remains a form of engagement insofar as it is rooted in a socially generated symbolic life-world. Those who flout its mores may not be condemned as "immoral." But they will be dismissed as "unserious," becoming the object of "certain nuances of disappointment and contempt." And this serves the same function as does moral condemnation within the less intellectualized and sublimated hero-systems of conservatives.

If this goes unrecognized, this is because liberal tastes and preferences have been *culturally defined* as a special naturalistic lucidity. They have been *culturally defined* as a ceaseless quest for social boundary crossing, *culturally defined* as Mooney's "Open Personality." The liberal virtues being the products of cultural definition rather than metaphysical disengagement, liberals must no less than conservatives place severe limits on social boundary crossing, on the kinds of emotions and values that may be exchanged in their midst, because they are no less than conservatives dependent on particular social meanings. And so liberals can never be as respectful of human idiosyncrasy as lofty talk of endless boundary crossing would suggest. It is the conservative who always stands accused of animus. But the liberal elites will react in the very same way to whatever threatens their hero-system.

The elites can see no equivalency between any liberal contempt for traditionalists and the bigot's antipathy for gays or other minorities. William Eskridge writes that this antipathy expresses a "body politics," the project of naturalizing inferiority, and has a long pedigree in discrimination against various immigrant groups, blacks, and religious minorities.[87] In advancing a "politics of disgust and contagion," this body politics demonizes the targeted minority as subhuman, not just mischievous.[88] And any liberal hostility toward traditionalists cannot be fairly compared this denigration:

> [A]llowing a schoolteacher to be openly lesbian does not impose upon unhappy parents or even traumatized children the kind of scarlet letter that body politics imposes upon homosexuals. Even the most politically correct regulations do not trumpet an image of the bigot as someone whose body is a corrupt situs of disgusting actions, whose soul is degenerate and subhuman, and whose polluted presence is contagious. In short, even if traditionalist claims can be deemed liberties, the demonization of the anti-gay bigot is in no way commensurable with the demonization of the homosexual.[89]

[87] William N. Eskridge, Jr., *Body Politics: Lawrence v. Texas and the Constitution of Disgust and Contagion*, 57 Fla. L. Rev. 1011, 1020 (2005).
[88] Ibid., pg. 1048.
[89] Ibid., pg. 1049.

Eskridge discerns a vast asymmetry between these two forms of demonization. But there is also symmetry underneath that asymmetry. Politically correct gay rights advocates may not see the body of the traditionalist as "a corrupt situs of disgusting actions." But neither do they see him as merely ignorant, misguided, or even mischievous. If the buffered identity involves an aspiration to a certain kind of spiritual purity, then the refusal of this purity must, as a corollary, involve a kind of spiritual corruption, a fallenness into an idolatry that degrades one's basic humanity. This is precisely how liberals see conservatives. If they do not recognize their conservaphobia—the distinctively liberal form of animus—this is because it has been invisibly built into their very identities, revealing itself only in the subtle shades of social meaning that are easily denied or papered over.

Conservatives sense these meanings powerfully, however. Hofstadter reports how a defender of McCarthy remarked that "the irrationality of the college-educated mob that has descended upon Joseph R. McCarthy" could only be explained by "something in McCarthy's personal makeup," by "a sort of animal negative-pole magnetism which repels alumni of Harvard, Princeton and Yale."[90] "[A]nimal negative-pole magnetism" is precisely what conservatives can exude to liberals. The alumni of Harvard, Princeton, and Yale had their reasons for despising McCarthy, just as liberals have their reasons for despising at least some conservatives. But evidence and argument do not eliminate what is a certain dehumanizing contempt for those who resist the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity—what give the evidence and argument their resonance.

As we saw in Chapter Two, Hannity notes that left-wing comedians can defend mock death threats against conservative politicians as "ironic jokes" while conservatives who make similar threats against liberals provoke more concern. And as we also saw, Congressman Peter King attributes this double-standard to liberals' undeserved Upper West Side privilege. But as liberals see it, this is a privilege that has been *earned* through the civilizing process itself, because of which they now enjoy a more self-transparent and self-regulating form of agency. Having more thoroughly absorbed the civilizing process with its automatic inhibitions against impulsive, unpredictable violence, liberals are presumed capable of entertaining intimations of violence without the danger that these will spill over into action. They are permitted what Elias calls a

[90] Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), pg. 13.

"relaxation within an already established standard" as those who have yet to internalize that standard are not. And this is why conservatives must radiate a dim but palpable "animal negative-pole magnetism" to liberals. This magnetism is nothing other than conservatives' resistance to the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, just the flipside of the Jedi-like aura that envelops social justice activism.

The rational discourse of liberals proceeds atop of something more primordial, the affect-transforming character of the civilizing process, which lives on in the taken-for-granted structure of liberals' visceral judgment that conservatives are driven by animus while they stand above such brutishness. Conservaphobia is ultimately continuous with, because a sublimated and politicized iteration of, the visceral repugnance which the courtiers felt toward those who still ate with their hands, salivated freely, and executed bodily functions publicly. As today's elites, liberals discern the very same primordial indiscipline in the conservative mind and personality. The demonization of the bigot is indeed different from the demonization of the homosexual. But this is because whereas the disgust of conservatives is aggravated by hatred, that of liberals is tempered by contempt. This is to be expected given that liberals are the standard-bearers of modernity' secularized asceticism, the heirs of what Nietzsche calls the ascetic priest, "the first form of the more *delicate* animal that despises more readily than it hates."[91] If conservatives see symmetry between their own "bare animus" and the ostensible mildness of liberal meta-censoriousness, this is because they understand that mildness as yet another instance of liberal privilege, one more sublimation, intellectualization, and etherealization for which liberals deserve no moral credit.

3. An Exhilarating Feeling of Momentousness

Lawrence Lessig argues that some traditional women have opposed abortion because it is associated with women's right to full and equal participation in the workplace. When motherhood was considered a woman's natural role, staying at home to raise children carried no social costs. But with the "professional model" for women now established as legitimate, it challenges the appropriateness of choosing a traditional life. With this choice now needing to be explained and defended, traditional, domestically-inclined women are confronted with a new justificatory burden. At best, the traditional motherhood is no longer considered unambiguously appropriate.

[91] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), pg. 126 (Essay III, Sec. 15).

At worst, the professional model inflicts a new social stigma on traditionalists by equating traditional motherhood with surrender to patriarchy. If some women oppose abortion, this is as a "defensive construction" of social meaning. Their opposition is an attempt to preserve the unquestioned naturalness and inevitability of the traditional role of women as child-bearers against developments that would dissolve that naturalness and impose new psychological burdens.[92]

Lessig's analysis of traditionalist motivations coheres with the feminist narrative, and also the broader liberal narrative, according to which women who oppose feminism do so because feminism threatens the psychological security of traditional gender roles. Though stifling, these roles were a known variable, a reliable source of meaning that feminism's grander emancipatory ambitions threatened to replace with uncertainty and confusion. Gloria Steinem argues that religious fundamentalism can appeal to women because "the promise *is* safety in return for obedience, respectability in return for self-respect and freedom—a sad bargain."[93] In a similar vein, Catherine MacKinnon writes that women who opposed the ERA

> feared the meaning of sex equality in their lives, because sex inequality gave them what little they had, so little that they felt they couldn't afford to lose it. They hung onto their crumbs from experience, as if that was all they were ever going to get. Even more, I think they opposed ERA because they heard in it a judgment of existing possibilities that meant that they had lived their one and only life under conditions that were less than they might have been, which made *them* less than they might have been.[94]

Here again, the judgment of the Left is that it is conservatives, not liberals, who are *seeking to defend a hero-system* and to this end refuse to recognize inconvenient truths, including the existence of oppressive social structures. Where the Left stands for truth, the Right stands for identity, on whose altar truth and awareness are sacrificed. To be liberal is to be psychologically liberated, open to experience, and given to reflection. To be traditional is to be psychologically stunted, fearful of the unknown and untried. But seeing symmetry where liberals see asymmetry, conservatives believe that feminists are driven by their own hero-systems, by their own quest for identity, of which the denigration of traditional women is a major component. Feminism is one more tentacle of the liberal culture, whose false universalism provides a pretext for its continuing assault on conservatives. If feminists cannot recognize their feminism as a hero-system, the reason

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[92] Lawrence Lessig, *The Regulation of Social Meaning*, 62 U. Chi. L. Rev. 943, 987-90 (1995).
[93] Qt. in Christina Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?: How Women Have Betrayed Women* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), pg. 260.
[94] Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), pg. 226.

is that doing so might involve the thought that *they* are "less than they might have been" as a result of their very feminism, to which they have sacrificed true autonomy.

The feminist narrative tells us that women's liberation is a struggle against the forces of patriarchy, against the various legal norms, social practices, and cultural prejudices that continue to confine women to a subordinate social station. But for conservatives, this is history as written by the victors, and so a history that silences the voices of the losers, non-feminist women, whose trials and tribulations never enter the liberal moral equation. Feminism is a struggle, not by all women against male patriarchs, but by an elite minority of powerful women against a majority of women who never felt compromised by traditional gender roles.

F. Carolyn Graglia argues in her *Domestic Tranquility*, a "brief against feminism," that while feminists believe they have unearthed a neglected history of women's resistance to traditional gender roles, the fact that some women dissented from these roles was well-known before the modern feminist movement.[95] What is new isn't the realization that some women are stifled by traditional expectations, but that these women should have used the vehicle of feminism to violate the traditional "women's pact."[96] This pact assumed that most women sought domesticity, but it also acknowledged that an exceptional minority preferred careers and independence. And so it affirmed the right of each to go their own way. But not satisfied "merely to shape their own destinies," feminists have attempted to impose their own values on all women and reshape society accordingly.[97] Feminism is just another form of liberal elitism, one more arena on which the anointed mock, scold, and intimidate the benighted under the deceptive veneer of enlightenment, progress, and liberation. Feminists charge that historians have suppressed the history of women's resistance to traditional gender roles. But feminists now suppress the history of women's resistance to feminism, dismissing it as fear and pathology in an attempt to deprive anti-feminist women of their own voice.

Feminists insist that most of what might seem like intrinsic self differences are in fact culturally imposed, but Graglia retorts that "contemporary feminism has undertaken its own cultural impositions."[98] While feminists represent their agenda as responsive to women's real

[95] F. Carolyn Graglia, *Domestic Tranquility: A Brief Against Feminism* (Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 1998), pg. 181.
[96] Ibid., pg. 58.
[97] Ibid., pgs. 263-64.
[98] Ibid., pg. 2.

desires, they have gone out of their way to engineer women's environments so as to generate those desires. Liberalized divorce laws, explains Graglia, were an effort "to instill in women distrust of their husbands and reluctance to leave the work force for fear of financial privation in the event of their divorces that 'reform' made more likely."[99] In leveling this threat, divorce reform "warned women to adopt the feminist perspective and replace homemaking with a full-time career."[100] Feminists now dismiss traditional gender roles as arbitrary. But it was feminists who first engineered these perceptions by enforcing a regime of coerced androgyny. The feminization of men, writes Graglia, was among "the seeds from which women's discontent grew and which blossomed into the women's movement." Absent the support and encouragement of a masculine man, women naturally became disenchanted with a traditional female role—feminism's ultimate objective.[101] Their dissatisfaction here wasn't just there waiting to be named by those who courageously spoke truth to power. Rather, it had to be *created* in order to socially vindicate the self-image of an elite minority of women.

To this end, feminists have waged a largely victorious "war against the housewife," employing any means necessary to denigrate her character, intelligence, and social status.[102] Hence Simone de Beauvoir's and Betty Friedan's repeated references to the housewife as a "parasite," which remind Graglia of Hitler's tirades against the Jews.[103] While feminists have attempted to ride "piggyback" on the civil rights movement, their contempt for the traditional housewife betrays a more nefarious agenda.[104] Women's "liberation" is an Orwellian sleight-of-hand because what feminists uphold as liberation could never have succeeded without the entrenching of new social stigmas designed to keep women in the feminist fold. These stigmas had no counterparts in the civil rights movement, which didn't require the social engineering of a small elite. The civil rights movement gave freedom to those who wanted it. But far from liberating women for their authentic desires, feminists have *created* the specific social and cultural conditions under which women are drawn to feminism.

Central to this effort is feminism's celebration of casual, meaningless sex. This kind of sex, observes Graglia, is fully compatible with women's participation in the workforce. By

[99] Ibid., pg. 265.
[100] Ibid., pg. 136.
[101] Ibid., pg. 39.
[102] Ibid., pg. 96.
[103] Ibid., pg. 119.
[104] Ibid., pg. 17.

contrast, "the meaningful sex that overwhelms, that transforms" threatens to make domestic roles more appealing to women.[105] Feminists therefore sought to strip sexuality of any higher metaphysical meaning, reducing sexual intercourse to "the physical assuaging of a genital itch."[106] While feminism claims to have liberated women from antiquated sexual ideologies that formerly subordinated them to patriarchy, it has in the process instituted a new sexual ideology that subordinates them to feminism itself, reconfiguring gender relations in order to socially vindicate feminist identities and discredit others. Women could never have been drawn into the feminist fold were they not first deracinated of their femininity, which is what feminism pursued. By cultivating a dissatisfaction it could then promise to relieve, feminism turned itself into a self-fulfilling prophesy, concealing all the manipulations by which it finally earned the grudging assent of women.

Catherine MacKinnon writes that the patriarchy compels women to "spend an incredible amount of time, life, and energy cowed, fearful, and colonized, trying to figure out how not to be next on the list."[107] But Graglia believes that these apprehensions are themselves outgrowths of feminism and its drive to deracinate sexuality of its traditional moral and spiritual moorings. She writes:

> Today, well-educated professional women, who are embarrassed to defend the unsophisticated concepts of virginity and chastity, are less competent to control men's sexual advances than high school girls were in the 1940s. One result is the invention of concepts like "date rape" and an expansive law of sexual harassment in an attempt to provide the protection for women against seduction they once felt completely confident in securing for themselves with a graceful—and, we sometimes thought, even elegant—refusal.[108]

Whereas feminism interprets date rape and sexual harassment as lingering remnants of a patriarchy that was once unresisted and unabashed, Graglia sees these problems as the unintended by predictable byproducts of feminist victories, which are now being exploited to secure further such victories. The helplessness that women may feel before male sexual imperiousness is the natural consequence of the erosion of traditional values at the hands of feminism. In reducing sex to the "physical assuaging of a genital itch," feminism deprived women of any basis for refusing sex beyond bare disinclination. Not being grounded in transcendent values like chastity and virginity,

[105] Ibid., pgs. 368-69.
[106] Ibid., pg. 176.
[107] Ibid., pg. 7.
[108] Ibid., pg. 170.

that disinclination cannot but seem arbitrary, something that might be overcome with further male persistence. Liberals would ground the refusal of sex in autonomous choice. But autonomous choices can change, sometimes under others' influence. And so feminism must plunge women into perpetual sexual confusion and ambivalence, further inviting the male persistence which expansive definitions of rape and sexual harassment are then designed to remedy.

If there is a "rape culture," this is a social construction of feminism itself, the logical consequence of the psychic conflicts it engenders. Having eviscerated the social understandings that once allowed women to refuse sex confidently, feminism then casts the ensuing ambivalence and confusion as the subtle, psychologically coercive machinations of omnipresent patriarchal power, thus further galvanizing feminist consciousness and its yearning for an as yet unfathomed utopia in which genuine female agency will for the first time be possible. Only then will women finally rest assured that their ostensible desires are truly their own, and feminism holds itself out as the only path to this transformed state of being. But this never-ending journey has been *necessitated* by feminism itself, which has deprived women of alternative social meanings. Here as elsewhere, the critical theory of the Right tells us that the dominant dispensation has created the conditions for its own social vindication, conditions under which it can *recast its effects as its rational justification*.

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What are we to make of this anti-feminist argument? Graglia imagines that women of the pre-feminist period were free to live as they pleased but that feminists, not content with this, have imposed their wills on a wider population of women predisposed toward domesticity. This is clearly fanciful. Obviously, career-minded women of the past faced significant obstacles that men did not, and Graglia disingenuously papers this over. Perhaps traditional gender roles weren't always quite as black-and-white as we now think. But they were clearly marked by the kind of cultural coercion that Graglia imagines that only feminism can exert, as well as by legal coercion. Career-minded women may have been tolerated here and there under unusual circumstances, but Graglia's idealized "women's pact" was surely less ecumenical than she pretends.

But putting aside all unwarranted nostalgia, the mutation counter-narrative reveals the higher truth behind Graglia's accusations, disclosing molding and imposition where liberals see only liberation and enlightenment. The subtraction account naturalizes autonomous self-

determination as a basic yearning of essential human nature. But the mutation counter-narrative tells us that what purports to be autonomous self-determination is in fact one historically constructed understanding of human agency among others. The "inner base area" of the buffered identity isn't something that was lying there all along, albeit concealed underneath various collectivizing illusions, but the product of specific social forces which have conditioned the human organism into its present self-reflexivity. The buffered identity is an *imposition* for whose sake our "default" human dispositions must be tamed and disciplined.

This affects how we see feminism. The subtraction account casts feminism as a revolt against the historical repression of female agency. But the mutation counter-narrative locates feminism as among the forces that *created* female agency (as understood by feminism). For feminism is merely another extension of modern liberalism's disciplinary agenda. It was feminism that *molded* women into the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, repressing the "lax and disorganized folkways" of traditional femininity, integrating them into the extended chains of social interdependence presupposed by the buffered distance and symbolized by the career woman. Feminism claims to upholds respect for women's personhood. But as John Gray notes, personhood is not the essence of humanity, but merely one of its masks. Persons "are only humans who have donned the mask that has been handed down in Europe over the past few generations, and taken it for their face."[109] Feminism is premised on precisely this conflation, which is how it can overlook its complicity in creating what it now says needs defending, its complicity in imposing a consciousness and identity that did not need to exist and so did not need to be liberated.

This is the core of both the mutation counter-narrative and Graglia's attack on feminism. She is critiquing feminism not only as an idea but also on the level of cosmological orientation, as part and parcel of the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. If feminism originated in the imperiousness of elite cadres bent on stigmatizing the housewife, this is as one more stage of the civilizing process, whose norms always spread outward from elite circles through the badgering, bullying, and scolding of the unwashed masses, whose capitulation will then be celebrated as liberation and enlightenment. Graglia charges that the feminist movement sought to eviscerate the metaphysical significance of sexuality, reducing it to the "physical assuaging of a

[109] John Gray, *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2007), pgs. 58-59.

genital itch." And this is just another instance of the buffered identity's war against "embodied feelings of the higher," which it must reduce to biological impulses purged of all anthropocentric predicates. The disenchantment of sexuality by feminism was, just like the disenchantment of the world generally, advanced in order to cultivate a disciplined and productive citizenry. This is what the career woman exalted by feminism represents, the milquetoast technocratic egalitarianism of the liberal culture, in whose service every last vestige of traditionalist sentiment must be uprooted. Whereas liberals locate the meaning of feminism in the supersession of certain historical inequalities and the prejudices that permitted them, conservatives locate it in the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, for which "equality" is merely a vehicle.

This is why conservatives refuse to accept feminism at face value, why they believe that "women's equality" describes feminism in "innocently thin terms" that conceal the true nature of feminism's appeal, which abstractions like freedom and equality do not capture. Christina Hoff Sommers observes that the gender feminists' motivation is powerfully enhanced by the "faith that they are privy to revolutionary insights into the nature of knowledge and society." This "inspires them with a missionary fervor unmatched by any other group in the contemporary academy."[110] "An exhilarating feeling of *momentousness*," she notes, "routinely surfaces at gender feminist gatherings," as feminist theorists invoke Copernicus and Darwin to symbolize the importance of their own discoveries, basking in the "exhilaration of feeling themselves in the vanguard of a new consciousness."[111] Feminists are seeking to express, not merely a set of *doctrines* one might or might not accept, but, more fundamentally, a *consciousness* one might or might not attain. They understand themselves, not only as liberated from traditional expectations and stereotypes, but furthermore as special participants in a privileged epistemic and spiritual dispensation that affords them a special lucidity unavailable to women who stubbornly resist feminism.

This hierarchy is feminism's inflection by the buffered distance, which weds feminism's social meaning, not only to the elimination of irrational prejudices about women's abilities, but to the presumption that feminist women have achieved a more self-transparent and self-regulating form of agency than is enjoyed by non-feminists, the "less fortunate peoples" of a benighted past. Sommers relates an article in *The New Yorker* on the ultraorthodox Hasidic women of Brooklyn. The secular reporter expressed her astonishment that what she expected would be "self-effacing

[110] Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?*, pg. 52.
[111] Ibid., pgs. 86-87.

drudges" worn down by a patriarchal family system turned out to be a "remarkably energetic, mutually supportive community of women, an almost Amazonian society" with strong families and large thriving marriages. Surprisingly, these women "sped around like intergalactic missiles" and "seemed…to be as occupied with worthy projects as Eleanor Roosevelt, as hospitable as Welcome Wagoneers."[112] If the writer expected to encounter only self-effacing drudges, this was because the subtraction account of modernity compelled her to see traditionalist institutions as mere confinements rather than sources of meaning, to see the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, not as one possible value among others, but as the *sine qua non* of all value. Feminism defines freedom as the freedom to be a feminist, and so it must dismiss all who refuse this freedom as stunted and without "awareness."

This denigration is just the corollary of feminists' self-understanding as cognitive elites having transcended the confining horizons by which others remain beguiled. Sommers writes:

> An illiberal authoritarianism is implicit in the doctrine that women are socialized to want the things the gender feminist believes they *should not want*. For those who believe that what women want and hope for is "constrained" or "coerced" by their upbringing in the patriarchy are led to dismiss the values and aspirations of most women. The next step may not be inevitable, but it is almost irresistible: to regard women as badly brought-up children whose harmful desires and immature choices must be discounted.[113]

The notion that traditional women are "constrained" or "coerced" by an oppressive patriarchal ideology follows naturally from the subtraction account. Feminists need to see their feminism, not as one hero-system among others, but as the transcendence of all hero-systems, and must to this end cast competing hero-systems, not as genuine alternatives, but as the byproducts of social malformations which feminists alone can recognize. But operating as they do out of an under-theorized understanding of the mutation counter-narrative, conservatives see feminism as a hero-system in its own right. And so they see feminist worries about the coerciveness of traditional gender roles as an ideological ruse serving to maintain that hero-system's preeminence. Feminists insist that it is the social status quo, not they, that demeans women. But this is a rationalization by which they dramatize their hero-systems, conscripting traditionalists into it as relics of a benighted past—the foils and props with which liberalism cannot dispense.

Graglia may fail to recognize that the 1950s housewife was a "social construction," feminists will insist. But the mutation counter-narrative reveals that the liberated woman of

[112] Ibid., pg. 261.
[113] Ibid., pg. 257.

feminism is no less of a social construction. Biology may not be destiny, but neither is the feminist identity, which reflects a culturally-sustained hero-system, not unvarnished human nature. Feminists place themselves in the tradition of Darwin and Copernicus. But Darwin and Copernicus alerted us to features of the natural world that pre-existed their discovery by the human mind. By contrast, the higher consciousness of feminists is a merely *social* reality of feminists' own devising. If the Left in general is guilty of naturalizing the modern liberal identity, then feminism in particular is guilty of naturalizing the feminist identity, as something that follows naturally from "consciousness raising." But understood through the mutation counter-narrative, what purports to be consciousness raising is in fact consciousness *creating*, a "censorship of fashion" serving to inculcate the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, a "silent curriculum" that culturally credentials feminist dispositions as autonomous and enlightened while branding traditionalist women as slavish and benighted. What feminism presents as its sophisticated theories of false consciousness and social construction are just ideological tools of this hierarchy, of the buffered distance. Notwithstanding its universalistic veneer, feminism is an attempt by some women to appropriate the social capital previously enjoyed by another, complete with an ideology to rationalize the appropriation as something nobler.

Lessig's analysis therefore captures only half the story. The identities of traditionalists are being threatened, not by freedom as such—Tribe's "eternal quest" for social "boundary-crossing"—but by a specific identity that necessarily comes at their expense. They feel threatened by feminism, not only because it imposes the burden of choice, but because feminists' claims to higher consciousness have as their ineluctable corollary the judgment that other women are mired in lower consciousness. This judgment is necessitated by the feminist identity, by a hero-system that must discredit whatever might discredit it. If the right to abortion ambiguates the heretofore taken-for-granted identities of traditionalist women, it is also the case that the very existence of such women ambiguates the identities of feminists, by highlighting their socially constructed character. Feminists may compare themselves to Copernicus. But whereas a telescope can conclusively refute any dissent before the heliocentric theory, claims to higher consciousness never stand on so secure a footing. And so they must be corroborated socially rather than experimentally, by denying the cognitive capacities of women who will not recognize that consciousness as higher.

* * *

University of Virginia sociology professor and anti-feminist W. Bradford Wilcox celebrates that many smart post-feminist college women who might have been expected to "gravitate to feminist academics" are now looking for "a sane path forward for the revival of courtship and family life."[114] Wilcox's contraposition of traditional family life with "feminist academics" in particular rather than female careers in general is peculiar, given that only a small fraction of the total female undergraduate population chooses careers in women's studies. But accurate or not, the contrast is symbolic of how conservatives see the challenge posed by feminism. The issue is not whether women will have more choices or fewer, or whether they will choose the professional model rather than motherhood, but whether they will submit to the cognitive elitism of feminists or resist it. The danger isn't that too many women will pursue professional careers to the detriment of homemaking, but that these careers will redound to the cultural prestige of this elitism. The smart, post-feminist women who eschew feminist academics are trailblazers in the struggle to overthrow that prestige, which is what conservatives above all resist.

Conservatives are accused of trying to "turn back the clock" on women's issues as on everything else. But *qua* claimants of cultural oppression, they are first and foremost driven, not to turn back the clock, but to "turn the tables" on the Left. Since "we are all liberals now," they cannot prescribe traditional gender roles as uniquely appropriate for all women, and so they merely counsel the clarity to see past the ideological illusions of feminism. *Qua* claimants of cultural oppression, conservatives are not stridently anti-feminist but amorphously "post-feminist," as Wilcox says. They understand themselves as seeing past the meta-narrative of feminism much as post-modernists believe they see past the meta-narratives of modernity. Their argument is not that women shouldn't choose independence, but that the independence offered by feminism is an illusion, only one hero-system among others and not the transcendence of all hero-systems. Feminism is no more authentic than hearth and home. It too demands the individual's submersion in the collective. Being a hero-system that mistakes itself for the transcendence of all hero-systems, feminism must continually dramatize this supposed transcendence and then inveigh against the world's failure to recognize it. And this must inevitably propel feminists into an ever-

[114] Qt. in Brian C. Anderson, *South Park Conservatives: The Revolt Against Liberal Media Bias* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2005), pg. 144.

deepening spirals of alienation, self-pity, and resentment that can never be assuaged and are instead politicized as social critique.

By contrast, the post-feminist woman celebrated by conservatives is keenly aware of the machinations by which the feminist flock is shepherded, refusing the false blandishments offered by feminism's "higher consciousness." Gloria Steinem charges that fundamentalism offers safety and respectability at the cost of self-respect and freedom. But Steinem, counters Sommers, "herself knows a thing or two [about] how to recruit adherents to a cause by promises of 'safety' and 'self-respect,'" because the "feminist orthodoxy she portrays promises safety in a sisterhood that will offer unhappy or insecure women a venue where they can build self-esteem and attain an authenticity enjoyed by no other group of women."[115] The post-feminist woman rejects these false consolations and thereby achieves the true authenticity that turns traditional gender roles into a genuine option. She understands that feminism is foremost driven, not by abstractions like autonomy and equal dignity, but by a visceral, moralistic hostility to these roles and femininity itself. Being affronts to feminism's disciplinary impulses, these are classified as devolution toward the brute nature, a kind of uncouth barbarism. Traditional women radiate an "animal negative-pole magnetism" to feminists. And the latter's sophisticated theories of patriarchally-induced false consciousness are merely sophisticated rationalizations for this visceral revulsion.

What liberals interpret as "attacks" on feminism, and by extension on women themselves, conservatives see as legitimate self-defense. To expose feminism as a hero-system is to undermine feminists' claim to a higher consciousness, which is in turn to disarm feminist condescension toward traditionalists of its power. Sommers is engaged in this project when she writes:

> Earlier in this century, many households still had smelling salts on hand in the event that "delicate" women reacted to displays of male vulgarity by fainting. Today, women of delicacy have a new way to demonstrate their exquisitely fragile sensibilities: by explaining to anyone who will listen how they have been blighted and violated by some male's offensive coarseness. If nothing of a telling nature has recently happened to us, we can tell about how we felt on hearing what happened to others. We faint, "discursively" and publicly, at our humiliations at the hands of men.[116]

The message is that these feminists have not eschewed traditional moral sentiments to the extent they believe, and have rather incorporated variants of them into their sophisticated theorizations of patriarchal power. In fainting "discursively," feminists lend intellectualized, sublimated, and

[115] Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?*, pg. 260.
[116] Ibid., pg. 29.

etherealized expression to the very traditionalism which they officially repudiate, endowing that traditionalism with an elaborate theoretical superstructure that conceals their underlying impulses, which closely mirror what they condemn as tradition-enslaved false consciousness. Fainting discursively is precisely what may be expected of a hero-system that holds itself out as the transcendence of all hero-systems.

The difference between feminists and traditionalists is not the difference between enlightenment and social illusion, but the difference between "modern" and "pre-modern" affective-instinctual structures, between more and less sublimated and intellectualized iterations of the same impulses. Women of an earlier period straightforwardly acknowledged their emotional "delicacy," the "embodied feelings of the higher" violations of which could induce fainting. But modern feminists have excarnated and sublimated those feelings into the *theoretical* delicacy with which they expose the subtle, ever-present machinations of patriarchal power. Worries about pervasive date rape and sexual harassment sound more secular, sophisticated, and hard-nosed than moralistic laments about the decline of virginity and chastity. But the meta-censoriousness of the former is merely the intellectualized and secularized reconfiguration of the censoriousness of the latter. It is not the subtraction of a benighted past but its mutation.

Coulter is discerning this when she notes the contradiction of feminists who rail against "sexist men" and "sexual harassment" while "simultaneously promoting the view that sex has no sacred purpose."[117] How, the question is, could sexual harassment be demeaning, rather than just distracting or annoying, if the substratum of that harassment, sexuality itself, lacks the higher meaning assigned it by benighted moral traditionalists? Feminists allege various power imbalances in favor of males. But these do not explain why males should have the power to *denigrate* sexually. If feminists can feel this way, this is because their judgments covertly rely on tradition and the special meaning it assigns sexuality. Coulter is simply expressing her under-theorized understanding of the mutation counter-narrative, which always reveals symmetry where liberals see asymmetry. Here as elsewhere, that narrative reveals that liberals secretly retain what they officially dismiss as the confining horizons of a benighted past, and that this retention undercuts their standing to criticize conservatives as they do.

The mutation counter-narrative cannot settle anything as to the ultimate value of the feminist revolution. But it does explain why many have been unwilling to accept feminism's self-

[117] Ann Coulter, *Godless: The Church of Liberalism* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007), pg. 9.

understanding at face value, why there has always been a large discrepancy between the number of Americans prepared to endorse what self-avowed feminists would proffer as their shortlist of basic principles and the number of Americans prepared to embrace the feminist label without reservation. Conservative claims of cultural oppression cannot be reduced to some "backlash" instigated at the behest of "Strict Father" morality. For that backlash is reaction against, not only to women's liberation, but also to the pragmatic contradictions of liberalism, a hero-system that gives to some what it denies to others. If conservatives refuse to adopt what is the "enlightened" perspective, this is because enlightenment is the ideological veneer behind which this inequality is perpetrated.

4. The Powerful Driving Force of Snobbery

The mutation counter-narrative illuminates not only what are commonly classified as "social" or "cultural" issues—like gay rights or feminism—but also a wide range of controversies which are less centrally associated with the "culture wars." Cosmological orientation, whose nature and origins is tracked by that narrative, inflects all these controversies as well, propelling conservatives to detect the same pragmatic contradiction again and again in ostensibly heterogeneous contexts. Ann Coulter writes:

> Only when you appreciate the powerful driving force of snobbery in the liberals' worldview do all their preposterous and counterintuitive arguments make sense. They promote immoral destructive behavior because they are snobs, they embrace criminals because they are snobs, they oppose tax cuts because they are snobs, they adore the environment because they are snobs. Every pernicious idea to come down the pike is instantly embraced by liberals to show how powerful they are. Liberals hate society and want to bring it down to reinforce their sense of invincibility. Secure in the knowledge that their beachfront haciendas will still be standing when the smoke clears, they giddily fiddle with the little people's rules and morals.[118]

This would seem like a cheap ad hominem tirade. But such tirades express conservatives' correct intuitive sense that liberal policy preferences embody a particular mode of transcendence that favors some identities to the detriment of others. And this is conservatives' visceral attunement to the modern liberal identity's origins. What is the "sense of invincibility" which Coulter accuses liberals of seeking to reinforce other than the "new kind of invulnerability" offered by the buffered distance? And who are her "little people" with "little people's rules and morals" other than the

[118] Ann Coulter, *Slander: Liberal Lies About the American Right* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002), pg. 27.

"less fortunate peoples" who are relics of our "barbarian past"? Conservative claims of cultural oppression exhibit a *recurring logical structure*. And this is the mutation counter-narrative, which gives them their powerful resonance. If the trope of the beleaguered "ordinary American" trodden down by "liberal elites" has proven so versatile, this is because it is rooted in something *real*, the clash of cosmological orientations tracked by that narrative.

Liberals refuse to recognize this clash, however. Against Coulter, they will retort that the "snobbery" of supporting redistributive taxation bespeaks a level of sociological sophistication usually absent in conservatives, who reject complex accounts of socio-economic causation in favor of simplistic moralisms like "personal responsibility." Lakoff writes that Strict Father morality's stress on moral strength "imposes a form of asceticism" that "rules out any explanation in terms of social forces or social class," this being incompatible with that morality's axiomatic equation of economic misfortune with moral failure.[119] In a similar vein, Lasch observes that Great Depression-era welfare professionals were horrified to discover "that many Americans, even victims of large-scale unemployment, still clung to the ethic of self-help and refused to acknowledge an individual's right to relief." The welfare state's advocates "had to persuade the public that poverty should not be attributed to lack of enterprise; that the system, not the individual, was at fault; that dependence on public relief was no disgrace; and that self-help, in the era of organization, was a snare and a delusion."[120] Conservatives' moralism and anti-intellectualism seem interrelated as different symptoms of their inability or unwillingness to take a dispassionate view of the causal forces that actually shape our lives. For this is what maintains them in their callousness toward the underprivileged and dispossessed. Liberals do take cognizance of these forces, however, and this is why conservatives must try to discredit them as snobs, because the alternative is to acknowledge liberals' superior insight and compassion.

This liberal sophistication reaches its logical conclusion in Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, where Rawls argues:

> While the liberal conception seems clearly preferable to the system of natural liberty, intuitively it still appears defective. For one thing, even if it works to perfection in eliminating the influence of social contingencies, it still permits the distribution of wealth and income to be determined by the natural distribution of talents and abilities. Within the limits allowed by the background arrangements, distributive shares are decided by the

[119] George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (The University of Chicago Press, 2002), pgs. 74-75.
[120] Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), pg. 218.

> outcome of the natural lottery; and this outcome is arbitrary from a moral perspective. There is no more reason to permit the distribution of income and wealth to be settled by the distribution of natural assets than by historical and social fortune… The extent to which natural capacities develop and reach fruition is affected by all kinds of social conditions and class attitudes. Even the willingness to make an effort, to try, and so to be deserving in the ordinary sense is itself dependent upon happy family and social circumstances.[121]

Not only large-scale unemployment, but also lackluster willpower, are misfortunes for which people cannot be fairly faulted once we recognize the causal chains that shaped who they became. Rawls argues that this recognition is attained through what he dubs the "Original Positon," a hypothetical situation in which a society's would-be citizens deliberate on the principles of justice that are to guide them. They do so under a "veil of ignorance," which deprives them of any knowledge of the particular social position they will occupy, including their class, race, gender, natural talents, and even conception of the good. Knowing only general truths about human psychology and social life, they can here formulate principles of justice without being influenced by particularistic interests and preferences. Being ignorant of the circumstances and aptitudes into which they will be born, they will recognize that even a "willingness to make an effort" originate in factors that elude individual control. And this is why they will support economic redistribution to the extent the poorest are not made worst off for it, because this is the rational position to adopt within the Original Position, which is also the moral position.

As with feminism, the contrast is between the dispassionate sociological sophistication of liberals and the identitarian compulsions of conservatives, who lack this sophistication and cannot "step back" from their contingent identities to assess the world objectively. But also as with feminism, this contraposition conceals what the mutation counter-narrative reveals, which is that even dispassionate sociological sophistication has an identitarian meaning. That the development of our natural capacities is a function of unchosen contingencies is doubtlessly true. But whether one accedes to the Original Position is a function, not only of accurate knowledge, but of the overall human make-up, the extent to which the civilizing process has completed its work.

As we observed with Elias in Chapter Five, it was only after people developed "increased emotional control" and "a greater restraint of their spontaneous feeling" that they could suppress the default perception that "everything they experience and everything that concerns them takes its stamp from them, is the expression of an intention, a destiny, a purpose relating to themselves."

[121] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pg. 1999), pgs. 63-64.

Only then, for example, could they recognize that the earth revolves around the sun notwithstanding how things appeared to their first-person experience. The scientific revolution presupposed, not only new techniques of investigation, but also a transformation in people's sense of themselves away from anthropocentricity. So too does liberalism. If Americans of the Great Depression saw poverty as a personal failure rather than a system failure, this was because they believed their circumstances expressed "an intention, a destiny, a purpose relating to themselves." If liberals by contrast see poverty as a systematic problem, this is because they have transcended the anthropocentric perspective. Having internalized the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, they stand above their everyday, embodied sense of themselves and so can distinguish between their ultimate identities and the contingent causal forces that have impinged on their circumstances. Liberalism is the political expression of the buffered identity, the medium through which this identity's structure is translated into moral and political argument.

Rawls denies that the Original Position carries anything like this meaning. Some have interpreted the Original Position as implying a metaphysical conception of the person according to which "the essential nature of persons is independent of and prior to their contingent attributes, including their final ends and attachments, and indeed their conception of the good and character as a whole." But Rawls disagrees:

> I believe this to be an illusion caused by not seeing the original position as a device of representation. The veil of ignorance, to mention one prominent feature of that position, has no specific metaphysical implications concerning the nature of the self; it does not imply that the self is ontologically prior to the facts about persons that the parties are excluded from knowing. We can, as it were, enter this position at any time simply by reasoning from principles of justice in accordance with the enumerated restrictions on information. When, in this way, we simulate being in the original position, our reasoning no more commits us to a particular metaphysical doctrine about the nature of the self than our acting a part in a play, say of Macbeth or Lady Macbeth, commits us to thinking that we are really a king or a queen engaged in a desperate struggle for political power…[122]

This seems persuasive on its face. But liberals can recognize that the harms and indignities of coerced religious oaths are not eliminated by the suggestion that the coerced party is always at liberty to withhold some inner mental assent from what they appear to be affirming, that they are no more required to actually believe the content of the oath than an actor is required to believe he is Macbeth. Liberals can recognize that the oath constitutes a form of self-betrayal and that this is

[122] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pg. 27.

not cured by labeling it a "device of representation." An oath may be a device of representation. But *using* that device is a human act that can violate the conscience.

For similar reasons, those who have not internalized the buffered identity will not be coaxed into adopting the Original Position. For this "device of representation" is the ultimate symbol of the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. And the conviction that resists this ethos is just as "real" as the convictions that have throughout history resisted coerced religious oaths. The buffered identity is very much a product of religion, after all. Nietzsche writes:

> I have discovered the arrogant theologian-instinct wherever anyone today feels himself to be an 'idealist' – wherever anyone assumes, by virtue of a higher origin, a right to cast strange and superior looks at actuality… Just like the priest, the idealist has all the great conceptions in his hand… he plays them out with a benevolent contempt against the 'understanding', the 'senses', honours', 'luxury', 'science', he sees these things as *beneath* him, as harmful and seductive forces above which 'the spirit' soars in pure self-sufficiency – as though humility, chastity, poverty, in a word *holiness*, had not hitherto done life unutterably more harm than any sort of frightfulness or vice whatever… Pure spirit is pure lie…[123]

Understood in the context of the mutation counter-narrative, Rawls's Original Position is a secularized and intellectualized iteration of this "arrogant theologian-instinct," just another way of casting "strange and superior looks at actuality." Liberals who embrace the Original Position may not have renounced honors or luxury in their personal lives. But they have effected a sublimated, intellectualized, and etherealized recapitulation of that renunciation in their embrace of liberal politics, which is one of the ways modernity has "built renunciation into everyday life," as Taylor says. In demanding that we look upon our everyday social identities detachedly, as a confluence of morally arbitrary causal forces, the Original Position asks that we be "in the world" but not "of it"—just as Religious Reform urged.

Lakoff charges that conservatism "imposes a form of asceticism" that is incompatible with a sophisticated understanding of social causality. But this sophisticated understanding also imposes a form of asceticism, the secularized asceticism of the buffered identity. This asceticism reaches, not only conduct, but also our basic sense of self. It is what enables us to rise above our default, "enfleshed" modes of human perception and recognize our personal attributes—like a "willingness to make an effort"—as assets with which we have been arbitrarily entrusted by forces lying "outside us." As we saw in Chapter Six, the difference between liberals and conservatives

[123] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Penguin Books, 1990), pgs. 131-32.

isn't that liberals reject the ascetic self-restraint celebrated by conservatives, but that they have internalized this asceticism all the more thoroughly. Whereas the asceticism of Strict Father morality pertains to one's desires, that of liberalism reaches our very consciousness, calling on us to disdain our own qualities as somehow "beneath" us, mere sensuousness that cannot be allowed to corrupt the higher reaches of awareness symbolized by the Original Position.

It is this theological inheritance that drives Bobos to engage in what Brooks calls "socially approved act of antistatus deviance," the practice of "mocking your own success in a manner that simultaneously displays your accomplishments and your ironic distance from them."[124] Whether this ironic distance is expressed politically through the Original Position or just socially, by sitting amidst success and affluence while affecting that these are mere happenstance, it is the expression of an aspiration toward spiritual transcendence of which liberal egalitarianism is one expression. It is this transcendence that allows one to see one's virtues as assets and others' vices as deficits thereof. Liberals may describe this transcendence as "objectivity" or "impartiality," but then they describe themselves in "innocently thin terms." For the mutation counter-narrative reveals this impartiality to be a spiritual stance, a drive to rise above the "peculiarly human emotions" in order to "soar in pure self-sufficiency," to attain a special self-possession that liberates our rational faculties from the contingency that imprisons the benighted.

This unacknowledged layer of social meaning explains why working-class conservatives will vote against their rational economic interests if only to defy the snobbery of the liberal elites. Peter Binzen's *Whitetown U.S.A.: A First-Hand study of How the "Silent Majority" Lives, Learns, Works, and Thinks*, is a sociological case study of the Philadelphia neighborhood of Kensington which, as related by Charles Murray, "portrayed a tightly knit, family oriented, hard-drinking, hardworking, hard-fighting blue-collar neighborhood that felt persecuted by the government and disdained by the elites." One source of the tension between community and government was Kensingtonians inordinate pride in their blighted community. To the exasperation of the social services establishment, they adopted a stoic stance toward their deprivations, treating them as givens rather than problems. "Kensingtonians are psychologically unable to face up to their social, cultural, and economic deprivation," explained one Philadelphia social worker: "Pride prevents

[124] David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), pg. 50.

them from taking advantage of social services. For them to accept these services might be to admit that they're not all they claim to be."[125]

Here as with feminism, liberalism cannot advance its agenda without announcing that some people are "not all they claim to be." This is why liberalism *provokes* conservative claims of cultural oppression. The hard-working, hard-drinking residents of Kensington could not accept public assistance because to have done so would have been to accede to the secularized asceticism of the buffered identity and therefore to surrender their own hero-system before that of the social service establishment. Believing in "an honest day's wage for an honest day's work," they understood their "willingness to make an effort" in an enfleshed rather than excarnated way, as a component of identity rather than the product of contingent causal forces. And so they could not enter the Original Position to recognize their entitlement to public assistance.

The ordinary American's self-respect must be undermined once ordinary virtues like hard work are conceptualized non-anthropocentrically, not as signifiers of metaphysical merit, but, as per Rawls, as assets with which individuals have been arbitrarily entrusted. Where we once had virtues and vices, we now have various adaptations to circumstance, causal forces whose operation does not redound to anyone's moral credit. The kind of identity that could claim moral credit has been replaced by the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. In imposing this ethos, liberalism begrudges ordinary Americans the dignity of their rugged stoicism before life's contingencies, the self-reliant spirit that would no more complain about unequal income distribution than the pioneers of the frontier period would have complained about a dust storm or a cold winter. Socio-economic theories of poverty may be more sophisticated than moralistic ones. But what separates the anointed and the benighted isn't sophistication and knowledge but hero-system and cosmological orientation. And it is only as the privileged carriers of the high heroism of the buffered identity that liberals can *afford* to devalue the everyday virtue of others, can afford their "strange and superior looks at actuality." The "snobbery" detected by Courter ultimately consists in this unearned privilege.

[125] Qt. in Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010* (New York: Crown Forum, 2012), pgs. 211-12.

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What Coulter decries as the liberal snobbery of embracing criminals is similarly explained. Nussbaum writes that jurors who are asked to respond to murderers with disgust are

> urged precisely *not* to have the thought, "there, but for… go I." But in reality, it seems likely that all human beings are capable of evil, and that many, if not most, of the hideous evildoers are warped by circumstances, both social and personal, which play a large role and sometimes decisive role in explaining the evil that they do. If jurors are led to think that evil is done by monsters who just were born different, are freaky and inhuman, they will be prevented from having thoughts about themselves and their own society that are highly pertinent, not only to the equal and principled application of the law, but also to the construction of a society in which less evil will exist.[126]

To think "there, but for… go I" is to see the criminal's present make-up, not as the primary phenomenon, but as the rationally comprehensible byproduct of circumstances which we have been privileged to avoid but must now take into account. The thought "there, but for… go I" is less compelling to conservatives, however. Sowell writes:

> [W]hen Chief Justice Earl Warren responded to indignant outcries against criminals by calling the people who make such outcries "self-righteous," he was making a statement whose validity depended on adopting the cosmic viewpoint. From such a viewpoint, particular individuals might turn out to be either criminals or law-abiding citizens as a result of innumerable influences resulting from the accidental circumstances into which they were born and which they chanced to encounter as they grew up: there but for the grace of God go I. However, if one is nowhere close to being either God or the cosmos, the question becomes: Now that criminals are what they are, for whatever reasons, how are we to deal with them and protect all other people. If it were oneself who was the criminal, the policy issue would be the same. The constrained options of the tragic vision permit no policies based on indulgences in cosmic questions—or cosmic dogmatism as to causation.[127]

Sowell criticizes the hubris with which the anointed presume to know a criminal defendant's just deserts on the basis of socio-economic causation, but the core of his disagreement with Nussbaum isn't empirical. On the contrary, he accepts her premise that social and personal contingencies shape whom we become. The crux of the disagreement isn't the facts, but how we should view them, how we should view *people*. K. Anthony Appiah observes that the "encumbered self, laden with all the specificity of its manifold allegiances, is not something we can, [as a rule] be bound to respect."[128] And whereas Nussbaum is urging us to view the criminal as something over and

[126] Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, pg. 167.
[127] Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), pg. 191.
[128] Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, pg. xv.

above the specificity of his manifold allegiances, Sowell is announcing that we are justified in looking upon him in just this way, as the encumbered flesh-and-blood individuals before us—regardless of how biology, environment, and chance have combined to shape him.

For Sowell, this stance reflects, not self-righteousness, or hiding from humanity, or a want of sociological sophistication, but rather the humility to recognize that the cosmic viewpoint is precluded to finite beings like us. What Sowell casts in epistemological terms—as a thesis about the limits of human knowledge—is on the level of cosmological orientation his opposition to the secularized asceticism of the buffered identity. If Sowell describes the "cosmic" or God's-eyed view as not just imprudent and impracticable but moreover as the vain self-indulgence of those who are "nowhere close to being either God or the cosmos," this is to signal his rejection of the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, whose hubris motivates the cosmic viewpoint.

Sowell is rejecting liberalism as a spiritual stance, liberalism as "arrogant theologian-instinct." To think "there but for the grace of God go I" is to embrace liberalism's secular-spiritual compression, to incorporate a God's-eyed view into secular affairs, and thus see the criminal as possessing a "soul" distinguishable from the earthly matter of its corrupted empirical embodiment. But from the perspective of relative pre-moderns resisting liberalism's secular-spiritual compression, this is to arrogate God's prerogatives in a vain attempt to step outside the human condition, to presume to see what only God can see. As with redistributive taxation, liberals are engaged in an empty pretense—"strange and superior looks at actuality"—attempting to rise above the contingency to which the rest of us are resigned as a given of our fallen state. If liberals will not take their criminals as they come—laden with the specificity of their manifold allegiances—this is once again a secularized iteration of the theologian's benevolent contempt for the senses, one more attempt to impose the liberal hero-system on those not sharing this contempt.

Coulter recounts the case of convicted murderer Jacob John Dougan, who as leader of the "Black Liberation Army" wanted to "indiscriminately kill white people and thus start a revolution." Having murdered an eighteen-year-old white hitchhiker, Dougan "then made a tape describing [the] murder in gruesome detail, which he mailed to the victim's mother and… the media," avowing that he "enjoyed every minute of it" and "loved watching the blood gush from his eyes." Yet Rosemary Barkett, Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court, voted to overturn his death sentence, arguing:

> [T]his killing was effectuated to focus attention on a chronic and pervasive illness of racial discrimination and of hurt, sorrow, and rejection. Throughout Dougan's life his resentment

> to bias and prejudice festered. His impatience for change, for understanding, for reconciliation matured to taking the illogical and drastic action of murder. His frustrations, his anger, and his obsession of injustice overcame reason. The victim was a symbolic representation of the class causing the perceived injustice.[129]

Offering as she is the picture of a liberal elite excusing black-on-white violence as compensation for historical racial grievances, Coulter seems engaged in backlash politics pure and simple. But backlash politics operates atop a struggle against the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity and its ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. Judge Barkett's argument was an affirmation of this ethos. She opined that Dugan's victim was a symbolic representation of racial injustice. But this very conceptualization is a symbolic representation of her liberal privilege, of a hero-system that aspires to rise above ordinary moral judgment by rising above the "peculiarly human emotions" elicited by Dugan's malevolence. She sees Dugan as he would be apart from his circumstances, recognizing his soul in its pristine, uncorrupted goodness. This is a religious stance, not sociological sophistication pure and simple. By contrast with Sowell, Nussbaum omits "for the grace of God," from her formulations. But this omission does not eliminate what the mutation counter-narrative reveals to be the sedimentation of the past in the present, the origins of the modern liberal identity in this aspiration to spiritual transcendence, which those resigned to the "peculiarly human emotions" are too modest to allow themselves.

It is easy to detect self-aggrandizing identitarian motivations in the retributivism of the conservative "model citizen." But conservatives detect an analogous identitarianism in "enlightened" opposition to retributivism. Judge Bazelon dismissed retributivism as a relic of our barbarian past, remarking that the "need to punish" is a "primitive urge" a "deep childish fear that with any reduction of punishment, multitudes would run amuck."[130] But if the conservative "need to punish" is a "primitive urge," then so too is liberals' "need to understand." For the latter originates in the aspiration to spiritual transcendence inhering in the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, which liberal "understanding" serves to impose, generating the same pragmatic contradiction as elsewhere. As with the question of economic redistribution, what liberals see as their superior cognizance of social causality is on the level of cosmological

[129] Coulter, *Godless*, pgs. 39-40.
[130] Thomas Sowell, *The Vision of the Anointed: Self-Congratulation as a Basis for Social Policy* (New York: Basic Books 1995), pg. 22.

orientation the incursion of one hero-system against another, not simply the elucidation of an idea but the imposition of a way of being.

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Though Nunberg complains that the social conscience of liberals has been unfairly caricatured as social pretension, these caricatures express conservatives' primordial Nietzschean intuition that "Pure spirit is pure lie," that liberalism's highest ideals embody origins that liberals cannot in their rationalism and "enlightenment" acknowledge. Nietzsche writes:

> The *other* idiosyncrasy of philosophers is no less perilous: it consists in mistaking the last for the first. They put that which comes at the end – unfortunately! for it ought not come at all! – the 'highest concepts', that is to say the most general, the emptiest concepts, the last fumes of evaporating reality, at the beginning *as* the beginning. It is again only the expression of their way of doing reverence: the higher must not be *allowed* to grow out of the lower, must not be *allowed* to have grown at all… Moral: everything of the first rank must be *causa sui*… All supreme values are of the first rank, all the supreme concepts – that which is, the unconditioned, the good, the true, the perfect – all that cannot have become, *must* therefore be *causa sui*.[131]

Whether the "supreme concept" be Rawls's Original Position or Nussbaum's "there, but for… go I," conservatives sense that they grew out of the pre-rational, pre-cognitive transformation of the overall human make-up chronicled by the mutation counter-narrative. Hence their refusal to recognize these concepts as "the good, the true, the perfect." What Nietzsche calls an idiosyncrasy of philosophers is also an idiosyncrasy of liberals. It is what blinds them to their supreme concepts' origins in the secularized asceticism imposed by the civilizing process, blinds them to how their rarefied ideals originate in something as primitive, unconscious, and animal as Elias's "retrained instinctual and affective impulses denied direct access to the motor apparatus." Being more viscerally naturalistic, conservatives are more attuned to human beings' nature as embodied organisms. And so they have a superior intuitive appreciation for these origins, which inevitably darken their opinions of liberals.

This attunement is why Ben Shapiro could, as we noted in Chapter One, accuse Obama of "bullying" a group of businesspeople when he admonished that they cannot claim sole credit for their accomplishments because they availed themselves of a social infrastructure which now imposes a reciprocal duty to promote the social good. Where liberals see simple facts and the

[131] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/Anit-Christ*, pg. 4.

common sense moral appeal of the Original Position, conservatives see meta-censoriousness, a sublimated, intellectualized, and etherealized variant of the badgering and scolding by which modern elites have always advanced their agendas. This is why they resent being "lectured to" by liberals, because the subtext of those lectures is always the imposition of a particular way of being. Where liberals discern supreme concepts, conservative claimants of cultural oppression are more strongly impressed by these concepts' *origins* in the civilizing process. And so they see in those concepts what Nietzsche calls "the last fumes of evaporating reality," or what Westen calls "cheap neural perfume." Hence their easy willingness to reduce liberal ideals to bullying, which is what their naturalistic processing of human motivation reveals to them.

Though "anti-intellectual" on some level, this reductionism remains meaningful as an articulation of the mutation counter-narrative. Coulter condemns liberals as people who "secure behind the guns of a civilian police force in a democratic society—and in many cases, doorman buildings, private security forces, bodyguards, and gated communities—make a sport of demanding that the guilty be set free."[132] Liberals may not actually avail themselves of these amenities more than anyone else. But what they *do* stand securely behind is the buffered distance, a civilizational identity for which the civilized amenities of doorman buildings and gated communities are being invoked as stand-in symbols. "Snobbery" is an imputation of social artifice that expresses the buffered identity's status as a historical artifice—as one historically constructed understanding of human agency among others.

This is not to suggest that no one who has not first internalized the buffered identity could ever support redistributive taxation or the rehabilitation of criminals. But it is to argue that any such support or its absence is a function of the hero-system in which the policy stakes are embedded, and that the embeddedness of liberal policies in the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity makes them anathema to many people, who viscerally experience that identity as "out of touch" with the ordinary American. Lasch observes that in celebrating individualism, social mobility, and self-realization, the liberals of the 1960s "defended the underdog in an upper-class accent."[133] This "accent" is the buffered distance and the reason why liberalism exudes a certain cultural foreignness to many people. As we saw with Cover, abstract rights are always

[132] Coulter, *Godless*, pg. 54.
[133] Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), pg. 36.

rooted in culture- specific designs of particularist meaning. And conservatives are opposing just such a design when they oppose redistributive taxation as elitist snobbery.

It might be objected that this is to over-intellectualize our politics, since the import of social policies is almost never articulated at this level of philosophical abstraction. However, this objection itself over-intellectualizes the realm of the intellect, eliding what the New Enlightenment reveals to be the intellect's fundamental continuity with more visceral levels of human experience, Bourdieu's "imperceptible cues of bodily *hexis*," where what later grow into philosophical abstractions are first *lived*.

These imperceptible cues are what provoke Kahane's warning to conservatives that they harbor no illusions about the nature of liberals, who are "Pride Incarnate, brimming at once with anger, resentment, and an overweening moral superiority based on nothing more than… [their] own inflated self-esteem."[134] Needless to say, these unflattering traits do not reveal themselves to liberals' introspection. Nor should they. The arrogance and condescension Kahane detects are not data of consciousness, but the logical corollaries of the buffered identity as *viewed from outside the social meanings that sustain it.* Conservatives' ad hominems refer, not to any hidden motivations, but to the buffered distance as seen from without, by those for whom "surrender to the prompting of the senses," to the brute givenness of things, is unproblematic—the brute givenness of Jacob John Dougan, for example, or the brute givenness of a "willingness to make an effort."

Liberals experience the decentering of lived experience of the buffered identity as a rational universalism that stands above bare "inclination," to use Kant's term. But those standing outside this identity must process this universalism as an egoistic pretense, an *ersatz* hero-system that refuses to acknowledge its own vacuity. Pride, anger, resentment, and overweening moral superiority based on bloated self-esteem are simply an alternative interpretation of the buffered identity's virtues. They are what remains of its sense of dignity, freedom, invulnerability, and control once it is positive ethical substance is denied—just as "animus" is what remains of traditional morality once its positive ethical substance is denied. Where conservative claimants of cultural oppression see snobbery, liberals see insight and empathy. These are not two competing

[134] David Kahane, *Rules for Radical Conservatives: Beat the Left at Its Own Game to Take Back America* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2010), pg. 155.

hypotheses one of which might be debunked, but rather two sides of the same coin, the same phenomenon as seen from different points along the civilizing process.

This realization should temper liberal indignation toward conservatives. If the guilt of Jacob John Dougan is mitigated by the fact that his victim was a symbolic representation of a legacy of racial injustice, then surely whatever irrationality can be imputed to conservative claims of cultural oppression is likewise mitigated by the fact that their targets are symbolic representations of the meta-equal protection problem, of liberal privilege. Liberals ask conservatives to think the thought "there but for the grace of God go I" when it comes to criminals. But they will not do so themselves when it comes to conservatives. And so they once again lend intellectualized, sublimated, and etherealized expression to the very sins they condemn in their adversaries.

5. A World of Victims, Villains, and Rescuers

Shelby Steele writes that racial preferences "implicitly mark whites with an exaggerated superiority just as they mark blacks with an exaggerated inferiority," reinforcing America's oldest racial myth and further stigmatizing the already stigmatized.[135] As we saw in Chapter Three, conservative claimants of cultural oppression charge liberals with a crypto-racism, accusing that what liberals present as their efforts to remedy racism or its legacy—like affirmative action and multiculturalism—are themselves continuations of that legacy, spreading new, subtler forms of racial stigmatization that liberals will not acknowledge. Liberals say their race consciousness is a temporary corrective that serves to redress the inherited inequality of a historically racist society. But conservatives believe that the kind of color-consciousness liberals defend isn't so readily distinguished from the kind they reproach as racist.

Liberals will dismiss these arguments as yet another conservative sleight-of-hand. For the inferiority presupposed by America's oldest racial myth and the "inferiority" presupposed by affirmative action, if such it be called, would seem like entirely different animals. There is a vast difference between acknowledging race in order to eliminate racism and doing so in order to perpetuate it. Affirmative action exists to redress socially instituted inequalities, not to accommodate allegedly biological ones. The conservative argument glibly abstracts color-

[135] Shelby Steele, *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era* (2006), pg. 120.

consciousness and color-blindness alike from the specific contexts in which they actually operate, eliding the range of factors that determine their varying moral and political meanings. Liberals understand these meanings, which dissolve the hypocrisy conservatives believe they detect in liberal race consciousness.

But Steele believes that the spuriousness of liberals' distinctions is illustrated by Maureen Dowd's critique of Justice Thomas's dissenting opinion in the Michigan case upholding the constitutionality of affirmative action. This was, Steele writes, "one of the most vile columns" he has ever seen in print.[136] Dowd had argued that Justice Thomas should be "grateful" for affirmative action rather than complaining about it. And so "thinking herself quite incapable of racism," she "effectively calls Justice Thomas a nigger who—given his fundamental inferiority—should show 'gratitude' to his white betters."[137] Dowd doubtlessly defended affirmative action as a measure to compensate for a socially produced inferiority, not to accommodate a genetic one. But in suggesting that *gratitude* was in order, she betrayed a subterranean racism lying underneath her official, sociologically sophisticated stance. Social justice pure and simple does not demand the gratitude in which Thomas was wanting, and so Dowd's judgment must have originated in something more nefarious, the conviction that blacks are fundamentally inferior and cannot compete on their merits.

Steele's argument follows logically from conservatives' less rationalistic, more naturalistic understanding of human agency. If conservatives blur or de-emphasize distinctions that are obvious to liberals, this is because they reject Old Enlightenment reason and feel that these distinctions speak to the "shallow part of our being," the part of our being that is easily put into words. This part of our being obscures the hidden costs of liberals' solicitude, which can culminate in a distinct form of racism originating in a layer of experience that liberal rationalism cannot acknowledge. Historical and sociological explanations for minority under-achievement are the result of intellectual, moral, and emotional self-discipline. But before rational reflection makes its appearance, the raw perception of inferiority as reinforced by affirmative action may provoke a reaction that is more reflexive, more primal, and so more compelling psychologically than the conclusions of rational reflection, which operates atop of something more primordial. Steele writes that "[h]owever this inferiority [of blacks] is explained—and it is easily enough explained

[136] Ibid., pg. 143.
[137] Ibid., pg. 147.

by the myriad deprivations that grew out of our oppression—it is still inferiority. There are explanations, and then there is the fact."[138] The fact carries a significance for us that is never fully dissolved by the explanations. Racial preferences can be defended philosophically without reference to inherent black inferiority. But these defenses may be powerless to eliminate the pre-theorized "nonexplicit engagement with the world" that seemingly altruistic forms of race consciousness will engender, in Dowd's case yielding the picture of black *need* and the *noblesse oblige* of a magnanimous white response to that need. Hence Thomas's ingratitude.

As a hero-system that misunderstands itself as the transcendence of all hero-systems, liberalism cannot recognize this layer of its own motivations, which is why liberals are stupefied by what strikes them as the glibness of the conservative argument. But what they see as conservatives' intellectual confusion is in fact the ultimate in sophistication, which discerns what liberal rationalism cannot. Liberals may trust their enhanced ACCs to detect and suppress whatever visceral racism color-consciousness might stimulate in the conservative amygdala. But the Dowd incident revealed that ACC to be less reliable than liberals think—something that is only "a few millimeters thick" as Westen says.

Sowell writes that the anointed inhabit a "world of victims, villains, and rescuers, with the anointed cast in the last and most heroic of these roles."[139] This enviable position is maintained by seizing on "particular beneficiary groups chosen to symbolize their moral stances," groups that serve as the "human mascots" with which the anointed can maintain their heroic posture.[140] With the mascots being the designated victims and the anointed being the rescuers, the villains are anyone who would question the demands levelled by the rescuers on behalf of the victims. Liberals adopt their moral stances in furtherance of a heroic narrative that places them at center stage and conscripts other groups as props of one kind or another: "The prime requisite for both mascots and targets is that they must distinguish the anointed from the benighted. Just as groups disdained by others become eligible to be mascots of the anointed, so groups respected by others are eligible to become targets."[141] The vision of the anointed thus "arbitrarily singles out some particular kind of individual or group to be made sacred and leaves others to be sacrificed on the altar of this

[138] Shelby Steele, *The Content of Our Character* (St. Martin's Press, 1990), pg. 116.
[139] Sowell, *The Vision of the Anointed*, pg. 249.
[140] Ibid., pg. 143.
[141] Ibid., pg. 168.

sacredness."[142] The anointed display what Jean-Francois Revel calls "a pitiless ferocity toward some" and "a boundless indulgence toward others."[143]

This combination of ferocity and indulgence is another outgrowth of liberalism's pragmatic contradiction, the way its universalism is underwritten by a hero-system. Though liberals seek to uplift the downtrodden, they do so as part and parcel of a heroic narrative that assigns them a privileged role for which others bear the cost. This cost was paid by Justice Thomas, who like all designated victims can enjoy the beneficence of the anointed and their victim/villain/rescuer narrative only inasmuch as he acknowledges that narrative and the anointed's status within it as rescuers. In opposing affirmative action, Thomas denied that narrative and status, and so he became exposed to the racial prejudice from which liberal blacks are shielded. Thomas should have showed gratitude to his white betters because he was undeserving. And he was undeserving because he rejected liberalism. This is what elicited the pitiless ferocity of a Maureen Dowd. The anointed haven't eliminated the racism in their hearts but merely circumscribed it in accordance with a hero-system. All conservatives oppose affirmative action. But only black conservatives threaten the political identities of those who promote affirmative action. And so they must be discredited at any price, including the price of racism.

It is a recurring theme of conservative claims of cultural oppression that liberals have simply politicized all the ancient bigotries they would associate with conservatives. The individualities of blacks, women, and gays are no longer submerged in the collective as defined by traditional stereotypes, but they are submerged in the collective as defined by the expectation that these groups ally themselves with the Left. And all the old prejudices will rear their ugly heads when these expectations are defied. Michelle Malkin writes that "[e]very minority conservative in public life has stories of being tarred as an 'Oreo,' 'coconut,' or 'banana' (black/brown/yellow on the outside, white on the inside)."[144] And likewise with conservative women. They are, Gallagher says, disdained by liberals as "mouthy women."[145] Coulter observes that Democrats "reserve unfathomable venom, often coupled with physical violence, for conservative women."[146] Like Thomas, conservative women refuse the liberal narrative.

[142] Ibid., pg. 209.
[143] Ibid., pg. 151.
[144] Michelle Malkin, *Unhinged: Exposing Liberals Gone Wild* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2005), pg. 113.
[145] Mike Gallagher, *50 Things Liberals Love to Hate* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2012), pg. 64.
[146] Ann Coulter, *Demonic: How the Liberal Mob Is Endangering America* (New York: Crown Forum, 2011), pg. 290.

Consequently, they become exposed to the sexism from which liberal women are shielded. Victims who refuse their roles as victims deprive liberals of their roles as rescuers. And so they must be punished, slated as among the worst of villains—oreos, coconuts, and bananas—traitors who no longer deserve the protection of liberal principles. Being the playing out of a hero-system, liberal political morality is always "thicker" in its practical application than it is in its theoretical self-conception. Liberals' commitment to equality is necessarily vitiated by the inequality that is intrinsic to the buffered distance, which limits the extent to which their principles may be extended to conservatives, relics of a benighted past lacking the full agency powers that would qualify them for equal respect.

D'Souza is discerning this thickness when he argues that the affirmative action policies once used at the University of California were particularly objectionable for their discriminatory impact on high-achieving Asian applicants, who were often sidelined despite their impressive credentials in order to make room for the lower-achieving minorities favored by affirmative action. This preferential treatment, ostensibly meant to help minorities, "appeared to be hurting a minority group which could scarcely be blamed for the past injuries and deprivations inflicted on indigenous American minorities, such as blacks."[147] Indeed, many Asians like the Vietnamese boat people had themselves suffered significant deprivations.[148] D'Souza believes this contradiction is traceable to Asians' cultural conservatism, which does not serve the Left's ideologized conception of diversity:

> Berkeley's Asian American students contribute to this visual diversity. Yet in another sense they stand in sharp contrast to the mood of languorous abandon. Most of them are impeccably groomed, conservative in dress, moderate in manner. They were not to be seen among the group cheering the man from San Quentin. In a subtle yet unmistakable way, the Asian American demeanor is a challenge to the ethos of the 1960s. Asians do not satisfy an understanding of diversity that requires unconventional attire, involvement in assorted causes, and a general identification with the counterculture. In this sense, they remain outsiders at Berkeley.[149]

Conservatives are accused of seizing on Asian Americans as the "model minority" that highlights the alleged deficiencies of other minorities. But D'Souza's target isn't so much other minorities as the very self-understanding of liberalism. If affirmative action is implemented in a way that

[147] Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: The Free, 1991), pg. 29.
[148] Ibid., pg. 33.
[149] Ibid., pg. 32.

contradicts the principles by which it is defended, this is because those principles subserve a hero-system. Affirmative action can be defended in terms of politically non-sectarian principles—rectification of historical injustice, compensation for unfair deprivations. But the case of the Asians illustrates how the full implications of those principles will be ignored when they run afoul of liberals' actual commitments. Asians' historical innocence as villains and frequent suffering as victims are ignored because their cultural conservatism is incompatible with liberalism's victim/villain/rescuer narrative. If Asians will not see themselves as victims, then liberals cannot see themselves as rescuers. And if liberals cannot see themselves as rescuers, then the moral calculus that liberals would otherwise apply becomes suspended.

Whereas politically conservative blacks and women have earned the wrath of liberals, culturally conservative Asians only incur their indifference. But the underlying logic is the same, the logic of a hero-system. Both cases illustrate that liberals' anti-racist universalism is inflected by the buffered distance, which guides the universalism's concrete application. Only inasmuch as minorities repudiate a benighted past of political or cultural conservatism can they qualify as the objects of liberals' special solicitude.

This isn't empty psychologism, but a corollary of the New Enlightenment. As we saw in the last chapter, Lakoff believes that the victim/villain/hero dramatic structure is a neurological universal. The contents can change, but the form is a political constant. And this engenders symmetries that liberals fail to recognize. If conservatives' Strict Father morality requires them to designate some people as evil Others against which to assert "Moral Order," then liberals have an equally powerful psychological *need* to designate some people as social victims requiring *their* particular brand of nurturance, and to derivatively designate all who oppose these efforts as villains. If conservatives have various open "slots" for new "bigoted clauses," then liberals have open slots for new "nurturing clauses" and the ideologies that rationalize them. The vice of conservatives is scapegoating, but the vice of liberals is reverse-scapegoating. If conservatives single out certain groups to saddle with responsibility for society's ills, then liberals single out certain groups as repositories of special moral capital. In doing so, they create scapegoats-by-default, which is anyone who opposes these judgments. Liberals are blind to these tendencies because they remained mired in the Old Enlightenment, which obscures liberalism's nature as a synaptically encoded hero-system driven to maintain the social meanings that sustain it, even at the cost of truth itself.

Conservatives could not have hoped for a starker illustration of these dynamics than the Duke lacrosse scandal, when a group of Duke University lacrosse players were accused of raping a black stripper, Crystal Mangum, after she was hired to perform at a party, pillorying her with racial epithets in the process. The case was problematic from the outset, however, given that Mangum had changed her story multiple times, at one point accusing a player who was provably absent from the scene. But with an overzealous district attorney having withheld exculpatory DNA evidence, the players lived with the charges hanging over their heads for a full year before being completely exonerated. The district attorney was later disbarred for his misconduct.[150]

What most interested conservatives, however, wasn't the unethical behavior of the district attorney, but the reactions of Duke faculty and other liberals who, rather than extending a presumption of innocence, seized on the incident as an illustration of rampant racism and sexism. Many faculty, observes David Horowitz, depicted the students as modern-day heir of white slave masters and lynch mobs, and some called for their expulsion, as the specific question of their guilt or innocence became subordinated to an ideological agenda for which the players served as symbols. One professor raged against the evils of "while, male, athletic privilege" while another denounced the Duke administration for the "abhorrent sexual assault, verbal racial violence, and drunken white male privilege loosed amongst us," sneering at the "timorous piety and sentimental legalism" of those counseling restraint.[151] Another professor confessed that the story resonated with her own personal experience: "I distinctly remember a crushing sense of vulnerability and dread when I interacted with some white males on campus. Although many were the model of respectable genial behavior on the surface, I often sensed a crewing hostility beneath the surface. When I first heard the allegations in this case I wept because it felt like someone had finally revealed the unspoken anxiety I so often felt."[152] No apologies were offered once it became clear that the story had been fabricated and that the players were innocent.

Here was an unusual confluence of events that seemed to confirm what conservatives had all along suspected. And this is that the white male is, as Goldberg says, "the Jew of liberal fascism," a scapegoat onto which all the manifold evil of the world may be projected. The issue was never whether the players were guilty of the crime, because they were from the beginning

[150] David Horowitz and Jacob Laskin, *One-Party Classroom: How Radical Professors at America's Top Colleges Indoctrinate Students and Undermine Our Democracy* (New York: Crown Forum, 2009), pg. 13.
[151] Ibid., pgs. 15-18.
[152] Coulter, *Demonic*, pgs. 71-72.

seen as repositories of a general depravity that exists apart from their specific conduct. As an original sin that offered surety for all the specific accusations, this depravity meant that the charges against the players would symbolize the truth even if they didn't accurately represent it. This was what the players' exoneration finally exposed.

The Duke incident was a delicious, egg-on-your-face rebuke to the Left's cognitive elitism, exposing the moralistic and identitarian subtext of what had been sold as an enlightened struggle against prejudice. Liberals could not accuse conservatives of exploiting the incident for ideological mileage, given that it was they who first saw fit to endow it with a vast symbolic significance—which simply turned out to be different than expected. Liberals were revealed as no less self-indulgent in their groupthink or willingness to vilify than the ordinary American they despise. Their humanitarianism was exposed as the veneer for a victim/villain/rescuer narrative that sacrifices truth at the altar of identitarian hostility. Though one professor detected "crewing hostility" underneath the genial surface of white male students, the crewing hostility turned out to be underneath the surface of the anointed themselves. They uphold the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, but the incident revealed this as the deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry thereof. Liberals' sociological sophistication is permeated by a moral hierarchy of identities against whose backdrop the specific conduct of individuals is interpreted.

This is, once again, because liberalism is a hero-system rather than the transcendence of all hero-systems. The Duke incident revealed that liberals no less than conservatives inhabit a public order "in which everyone lives," and size up others according to their role in either upholding or undermining it. Liberals would see themselves as self-possessed, disengaged subjects operating in a symbolically neutral environment. But they are no less than conservatives embodied organisms that are neurologically dependent on forms of symbolic sustenance more specific and circumscribed than is acknowledged by their articulated political morality. An abstract egalitarianism cannot sustain liberals' identities as the carriers of the buffered distance. And so that egalitarianism must be quietly "filled out" with a richer, more moralistic teleology, the "culture-specific designs of particularist meaning" that underwrite liberal universalism while also causing it to "misfire," as happened at Duke.

The mother of one of the accused players wanted to make a conciliatory gesture and emailed one of the professors involved in the campaign against the players. Acknowledging that "[o]ur paths may have been different, but I am sure all of us seek truth and justice," she requested

that he now step forth to acknowledge the players' innocence. The professor refused and instead accused:

> LIES! You are just a provocateur on a happy New Years [*sic*] Eve trying to get credit for a scummy bunch of white males. You know you are in search of sympathy for young white guys who beat up a gay man in Georgetown, get drunk in Durham, and lived like "a bunch of farm animals" near campus… umhappy [*sic*] new year to you… and forgive me if your [*sic*] really are, quite sadly, mother of a "farm animal."[153]

The accused students were not only white males, but also athletes participating in a violent sport who were furthermore given to bouts of debauchery. As such, they were symbolically anathema to the properly ordered sociability of the buffered identity. Just like "farm animals," they were still wallowing in the "squalor and coarseness" from which that sociability extricates us, liable to the wild affective oscillations in opposition to which the buffered identity is defined. This was why they would not "get credit" from the professor despite their exoneration, because their overall disposition and temperament resist the civilizing process. The ostensible issues were race and sex, but this resistance was lurking in the background, generating the "negative animal-pole magnetism" that shaped the Duke professoriate's impressions of the accused players.

Liberals mistake their ideals for an irreducible, primordial phenomenon when these have in fact grown out of the lower, as Nietzsche would say, grown out of the pre-cognitive changes in the overall human make-up chronicled by the mutation counter-narrative. What purport to be enlightened attitudes are not primordial phenomenon, but rather reinterpretations and reconfigurations of the historically inherited impulses that narrative identifies. For this reason, the concrete application of liberal principles can never wholly escape liberalism's origins in the civilizing process and the production of a historically contingent identity. These origins may sometimes recede in relation to their outgrowths in liberal theory. But they remain incorporated into that theory's application. Under the right conditions, they will obtrude to the fore, inflecting liberal humanitarianism with extra-humanitarian imperatives, exposing the pragmatic contradiction that was always lurking underneath.

D'Souza is detecting this pragmatic contradiction when he argues that what liberals mistake for the lingering effects of historic racism is a new phenomenon of their own making. The conventional wisdom is that racial bigotry is a cultural constant that once operated openly, in the style of Bull Connor, but has since been forced underground, expressing itself only subtly and

[153] Horowitz and Laskin, *One-Party Classroom*, pg. 22.

obliquely in dog-whistle defiance of new anti-racist norms. Any resurgence of racism, then, "must reflect a relaxation of the strict moral and societal curbs that alone inhibit the visceral bigotry of white Americans."[154] It follows from this diagnosis that campus racial incidents should erupt most frequently in the Deep South, where historical racism is most deep-seated.

But surprisingly, they have been more common at Northern Universities, especially in the liberal Northeast.[155] The explanation, D'Souza proffers, is that Northern students are outraged at finding themselves on the racism suspect lists of inquisitorial academic radicals at the same time as they see under-qualified minorities receiving preferential treatment in admissions and onward, in compensation for injuries for which they do not feel responsible. The cumulative result is a "new bigotry" born of experience rather than ignorance. These students lose their sympathy for minorities and "feel they occupy the high ground, while everyone else is performing pirouettes and somersaults to avoid the obvious."[156] But with these perceptions being taboo in liberal-dominated college settings, the resentment is forced to fester underground until the dam bursts and students react with rude and crude counter-attacks on the victims' revolution, as happened when Dartmouth conservatives sacked anti-apartheid shanties on campus in 1986.[157] Such incidents will predictably be cited as further evidence of entrenched racism. But they are in fact outcomes that liberalism has itself ordained.

D'Souza does not argue that these students were the wholly innocent victims of politically correct tyranny. But he does suggest that, to the extent they were villains, this is because the politically correct culture had *inducted* them into that role. The victim/villain/rescuer narrative not only designates villains, it also *creates* them, generating conditions under which conservative political views are transmuted into a visceral rage that bears a superficial resemblance to the old racism even though it comes from a different place. The rescuers, to be rescuers, need villains as much as they need victims and will, to this end, design symbolic environments that produce them. By suffocating conservatives in an atmosphere of unremitting political correctness, liberalism provokes the irrational hostilities that can then be cited to justify this atmosphere. Whereas liberals allege that conservatives remain surreptitiously racist, conservatives insist that they are being culturally oppressed by the Left's victim/villain/rescuer narratives. And these are but two sides of

[154] D'Souza, *Illiberal Education*, pg. 126.
[155] Ibid., pg. 126.
[156] Ibid., pgs. 240-41.
[157] Ibid., pg. 19.

the same coin, because liberalism thrives by *re-channeling resentment that was originally directed at the victim/villain/rescuer narrative itself toward the victims*, thereby conscripting the narrative's opponents into its service.

This may sound hopelessly conspiratorial. But liberals have no difficulty believing that bellicose neoconservatives will seek to *make* new foreign enemies for America to replace those which history has eliminated and, in the process, generate the very dangers of which they warned. D'Souza's intuition is that an analogous dynamic transpires on the Left. This is not a conspiracy, but something that follows from a post-epistemological interpretation of the New Enlightenment. Ideology isn't just a set of beliefs about how the world works or should work, but the organismic *project* of engendering the conditions under which a hero-system can flourish. This means creating victims and villains where none offer themselves voluntarily. Liberals oppose racism, not only as an unfair impediment to other people's strategic action, but also to dramatize their hero-system. And so they *require* the existence of racism or some racism-analogue as a target. They do not so see themselves, of course. But consciousness intent isn't dispositive under the New Enlightenment. The issue isn't self-conscious cynicism but, as Nietzsche says, a "subtlety of discernment higher than all reason," a basic drive to maintain the social conditions for a hero-system. Conservative claims of cultural oppression a reaction to just this.

6. Female Grade-School Teachers from Brown or Swarthmore

Sommers observes that progressive educators now dismiss traditional character education as "moralizing" and "indoctrination" and insist it is "inappropriate for a teacher to encourage students, however subtly or indirectly, to adopt the values of the teacher or the community.[158] These traditional approaches are condemned as attempts to turn children into obedient workers beguiled by an unjust order where wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of the few, just as the Pledge of Allegiance is likened to fascist oaths to the fatherland.[159] Traditional education does not "build character." It numbs the mind and crushes the spirit. And it is the task of progressive educators to tear away the veils of illusion with which traditional education has always weighed down the young.

[158] Christina Hoff Sommers, *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism is Harming Our Young Men* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2000), pg. 193.
[159] Ibid., pg. 203.

But Sommers argues that progressivism has not yielded the individual autonomy it promises. For the moral education of yesteryear has simply been replaced by the new conformism of therapism, which is even more oppressive. Though promoted in the name of the child's personal development, the new dispensation is "far more invasive of the child's privacy and far more insidious in its effects on the child's autonomy than the directive moral education that was once the norm in every school."[160] Conservatives believe that "progressive education" is merely the vehicle through which impressionable minds are inducted into the liberal dispensation under the deceptive veneer of tolerance, open-mindedness, critical thinking, and other ostensibly benign values. As we saw earlier, Goldberg warns that "[t]he quintessential liberal fascist isn't an SS storm trooper" but rather "a female grade-school teacher with an education degree from Brown or Swarthmore." And David Limbaugh warns parents that the National Education Association hopes to transform schools into "ethics clinics whose purpose is to provide individualized psycho-social treatment for the student" and where "teachers must become psycho-social therapists"[161] How indoctrinating, conservatives ask, is the daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance or the Boy Scout Oath, or even the display of the Ten Commandments for that matter, by comparison with the individualized psycho-social treatment envisioned by progressive educators? Here as elsewhere, conservative claimants of cultural oppression see symmetry where liberals see asymmetry. Their moral traditionalism has simply been replaced by a new regime that conceals itself in the benign mantle of therapeutic professionalism all the while molding youth to its own specifications. If moral traditionalism seems more authoritarian, this is owing to the social prestige of the liberal dispensation, and not the actual psychodynamics.

Liberals will disagree, naturally. Progressive educators may acknowledge that they attempt to inculcate specific values, but they also insist that these are hardly sectarian or coercive. Lakoff explains that the evils targeted by Nurturant Parent morality are "lack of social responsibility, selfishness, self-righteousness, narrow-mindedness, inability to experience pleasure, aesthetic insensitivity, lack of curiosity, uncommunicativeness, dishonesty, insensitivity to feelings, inconsiderateness, uncooperativeness, meanness, self-centeredness, and lack of self-respect."[162] Nurturant parent morality seems more ecumenical—less "directive" as Sommers says—than the

[160] Ibid., pg. 212.
[161] David Limbaugh, *Persecution: How Liberals Are Waging War Against Christianity* (HarperCollins, 2004), pg. 86.
[162] Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, pg. 127.

moralistic character education endorsed by conservatives. There is a real difference between excoriating homosexuality and excoriating "narrow-mindedness." Conservatives are thus mistaken to see symmetry. Students given a progressive education are being sensitized, not to some supra-personal "Moral Order" with its illusory hierarchies, but to the concrete "experiential" realities around them, which anchor progressive values in bona fide human flourishing. Liberals will naturally oppose those who reject these priorities. And conservatives can elect to call this "meta-censoriousness." But here as elsewhere, this term of derision does not eliminate the real differences between liberal and conservative moralities. Conservative moralism upholds God, Country, and Family. But the liberal virtues consist in meta-values whose appeal does not presuppose these parochial allegiances, and it is these meta-values that justify the "meta-censoriousness."

However, conservatives suspect that it is precisely by way of this amorphous, all-purpose benevolence that Nurturant Parent morality invites endless manipulativeness and intrusiveness cloaked in the mantle of respect for the individual's highest potentialities. Indeed, this respect is merely another tool with which the anointed badger and scold the benighted, a cudgel used to subtly underscore the deficiencies of those who have not attained liberalism's higher consciousness. Just when will someone have displayed a morally adequate level of curiosity? How broad-minded must we be and with respect to what? Anyone can always be found lacking on these fronts, as falling short of the "high standards" that liberals in their optimism urge upon us. The ecumenical open-endedness of liberal values just means that they can always be implemented according to parochial imperatives. Having been disguised in lofty abstractions like "awareness" or "sensitivity", they need never be openly announced, and so can never be checked.

* * *

As we will now see, the authoritarianism that conservatives detect in progressive education is liberalism's attempt to inculcate the properly ordered sociability of the buffered identity under the banner of liberation and awareness, in the "innocently thin terms" that conceal the true scope of the transformative agenda that we have again and again observed at work. This agenda is why one religious conservative could complain that the values clarification education which purports to liberate student to explore their own values actually "threatens to imprison" them "within walls

of egoistic subjectivity, to drown them in a flood of feeling."[163] As with all conservative claims of cultural oppression, this apprehension reflects conservatives' under-theorized understanding of the mutation counter-narrative. The buffered identity cannot be reduced to mere "egoistic subjectivity." But the charge that students are being imprisoned in its "walls" bespeaks conservatives' intuitive sense that progressive educators are imposing that identity on students' default porousness. That wall is their buffering against their "pre-modern" impulses, against the "teleological libertinism" that offends the disengaged innerness of the buffered self.

Liberals will insist that values clarification programs inculcate critical thinking, not specific beliefs. But the buffered identity isn't a set of beliefs that might be inculcated to the exclusion of others, but rather a structure of reflexivity—a *way* of believing and of being. Hence David Limbaugh's worries that the meditation exercises now being taught to schoolchildren are "mind-altering techniques" that send "a subtle message that children can find an ultimate source of wisdom (and goodness) within themselves." Children are being told that "[j]ust by tapping on that inner reservoir, they'll automatically begin to behave better and achieve greater fulfillment."[164] Limbaugh frames his objections within the epistemological framework forced upon him by the dominant dispensation—as concerning a "subtle message." But that subtlety actually consists in the fact that these techniques are *generating* the "inner reservoir," inculcating the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity as an antidote to the pre-modern impulses. The "subtle message" discerned by Limbaugh is subtle precisely because it is being cultivated at the level of "nonexplicit engagement with the world," the level of cosmological orientation, precisely the layer of human experience that liberal rationalism cannot acknowledge. Unable to see this, liberals also cannot see the coercion they are exerting through it.

Hofstadter relates that the N.E.A. Proceedings of 1900 announced that rather than "trying to fit the boy into the system," the goal of education would now be "to adjust the system to the boy."[165] Adjusting the system to the boy seems less authoritarian than adjusting the boy to the system. But whereas adjusting the boy to the system doesn't presume intimate knowledge of the boy, but only of the system, adjusting the system to the boy imputes the educator with precisely

[163] Qt. in James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), pg. 205.
[164] Limbaugh, *Persecution*, pg. 80.
[165] Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, pg. 364.

this knowledge and thus invites a presumptuousness and intrusiveness unknown under the former ostensibly more authoritarian dispensation, which imposed many rules but was less keen to tamper with consciousness. The former dispensation sought to *restrict* subjectivity. The new one seeks to *shape* it.

This imperiousness is now ensconced in the benevolent solicitude of therapism. But it is betrayed by the original *non-secular* categories with which progressive educators first announced their mission. Hofstadter observes that the N.E.A. believed a child's relationship to his teacher should mirror Lazarus's relationship to Christ. Just like Christ, the teacher would release the child "from shrouds and deathly sacraments," thereby "turning him loose to grow."[166] Today's teacher-therapists may no longer aspire to a Christ-like role. But Goldberg's female grade-school teachers from Brown or Swarthmore arrogate the same prerogatives when they presume to rescue their students from blindness, insensitivity, and narrowness—our modern-day secularized iterations of *sin*. The religious lingo is no longer in vogue, not because we have become more secular, but because the religious has become *compressed* into the secular, where it works itself out therapeutically whenever the anointed prod the benighted to "grow." With their under-theorized understanding of the mutation counter-narrative, conservatives sense intuitively that this growth is less open-minded and open-ended than liberals ask them to believe.

Limbaugh notes that children are now taught about religion by being asked to reenact Islamic rituals like praying to Allah. The purpose of these "Islam simulation materials" isn't to teach about the tenets of Islam, which is unobjectionable, but to force students "to pretend they were Muslims, praying in the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful, and to chant 'praise to Allah, Lord of Creation.'"[167] The progressive will respond that the purpose of the simulations isn't to proselytize students to any particular creed but, on the contrary, to broaden their horizons, to help them "step out of their own shoes" as it were, and thus develop the virtues of tolerance, openness to change, and so forth. Immersion in Islam is only a means to this end. But this is to describe the exercises in innocently thin terms. For the reflectiveness being urged upon these students is *structured,* inflected by particular ideals that outstrip the official pedagogical agenda. The exercises may aim to inculcate openness rather than Islam. But this is because they aim to transform religion into an expressive need, and thereby instill the well-adjusted expressive

[166] Ibid., pg. 364.
[167] Limbaugh, *Persecution*, pgs. 76, 83.

moderation of the buffered identity. These exercises aim to transform faith into civility, into the new faith of civility. Contra Limbaugh, the goal isn't to proselytize Christians to Islam. But it is to transform Christians into "individuals" who happen to entertain a particular "conception of the good" and therefore do not *live* that conception.

What conservatives decry as the invasiveness of progressive education is unintelligible on the subtraction account, within which progressive values liberate human nature from the illusions and confining horizons of a benighted past. But on the mutation counter-narrative, that liberation is also the inculcation of a particular affective-instinctual structure that upends human agency's default setting. Progressive educators believe they are inculcating "awareness," which seems like a "neutral" ideal. But this ideal refers, not to any abstract, culturally-denuded "openness"—whatever this could mean—but to the buffered distance. To be "aware" is to be aware *of* one's distance from a barbarian past of less fortunate peoples, to be aware of the spiritual and secular as compressed into one another, and therefore to endorse the tastes, values, and habits that advertise this compression—like the Bobo ethos. "Awareness" isn't only a stance toward the world, but also a stance *toward oneself*, a commitment to the disciplines and repressions of buffered identity and its properly ordered sociability. If progressive educators cannot recognize this imposition, this is because the buffered identity has, *in their case*, receded into the invisible, taken-for granted background of things, as it hasn't for conservatives.

Sommers relates the story of an "equity educator" who inculcated the virtues of sex-role reversal in her students throughout the school year and was then astonished that they should have on their own initiative elected to swap sex-roles in their traditional end-of-the-year class play. What she mistook for their initiative was of course the predictable effect of the indoctrination she had been meting out over the entire year. "Such self-deception," writes Sommers "is common among equity educators." It "never seems to occur to them that they are tampering with children's individuality or intruding on their privacy."[168]

If Sommers's equity educator could have so thoroughly deceived herself here, this is because her indoctrination proceeded *under the auspices of the subtraction account.* This allowed her to interpret her "tampering" as a benign effort to expose students to alternative perspectives and thus overthrow the confining horizons that impede their autonomous self-development. But she and other progressive educators overlook that they are providing, not only "new perspectives,"

[168] Sommers, *The War Against Boys*, pg. 78.

but also forms of *training*, the purpose of which is to discipline students away from the "peculiarly human emotions"—in this case, the quasi-teleological notion that gender is a manifestation of sex. What the equity educator held out as mere consciousness-raising was underwritten by an aspiration to spiritual purity that sets itself against just such thoughts, as we already saw in Chapter Four. Understanding themselves through the epistemological framework, liberals define "indoctrination" as the coercion of specific avowals. And since they refrain from such coercion, they do not see themselves as engaged in indoctrination. But the "silent curriculum" of liberalism is, as Macedo observes, gentle, proceeding not through direct force but by fostering an atmosphere in which liberal attitudes seem natural and inevitable, built into the structure of human reflexivity as the unspoken background of all subsequent theorizing. Such is precisely what could be expected of a hero-system that disguises itself as the transcendence of all hero-systems.

* * *

Students can recognize right-wing moralism for what it is and either accept or resist it. But no such defenses are available against the solicitude of the NEA's psycho-social therapists who seek, not to instill discrete, identifiable convictions like love of country or the work ethic, but to commune with the child as a whole in the name of endlessly malleable concepts like self-awareness or the human potential. The strictness of Strict Father morality means that morality is definable and identifiable, a mere coefficient of adversity that can be opposed. By contrast, liberal nurturance engenders a situation where the agent can no longer distinguish his will from the external forces that act upon it. To oppose these is now to oppose open-mindedness, awareness, sensitivity, curiosity, and so on—everything that makes one a fully realized human agent. Whereas transgressions against conservatives' "Moral Order" will be labeled just that, transgressions against liberal civility will be *internalized*, cast, not as a conflict *between* individual and society, but as a deficiency *within* the individual that compromises his human functioning, placing him outside the buffered distance as a mass of unruly impulses yet to be reformed.

Alan Kors reports that Northwestern University hired "Self-Evaluation Consultants" to facilitate its New Student Week in 1989. There, the consultants admonished incoming freshmen that while they were not to blame for the "customs and habits of thought" they inherited from their parents and communities, they must now remake their lives, ridding themselves of "the ugliness,

the meanness… [the] narrowness and [the] tribalism."[169] Similarly at Montclair State University, residential advisors attending sensitivity training were issued a "permission slip" granting them permission to be "imperfect with regards to homophobia and heterosexism." Given the homophobic/heterosexist culture in which they were raised, their ignorance and bias were excusable so long as they were "struggling to change my false/inaccurate beliefs or oppressive attitudes [and] learning what I can do to make a difference."[170]

The forbearance extended by these diversity trainers is fully consistent with the vision of the anointed. As we observed with Sowell, this vision holds that the benighted must be afforded an opportunity "to be made 'aware,' to have their 'consciousness raised,'" in the "wistful hope" that they will "grow." Whereas traditional moralism can condemn moral failure without circumlocution, the anointed's claims to sociological sophistication require them to condemn moral failure circuitously *qua* cognitive failure. The elites' hero-system is predicated on their insight into a social causality to which others are oblivious. So they cannot hold the benighted responsible for their prejudices in any straightforward causal sense, and can only demand that the benighted assume responsibility for their condition by becoming "aware."

But this call for awareness is moralistic in its own way. As Sowell also observes, those who resist the guidance of the anointed must have their "mean-spiritedness" fought and their real motivations exposed. Consistently with this, Kors reports that students in these sensitivity trainings who step forward to confess their bigoted impulses are adulated for their courage and newfound enlightenment, while those who do not are condemned as fascists and racists deserving punishment.[171] One might think that any refusal to struggle and overcome one's moral failings would be just as excusable as the original failings, since both are equally products of unchosen social forces which the elites alone have recognized. Yet it is not excused. And therein lies another of liberalism's pragmatic contradictions.

The Left charges opponents of homosexuality with "homophobia," thereby medicalizing their worldviews as the pathology of those given to "bare animus." But it does not then indulge homophobes with the clinical detachment that is appropriate to, say, agoraphobes. The clinical detachment will be intimated at the outset—e.g., the diversity trainers' permission slips. But it is

[169] Alan Charles Kors and Harvey A. Silvergate, *The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's Campuses* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1999), pg. 221.
[170] Ibid., pg. 229.
[171] Ibid., pg. 215.

soon enough revoked and replaced by moralistic intensity, revealing itself as the deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry of the dispassionate objectivity it advertises. And this is because the clinical detachment is ultimately an expression of the buffered identity, of a hero-system whose moral compass is shaped by the specific social meanings that sustain it. The question isn't whether students are causally responsible for their homophobia, but whether they uphold the naturalistic worldview within which the discourse of homophobia makes sense. Only those who uphold this naturalism (by acknowledging their homophobic socializations) will be extended the forbearance it logically entails for everyone. Once again, the buffered identity cannot take its naturalism to its logical conclusion. Once again, the reason is that liberal naturalism is permeated by the moralism of an original spiritual vision. It is this moralism that is being unleashed against those who resist the naturalism, who refuse to see themselves as products of the irrational social forces that liberals have in their superior awareness brought to their attention.

Meta-censorious is not, as Dalrymple suggests, a mere redirection of traditional censoriousness onto novel targets, but, as would be expected on the mutation counter-narrative, the sublimation, intellectualization, and etherealization of that original censoriousness. Having compressed their moralism into their naturalism, liberals blur the line between cognitive demands and moral ones. This gives liberals' censoriousness a special power. Those who defy the moralism of the right will be condemned for sinful arrogance. But those who defy the moralism of the Left will find themselves stripped of basic cognitive competence, rendered helpless before the admonitions of liberals. What is one to say before those who promote, not some set of substantive moral dogmas, but "awareness" as such, who judge one's opinions, not as right or wrong, or even sinful or upright, but as aware or unaware? Meta-censoriousness is, as Sartre would say, a look that cannot be looked at, a disembodied superciliousness that, being "sublimely confident," as Goldberg says, presents its engagement as disengagement and so assaults through its very detachment. This passive-aggressiveness is not the hypocrisy of individual liberals, but the logical outcome of a hero-system that disguises itself as the transcendence of all hero-systems.

The censoriousness of the Right is a comparatively primitive technology, a hard stone wall that can in principle be resisted. By contrast, the meta-censoriousness of liberals is a more sophisticated instrument, a pool of quicksand into which one sinks deeper and deeper with every protestation. Meta-censoriousness is a self-fulfilling prophesy because liberals' claims to higher consciousness provokes the very hostility that then vindicates those claims socially. Conservatives

who resent liberalism's disciplinary impulses are driven further and further into the reactionary positions that would appear to justify those impulses, turning themselves into the very caricatures with which liberals would tar them. Here as elsewhere, liberalism creates its own truth by creating the social conditions under which its presumptions are validated. The censoriousness of the Right is capable of no such insidiousness.

Chapter Nine

The Secular Counter-Church of Liberalism

The traditional conservative attack on "judicial activism" argues that enumerated constitutional protections of individual freedoms reflect America's particular historical experience at the founding and the wisdom it furnished. Liberal courts stand accused of disregarding this wisdom and experience by construing what are really specific protections against specific governmental usurpations as imperfect instantiations of abstract moral ideals like autonomy and equality, whose philosophical implications must now be extrapolated by the judiciary. In this way, liberal judges insert their personal values into the Constitution, inventing new rights and principles that would have been philosophically and culturally foreign to those who framed and ratified the Constitution, as well as to contemporary majorities, who have not elected to amend the Constitution legislatively as the liberal activist judge now amends it judicially.

However, this complaint assumes a different flavor when advanced as a conservative claim of cultural oppression. In this context, the liberal judge is accused of ignoring the original understanding of the Constitution, not simply to satisfy his personal philosophical leanings, but to propagate a parochial cultural vision. "Judicial activism" is undemocratic, not only in substituting the will of a few judges for that of the majority, but also in entrenching the parochial cultural sensibilities of one social class, the liberal elites, at the expense of the voiceless ordinary American. Bork writes that the Supreme Court's "pronouncements are significantly guided not by the historical meaning of the Constitution but by the values of the class that is dominant in the culture."[1] Having become colonized by the "parochial morality of an arrogant intellectual class,"[2] the courts surreptitiously elevate a particularistic cultural ethos into a hegemonic narrative about the meaning of American ideals, all under the guise of thoughtfulness, enlightenment, progress, and so forth. Much as *Lochner* era jurisprudence reflected the economic interests of the then-dominant capitalist class, so contemporary liberal jurisprudence reflects the cultural interests of the now-dominant verbal class, the anointed or liberal elites.

[1] Robert H. Bork, *Slouching toward Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (New York: Regan Books, 1996), pg. 149.
[2] Ibid., pg. 321.

We have already examined these suspicions in several contexts. There was, for example, Justice Scalia's charge that *Romer v. Evans* reflected "Templar" sensibilities—the "law-school view of what 'prejudices' must be stamped out." As we also saw, Justice Scalia believed that the Court's decision in *U.S. v Virginia* requiring the Virginia Military Institute to admit women evinced hostility to "manly honor." There was also Greenberg's critique of *Texas v. Johnson*, upholding flag-burning as constitutionally protected speech, which he argued reflected "an isolating intellectualism cut off from a sense of reverence, and so from the historical memory and heroic imagination that determines the fate of any nation." In all these cases, the underlying intuition is that what liberals hold out as detached ratiocination gives disguised expression to something more primitive and visceral, the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. The Court was upholding, not only abstract ideals, but also a concrete understanding of human agency, of the "overall human make-up" as Elias would say. And this explains why the pivotal issues were conceptualized as they were.

I will now continue this line of analysis by examining the role played by the concept of religious neutrality in the Supreme Court's Establishment Clause jurisprudence. Goldberg, we saw in Chapter Three, alleges that a secularist group like People for the American Way "serves as a tireless mason in the construction of the wall between church and state, shrinking the public space for traditional religion and building the foundations of a secular counter-church of liberalism." As we also saw, conservatives believe this because they conceive of the "secular," not as a neutral sphere wherein religious questions are benignly put out of play, but rather as religion's *competitor*. The secular is a kind of religion in its own right, albeit a covert one. And so what liberals call religious neutrality is just an ideological vehicle through which to impose their secular counter-religion.

On the other hand, liberals scoff at such arguments as disingenuous and contrived, dismissing them as ideological rationalizations for religious conservatives' theocratic impulses, which are advanced under the pretense of resistance to a secular liberal counter-religion. Religious conservatives would accuse liberals of surreptitious sectarianism, arguing that they promote some covert secular analogue of religious faith. But as secular liberals see, it, the real ploy lies in this very accusation, which is a ruse by which religious conservatives advance their surreptitious imperiousness. Seeking to foist their personal theological preferences on the wider society, religious conservatives must find a way to put the real advocates of religious neutrality on the

defensive, at which point they can be called upon to compensate fundamentalists for some imaginary injury to their faith. *This* is why they dismiss liberal neutrality as bogus.

If my argument thus far is correct, then this controversy too can be understood as a clash of cosmological orientations. What liberals understand as religious neutrality is an expression of the buffered identity as understood from within the subtraction account of modernity and secularity, just as conservatives' sense that this neutrality is fraudulent expresses the agency structure of porous selves with their under-theorized understanding of the mutation counter-narrative. If conservatives see anti-religious hostility where liberals see religious neutrality, this is because the hostility transpires at the level of nonexplicit engagement with the world, not in any official pronouncements, but in the ordinarily hidden and disavowed layers of social meaning that liberal neutrality quietly evokes. The "blind spots" of liberals must, in this case as in the others, originate in their failure to take their naturalism to its logical conclusion, where it reveals a clash of physiologically embodied hero-systems. This is what reveals the normatively relevant symmetries between liberalism and what liberals see as conservative authoritarianism—between what secular liberals call religious neutrality and what they judge to be the incipiently theocratic agenda of those rejecting that neutrality. As we will now see, the intractability that has always plagued the religious neutrality problem is the result, not of personal obstinacy nor of intellectual complexity, but of a clash of cosmological orientations, which is what the arguments express conceptually.

I will introduce our problem in Sections One and Two by showing how the religious neutrality controversy has been marked by a recurring logical structure that can be discovered across a range of seemingly discrete controversies, such as school prayer, public religious displays, and textbook content. Specifically, we will seek to understand just why conservative complaints about the fraudulence of liberal neutrality have always struck liberals as transparently disingenuous gambits to procure special advantages for religion under the cover of equal respect. Beginning in Section Three, I will explain how this liberal incredulity is problematized by the mutation counter-narrative. Here as elsewhere, conservative claims of cultural oppression are not contrived, because the meaning of religious neutrality will be processed differently according to where one stands along the modern/pre-modern continuum. The upshot, we will see, is that there is no religiously neutral vantage point on religious neutrality because what qualifies as religious

neutrality is a function of cosmological orientation, which the mutation counter-narrative reveals to be a fundamentally religious in nature.

1. Truly to be Neutral

In its 1962 *Engele v. Vitale* decision, the Supreme Court held unconstitutional a New York school district's policy of requiring students to commence the school day by reciting a prayer composed by the state's Board of Regents. It went "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers and our country. Amen."[3] Only a year later, the Court's decision in *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp*, the Court made clear that the constitutional problem went beyond the state-composed status of that prayer. It would now hold unconstitutional two laws requiring that public schools initiate the school day with religious exercises, including a recital of the Lord's Prayer and the reading of Bible verses, without comment, by teachers or select students. Both schools excused students from the exercises upon their parents' written request. Nevertheless, the Court concluded that the Constitution strictly prohibited state actions whose purpose or effect was "to aid or oppose, to advance or retard" religion, and aiding and advancing religion was precisely what these exercises were doing. With respect to religion, "the State is firmly committed to a position of neutrality."[4]

Writing as the lone dissenter, Justice Stewart objected that the Court's reasoning swept too broadly, because the constitutionality of the exercises at issue depended on the way they were implemented, as to which the record was incomplete. "[R]eligious exercises are not constitutionally invalid," he argued, "if they simply reflect differences which exist in the society from which the school draws its pupils."[5] There would be no constitutional problem if these exercises were offered as merely one of several alternative activities in which students could choose to participate.[6] Prayer would then be like an elective course rather than part of the core curriculum. The state would only be recognizing already extant religious sentiments, not inculcating new ones. With other non-religious activities being available to students, the state would not be corralling them into the exercises, and so would not be displaying unconstitutional

[3] *Engele v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421, 422 (U.S. 1962).
[4] *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 226 (U.S. 1963)
[5] Ibid., pgs. 317-18 (Stewart, J., dissenting).
[6] Ibid., pg. 318 (Stewart, J., dissenting).

favoritism toward religion. The state does not endorse baseball when it offers students the choice of playing baseball, basketball, or football. Why then, Justice Stewart's question seems to be, is it endorsing religion when it lets students choose between praying and some secular alternative? To institute prayer thusly would be to support religion only in the constitutionally unobjectionable sense of "the withholding of state hostility." School sponsored prayer would be "a simple acknowledgment on the part of secular authorities that the Constitution does not require extirpation of all expression of religious belief."[7]

This was to imply that the Court was itself complicit in promoting this extirpation. And indeed, Justice Stewart suggested that it was recreating the very problem it was supposedly redressing:

> For a compulsory state educational system so structures a child's life that if religious exercises are held to be an impermissible activity in schools, religion is placed at an artificial and state-created disadvantage. Viewed in this light, permission of such exercises for those who want them is necessary if the schools are truly to be neutral in the matter of religion. And a refusal to permit religious exercises thus is seen, not as the realization of state neutrality, but rather as the establishment of a religion of secularism, or at the least, as government support of the beliefs of those who think that religious exercises should be conducted only in private.[8]

This may sound temperate and level-headed. But Justice Stewart's essential logic—that to ignore religion is already to oppose it—strikes liberals as outrageous. In the case of people, the sense that inattention alone bespeaks positive hostility often indicates inflated narcissism. Yet in the case of religion, Justice Stewart asks us to accept precisely this principle and furthermore idealizes it as true neutrality. But this, it seems to liberals, is already to be less than neutral toward religion. The majority readily acknowledged that establishing a "religion of secularism" would be unconstitutional. But this, it held, would have to involve "affirmatively opposing or showing hostility to religion."[9] And how can the mere cessation of school-sponsored prayer constitute affirmative opposition or hostility? The Court wasn't requiring teachers to begin the school day by questioning the existence of God or reciting the hypocrisies of institutional religion, but merely that they refrain from inviting their students to pray. The Court was commanding nothing other than silence with respect to religion. And silence, a non-occurrence, doesn't count as affirmative opposition to anything. How can there be affirmative hostility toward religion when there is no

[7] Ibid., pg. 318 (Stewart, J., dissenting).
[8] Ibid., pg. 313 (Stewart, J., dissenting).
[9] Ibid., pg. 225.

act through which this hostility could be expressed? These points are not complicated. Why then, liberals wonder, are so many conservatives either unwilling or unable to accept them?

Though not himself a conservative or school prayer advocate, Stephen Carter articulates the core of the conservative intuition:

> After all, if the knowledge that many of one's classmates are praying during the moment of silence produces pressure to pray… then surely the knowledge that many of one's classmates are *not* praying as the school day opens will produce pressure *not* to pray. There is, in short, no neutral position.[10]

But of course, students are *not* doing, and know each other *not* to be doing, a whole gamut of things during the school day, from riding their bicycles to playing video games to ordering pizza. Yet we would not say that the school is impliedly denigrating these activities merely by declining to sponsor them. They have been judged "out of place" and nothing more. Why, then, are religious conservatives unprepared to accept that nothing more nefarious is being implied about religion? Why should the "not" carry a different significance in the religion context? The law of the excluded middle cannot make conservatives' case for them, because the question is why indifference to religion should be so readily interpreted as covert hostility.

Justice Stewart sees himself as issuing a modest plea for some minimal acknowledgment of religion's importance in the lives of students. But he does not explain how a principle that equates inaction with hostility admits of any limitation. His argument is that public schools "structure" the lives of students in a way that transmutes what might have been indifference into hostility. But he does not explain how exactly this is possible. Could atheistic parents not also complain that the school day "structures" their children's lives to the point that the state must assist in the atheistic upbringing of their children through voluntary readings of Richard Dawkins if it is "truly to be neutral in the matter of religion"? Yet atheists restrain themselves from making such demands. Is it too much to ask that religious believers follow suit?

Rejecting the suggestion that public schools could eliminate the problem of religious sectarianism by eliminating all religious instruction, New York's Bishop Hughes argued in 1840 that

> To make an infidel, what is it necessary to do? Cage him up in a room, give him a secular education from the age of five years to twenty-one, and I ask you what will he come out,

[10] Stephen L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), pg. 191.

> if not an infidel?... They say that their instruction is not sectarianism: but it is; and of what kind? The sectarianism of infidelity in its every feature.[11]

Justice Stewart is concerned to avert a "religion of secularism" rather than a "sectarianism of infidelity." But are these not two words for the same thing, liberals ask? Whereas Bishop Hughes could express his theological prejudices without inhibition, today's religious conservatives must disguise these in worries about secularist hegemony. But the disguise seems rather thin. As Bishop Hughes's argument reveals, the extent to which educational regimentation artificially impedes religious practice cannot be assessed without reference to the religious practices allegedly being impeded. To go down this path, then, is to begin translating theology into law, however the argument is couched. For this reason, liberals feel they can concede nothing to religious conservatives. What assurance do they have, liberals ask, that these conservatives will not, having received the finger, not then ask for the whole hand? If Justice Stewart doesn't *want* neutrality, then that is of course another matter. But then he should be straightforward about it, rather than disguising his attempt to privilege religion in claims about what is required for the state to be "truly to be neutral in the matter of religion."

The dynamics of *Schempp* anticipated a pattern that would recur again and again in subsequent Establishment Clause cases. The charge that judicial decisions and other state actions that purport to be religiously neutral or indifferent carry an unacknowledged anti-religious or counter-religious subtext would be repeated many times in later years, usually in the dissenting opinions of conservative justices outraged at the obtuseness of their liberal colleagues.

In *Lee v. Weisman*, for example, the Supreme Court held unconstitutional a non-sectarian middle school graduation benediction on the grounds that it is psychologically coercive to the adolescents in attendance. None were required to participate. But given adolescents' well-known susceptibility to peer pressure, the coercion was genuine. Dissenting, Justice Scalia objected that that this one-sided concern for the plaintiff's feelings ignored the essential nature of religion:

> The reader has been told much in this case about the personal interest of Mr. Weisman and his daughter, and very little about the personal interests on the other side. They are not inconsequential. Church and state would not be such a difficult subject if religion were, as the Court apparently thinks it to be, some purely personal avocation that can be indulged entirely in secret, like pornography, in the privacy of one's room. For most believers it is not that, and has never been. Religious men and women of almost all denominations have felt it necessary to acknowledge and beseech the blessing of God as a people, and not just

[11] Qt in Stephen Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), pg. 69.

> as individuals, because they believe in the "protection of divine Providence," as the Declaration of Independence put it, not just for individuals but for societies….[12]

As we saw in the last chapter, Sowell charges that the vision of the anointed "arbitrarily singles out some particular kind of individual or group to be made sacred and leaves others to be sacrificed on the altar of this sacredness." And Justice Scalia is suggesting that the Court was exhibiting precisely this tendency. It could have attached such importance to the potential psychological coercion of one student while ignoring the consequences of this solicitude for the other affected parties only because it first cast religion as a purely private affair. It is this false picture, Justice Scalia suggests, that permitted the Court to artificially simplify the stakes, to misrepresent a zero-sum game as a non-zero-sum game and so conceal the true costs of its decision. The Court could claim non-hostility toward religion only by first doing violence to its nature, relegating it to the status of pornography. This understanding of what religion *is* hardly counts as neutral, yet liberals refuse to recognize their sleight-of-hand.

But liberals dismiss this as an exercise in obfuscation. Justice Scalia accuses the Court of relegating religion to the status of pornography, but his argument equivocates between the legal and spatial senses of the public/private distinction. That public schools may not sponsor graduation prayers does not in any way condemn religious believers to undertake their activities in solitude, or even away from the public eye. It is a basic axiom of the First Amendment that religious groups may use public space on the same terms as non-religious ones.[13] Like Justice Stewart in *Schempp*, Justice Scalia will reach for any argument in his zeal to cast a mere failure to favor as an act of aggression.

This is not a principle the courts could take to its logical conclusion. Justice Stewart describes a "refusal to permit religious exercises" as the establishment of a religion of secularism. But it would follow that school districts should be constitutionally *required* to sponsor some form of elective religious activity, without which a secular counter-religion will have been established. If this "refusal" qualifies as hostility toward religion when issued by the Supreme Court, then should it not signify the same when issued by local school boards? Yet few conservative jurists will go this far. And their unwillingness to take their rhetoric to its logical conclusion indicates to liberals that talk of a "religion of secularism" and the "extirpation of all expression of religious

[12] *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577, 645 (U.S. 1992) (Scalia, J., dissenting).
[13] *Good News Club v. Milford Central School*, 533 U.S. 98 (U.S. 2001).

belief" is a ruse that conservatives themselves do not truly believe. This rhetoric isn't a principled challenge to some misapplication of the neutrality principle, but a last-ditch effort to sabotage the principle as such.

Of course, someone like Justice Scalia also rejects religious neutrality as a constitutional principle, dismissing neutrality as between religion and non-religion—as opposed to neutrality between religions—as an illegitimate judicial artifice uprooted from longstanding constitutional traditions. But while conservative claimants of cultural oppression do indeed make this argument, they are not satisfied letting their case rest there, and furthermore insist that *ostensibly descriptive claims concerning what qualifies as hostility toward religion express normative commitments, like that very hostility, that will not be openly acknowledged*. The problem isn't that liberal jurists ignore longstanding traditions allowing a measure of religious favoritism, but that they have in repudiating these traditions replaced that favoritism, not with neutrality, but with hostility operating under the cover of neutrality. In this way do the liberal elites vent their broader cultural aversion toward religion, employing disavowed layers of social meaning to denigrate religion with plausible deniability. For liberals, however, this invisible message is a figment of the conservative imagination, all of whose arguments simply fall flat.

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Justice Stewart was invoking the "religion of secularism" in a fairly loose, ill-defined sense, simply to suggest that secularism can become as hegemonic or intolerant as traditional religion has sometimes been. But the notion of a secular religiosity was more fully elaborated in the lower courts, where plaintiffs, and in one case a federal district judge, have argued that school curriculums were covertly advancing a secular counter-religion, often labeled "secular humanism," with the aim of undermining traditional theism. In *Smith v. Board of Commissioners of Mobile County*, a group of citizens intervened in an ongoing school prayer case to ask that any injunction against school prayer also prohibit ideologically slanted textbooks promoting "the religions of secularism, humanism, evolution, materialism, agnosticism, atheism and others."[14] The school's curriculum, they argued, "unconstitutionally advanced the religion of humanism,

[14] *Smith v. Board of School Commissioners of Mobile County*, 655 F. Supp 939, 942 (S.D. Ala. 1987).

unconstitutionally inhibited Christianity, [and] systematically excluded history of the contributions of Christianity to the American way of life"[15]

District Judge Hand accepted the argument. After his initial ruling that the Supreme Court erred in applying the Establishment Clause to the states was overturned by the Court of Appeals, he turned to the new duties which had now been thrust upon him:

> The religions of atheism, materialism, agnosticism, communism and socialism have escaped the scrutiny of the courts throughout the years, and make no mistake these are to the believers religions; they are ardently adhered to and quantitatively advanced in the teachings and literature that is presented to the fertile minds of the students in the various school systems. If the courts are to involve themselves in the proscription of religious activities in the schools, then it appears to this Court that we are going to have to involve ourselves in a whole host of areas, such as censoring, that we have heretofore ignored or overlooked.[16]

Faced with no choice but to apply the Establishment Clause to the states, Judge Hand turned the principle of religious neutrality back against its secular defenders. After what appears to have been an extended examination of the nature of religion, secular humanism's origins in the philosophy of John Dewey, and how that philosophy insinuated itself into the educational system, Judge Hand issued an injunction, later vacated on appeal, proscribing the classroom use of forty-four home economics and history textbooks, which he held were unconstitutionally advancing the religion of secular humanism. This was a creed that, as an expert explained, "holds that we have no reason to believe in a creator, that the world is self existing, that there is no transcendent power at work in the world" and, correlatively, that "we should not turn to traditional religion for wisdom" but instead "develop a new ethics and a new method of moral order founded upon the teachings of modern naturalism and physical science."[17] In its attempt to hijack the prestige of natural science for its own ends, secular humanism had taken science beyond its proper bounds as a specialized mode of inquiry, elevating it into a comprehensive worldview that is hostile to theism. The recurring message of the textbooks was the secular humanist "faith assumption" that "self-actualization is the goal of every human being, that man has no supernatural attributes or component, that there are only temporal and physical consequences for man's actions, and that these results, alone, determine the morality of an action."[18]

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[15] Ibid., pg. 946.
[16] Qtd. in *Smith v. Board of School Commissioners of Mobile County*, 827 F.2d 684, 688 (11th Cir. Ala. 1987).
[17] *Smith v. Board of School Commissioners of Mobile County*, 655 F. Supp 939, 961 (S.D. Ala. 1987).
[18] Ibid., pgs. 986-67.

None of the contested textbooks expressly endorsed secular humanism or its alleged tenets. But Judge Hand believed these tenets were logically implicit in many textbook passages. While the "faith assumptions" of some religious systems are "stated outright," they can also "be implied from less fundamental beliefs."[19] And Judge Hand was unprepared to permit the religion of secular humanism to escape constitutional scrutiny merely because it left it to students to articulate what was already being implied. Thus, the problem with the history textbooks wasn't anything actually said about religion but precisely what was left unsaid. Likening these texts' treatment of religion to the suppression of black history, one plaintiff complained that they "leave out all meaningful discussion of the part that Christianity and Judaism have played in the history of the United States."[20] To the extent religion was acknowledged at all, it was "generally represented as a private matter, only influencing American public life at some extraordinary moments"—precisely the view that "humanists have been seeking to instill for fifty years."[21] This wasn't just bad history; it was "ideological promotion."[22] The texts did not expressly declare religion to be irrelevant. But all the unjustified omissions were calculated to encourage this conclusion. The history curriculum didn't directly denigrate religion. But it was, as Justice Stewart would say, "so structured" as to do this tacitly at the unspoken level of social meanings.

The religion of secular humanism operates, not through direct denunciation of traditional religion, but surreptitiously and obliquely, through conspicuous omissions, unacknowledged double-standards, and unarticulated implications. This religion had been established *by insinuation*, under the cover of plausible deniability. One home economics textbook, for example, advised students that "[p]rofessional help includes psychologists, psychiatrist, social workers, counselors, and others who are trained in helping people deal with small and large problems," but did not similarly mention the availability of ministers, rabbis, and priests.[23] Did this omission not implicitly relegate religious worldview to second-class status? Why else the difference in treatment? Religious counseling did not have to be favored, but should it not at least have been mentioned? Liberals will say that the passage had nothing to do with religion one way or the other. But just as the Left insists that racism is embedded in policies that do not facially respect race, so

[19] Ibid., pg. 979.
[20] Ibid., pg. 947.
[21] Ibid., pg. 985.
[22] Ibid., pg. 985.
[23] Ibid., pg. 1000.

conservatives insist that secular humanism can make itself felt through practices that do not facially touch on religion, but nevertheless imply a judgment about it. This is how secular humanism insinuated itself in to the American consciousness, chipping away at traditional values quietly and incrementally until it became the unnoticed taken-for-granted background of things.

An expert witness detected the same quiet denigration of religious faith in a textbook discussion of practical ethics:

> The teaching that it is wrong to tell a lie because it results in the disapprobation of your fellow-man, leaves out many an example of how a theist might make this same moral decision. It implies that it is no longer a sin to tell a lie, and this is the advancement of the humanistic approach to morals which are man centered.[24]

Judge Hand agreed and held that while the Constitution allows public schools to instruct children that lying is wrong, it also requires that any discussion of the principle's justification be religiously even-handed, which the textbook with their one-sided man-centered outlook were not. To defend truth-telling in strictly utilitarian terms—e.g., by warning students that lying will cost them friends—is to emphasize this-worldly or man-centered rationales to the implied disparagement of other-worldly or God-centered ones. And this is to place the state's imprimatur of approval on secular humanism to the exclusion of theistic perspectives. A logic that Justice Stewart applied to the school day as a whole, Judge Hand applied to the minutiae of its curricular content, once again raising a question about when an omission qualifies as an affirmative judgment concerning the thing omitted.

Judge Hand also saw secular humanist orthodoxy in a textbook passage advising students that thoughtful decision-making requires you to "[k]now yourself, accept yourself and believe in yourself, [to] establish a sound self-concept and learn to deal with your strengths and your weaknesses."[25] Innocuous though this sounds, an expert witness objected:

> …this statement is fine if one is a secular humanist and has that as one's religious faith. It is not fine if one is a traditional religious Jew or a believing Christian, who believes that we can prepare ourselves to make right decisions by being conformed to the mind of Jesus Christ for the Christian, or to the Torah for the Jew. It is a totally different framework. And again, the offense is that the state is indoctrinating a captive or semi-captive student audience in one religious position, and excluding others.[26]

[24] Ibid., pg. 973.
[25] Ibid., pg. 973.
[26] Ibid., pg. 973.

In promoting one's self-concept as the foundation of proper decision-making, the texts were insinuating the exclusion of other such foundation, denigrating Jesus Christ and the Torah as appropriate moral compasses. A "sound self-concept" wasn't held out as one source of moral guidance among others, but as the exclusive framework for moral decision-making. And this was to promote a secular humanist orthodoxy, to create conditions under which secular categories will seem obvious and religion will become alien or irrelevant.

The *Smith* defendants argued that "secular humanism is nothing more than a convenient label that attaches to opinions and facts that do not comport with religious world views."[27] Secular humanists may indeed be out there, but their possible agreement with the textbook passages did not automatically transform these into religious affirmations. Indeed, Judge Hand conceded that "[m]ere coincidence between a statement in a textbook and a religious belief is not an establishment of religion."[28] Such a standard would quickly disable the state in most of its functions, which is why Judge Hand agreed with the Supreme Court in *McGowan v. Maryland* that the state may prohibit homicide despite the fact that "this agrees with the dictates of the Judaeo-Christian religions while it may disagree with others."[29]

However, Judge Hand insisted that a coincidence of position will run afoul of the Establishment Clause when that position involves "faith assumptions" concerning 1) the existence of a supernatural and/or transcendent reality, 2) the nature of man, 3) the ultimate end or purpose of man's existence, individually and collectively, and 4) the purpose and nature of the universe.[30] Since these are the basic questions to which religion attempts an answer, to adopt an answer is to have adopted a religious stance for Establishment Clause purposes.

This is why secular humanism constitutes a religion. As one expert witness explained, secular humanists have no less than traditional believers "immanentized the eschaton." Echoing the widespread conservative belief that the Left misdirects other-worldly religious passions toward this-worldly objects, he observed that whereas "Christians immanentize symbols of transcendence by claiming that one enters upon immortality through perfection in grace in death, secularists immanentize this by bringing the issue down to this world." Secular humanists pursue, not

[27] Ibid., pg. 948.
[28] Ibid., pg. 987.
[29] *Smith v. Board of School Commissioners of Mobile County*, 827 F.2d 684, 691-92 (11th Cir. Ala. 1987) (quoting *McGowan v. Maryland*, 366 U.S. 420, 442 (1961))
[30] *Smith v. Board of School Commissioners of Mobile County*, 655 F. Supp 939, 979 (S.D. Ala. 1987).

"salvation through grace in death," but the "perfection of society here in this world"—for example, in the Marxist dream of "changelessness here on earth, in a condition of perfect equality."[31] Secular humanism is comparable to traditional theism because both represent competing answers to the same question—how to immanentize the eschaton—just as theism and atheism represent competing answers to the same question of whether God exists. The constitutional upshot, it seems, is that the religiously neutral state must, beyond keeping out of public debates about the existence of God, also treat alternative ways of immanentizing the eschaton with equal respect. This means giving theistic immanentizations equal time with "man centered," secular ones, which the textbooks failed to do. Religious neutrality as understood by the plaintiffs and Judge Hand was neutrality between the City of Man and the City of God, neutrality between purely immanent values and transcendent ones.

This neutrality was therefore violated when the contested passages located the source of ultimate value in human agency rather than God's agency. The plaintiffs objected to a passage telling students:

> When you were very young, you probably accepted all of your family's values without question. As people grow, see more of life, and learn to think on their own, they may choose other values. However, changing a set of values may bring conflict to your life. For example, you may decide that the ideals your friends have will not make you happy. Someday you may be faced with putting your ideals before theirs. Only you can judge your own values.[32]

The plaintiffs were predictably upset that this incitement to moral autonomy would interfere with the religious upbringing of their children. But beyond this and more interestingly, they also objected to the suggestion that young children will unselfconsciously absorb their families' values. Adopting no position as to the relative merits of religious and secular upbringings, this merely descriptive claim might seem religiously indifferent, a mere truism of developmental psychology without normative implications. The plaintiffs disagreed, however, and argued:

> The Christian "values" of which the Websters are convinced are not of their own making. In that sense they are not "our values" but God's. For the Websters to pass them on to their children, therefore, is hardly the self-centered act the authors' rhetoric implies. The very possibility of an enduring our – "our family, -- our love for one another, -- our Christian home, -- our personhood" -- is predicated on the fact that the Websters have not created themselves. What has truly created them is their acceptance of Christ as their Savior. Says Mrs. Webster, "Jesus is Lord of our lives, and His standard is our standard."[33]

[31] Ibid., pgs. 968-69.
[32] Ibid., pg. 1002.
[33] Ibid., pg. 992.

As they saw it, the Websters were simply acquainting their children with how things are, as does any responsible parent, and not attempting to shape them according to some narrow mold, as the passage was suggesting. The textbook cast these values' transmission as the family's effort to influence their children religiously, an egocentric effort to impose its preferred values upon impressionable minds. But for the Websters, it was God, not they, who was doing the religious influencing. They themselves only supported this process by protecting their children against whatever distractions or wrong turns might impede it. Their children's values not being the work of their own hands, they would not take the credit that the textbook was giving them and indeed insisted that giving it was unconstitutional. Secular humanism wasn't expressly endorsed. But it was implicit in the social psychology that the textbooks did endorse, presupposed by what purported to be neutral descriptive categories.

Like Justice Stewart, the plaintiffs avowed that they were merely demanding a level playing field for religion. The Websters explained that they would not have been "quite so alarmed" had there been a "free-market competition between rival conceptions of truth in the public school," as "[o]ne set of firmly-held convictions might be balanced by another."[34] The objection wasn't that secular humanist views were being discussed, but that they were being introduced as official orthodoxy or taken-for-granted truth rather than as one viewpoint among others. This was what happened when the textbooks simply assumed that the Websters' values were "our values" rather than God's values, without leaving it to students to decide this for themselves.

Dr. Paul Kurtz, an expert witness and a secular humanist, testified that secular humanism promoted precisely the free-market of ideas that the Websters claimed to believe in. They interpreted secular humanism as a set of tenets adversarial to theism. But this was a category error. Secular humanism is defined, not by any narrow creed, but by a self-critical, questioning attitude toward all things. While secular humanists "do attempt to educate," they are not zealous proselytizers, for the "very basis of secular humanism is criticism and doubt even about one's own view."[35] Judge Hand was unpersuaded, however, and instead noted the hypocrisy of secular humanists, who inveigh against blind faith while retaining their own blind faith that "as they lack

[34] Ibid., pg. 993.
[35] Ibid., pg. 964.

certitude, so must everyone."[36] Secular humanists would instill doubt and skepticism in others. But the one thing they will not question is their own skeptical disposition and desire to inculcate it. And so they would burden traditional religious believers with an obligation they are unprepared to assume themselves. They identify neutrality with skepticism or agnosticism, but true neutrality is neutrality *between* faith and skepticism or agnosticism. Judge Hand therefore detected "a little bit of Animal Farm," in the neutrality of secular humanists, for whom "[a]ll animals are equal, but some are more equal than others."[37]

This wasn't necessarily the calculated outcome of a backroom conspiracy, however. Just as critical race theorists warn that we may fail to recognize our own racism, so conservative claims of cultural oppression warn that we may fail to recognize our own secular humanism and anti-religious hostility, which is too pervasive or deep-seated to be recognized as such. Thus, Judge Hand acknowledged that many educators do not believe they have been influenced by John Dewey, the putative prophet of secular humanism. But as one expert witness explained:

> they feel that way because they, in fact, see through the eyes of Dewey though they do not know it. He analogizes by referring to his glasses. As long as you have them on, you are not aware that you do, and thus Dewey is the spectacles through which American educators have been trained to see the world… it is not surprising that they no longer see Dewey because they see with Dewey.[38]

The problem wasn't a conspiracy of zealots but the institutional reification of a changeable social order, the false consciousness into which secular humanism has enslaved its most aggressive agents. The downplaying of Dewey's influence was just testimony to its pervasiveness, which now goes unnoticed as the taken-for-granted background of things. Like other features of modern liberalism, it has entered "into the realm of habit, taste, and feeling, becoming along the way not only ideas that are espoused but also a way of life," as Kimball says. In the same vein, an expert witness proffered that the problem originated in the Boston and New York publishers who produced the textbooks. While these publishers' primary motivations were pecuniary, not ideological, their schooling and the "milieu from which they came" had left them "uneasy" about traditional religion, thereby blinding them to the textbooks' ideological slant.[39] In an inversion of the usual stereotype that we have again and again seen is a defining feature of conservative claims

[36] Ibid., pg. 992.
[37] Ibid., pg. 993.
[38] Ibid., pg. 958.
[39] Ibid., pg. 959..

of cultural oppression, it was secularists, not religious conservatives, who were victims of a narrow, parochial upbringing and the shunted horizons to which it condemned them. Correlatively, it was the religious conservative, the despised outsider speaking truth to power, who has been rewarded with a privileged insight into the contingency of the taken-for-granted. He sees the eyes of Dewey as those who see through them cannot, and this is why he is not beguiled by liberal neutrality.

* * *

Conservative claimants of cultural oppression all accept some version of what Carl Esbeck calls the "myth-of-neutrality assertion," the position that "state neutrality is not only impossible and thus a myth, but worse, it is a ploy calculated to use the state as an instrument for advancing philosophies that are antithetical to Christianity." "[E]ither the state favors Christianity or it favors an opposing philosophy," and there is no neutral ground in between.[40] Not every conservative will go this far. Some may argue that while neutrality between theism and atheism is impossible, the state can be impartial as between Christianity and other monotheistic faiths. Or else they may, like Judge Hand, believe that what now passes for neutrality is fraudulent but that the genuine article could be realized or approximated by requiring teachers to give religious perspectives "equal time" with secular ones, as they are now prohibited from doing.

But however they be articulated, these apprehensions about the encroachment of an evangelizing, quasi-conspiratorial secular humanism strike liberals as too extravagant to be taken seriously. Robert Boston writes that to imagine that a small cadre of secular humanists "have managed to seize control of all major institutions is to suspend reason." The scenario is simply "too fantastic for any thinking person to believe."[41] And so liberals will agree with the *Smith* Court of Appeals that the "evidence" for secular humanist influence is illusory. Reversing Judge Hand, the Court of Appeals characterized the contested textbooks as just a "governmental attempt to instill in Alabama public school children such values as independent thought, tolerance of diverse views, self-respect, maturity, self-reliance and logical decision-making."[42] Judge Hand had turned the "establishment clause requirement of 'lofty neutrality' on the part of the public schools into an

[40] Carl H. Esbeck, *Religion and a Neutral State: Imperative or Impossibility*, 15 Cumb. L. Rev. 67, 68 (1984-85).
[41] Robert Boston, *Why the Religious Right Is Wrong about Separation of Church and State* (Amherst New York: Promethus Boooks, 2003)., pgs. 27-28.
[42] *Smith v. Board of School Commissioners of Mobile County*, 827 F.2d 684, 684 (11th Cir. Ala. 1987).

affirmative obligation to speak about religion."[43] Though he presented this duty as a modest corrective to secularist bias, this "bias" was only the benign cultivation of democratic virtue. *This* is what oppresses fundamentalists.

As liberals see it, what these fundamentalists hold out as their special insight into the fraudulence of liberal neutrality rests on a set of manifest category errors and the bad faith that enables them. The students were directed to establish a sound self-concept, but surely this is not incompatible with conforming one's mind to Jesus or the Torah, if that is what one's self-concept requires—or with conforming it to the doctrines of a Richard Dawkins, if one has an atheistic self-concept. And is the characterization of the Websters' values as "their" own not perfectly accurate and perfectly neutral as far as it goes? These values belong to the Websters in the ordinary sense that they are accepted and acted upon by them. Whether or not these values are God-given is another question, as to which the textbook remained silent. Why, here too, will silence not suffice? The fact that other-worldly rationales for truth-telling go unmentioned in one particular setting—public schools—does not imply some subterranean hostility to religion. A public school teacher may warn students that plagiarism will be punished with a failing grade without also noting the possibility of other, supra-temporal sanctions. Why, then, may she not similarly address the temporal to the exclusion of the eternal in the context of a theoretical discussion of practical ethics? Whatever our religious beliefs, we can all agree that lying doesn't promote friendships or maximize utility generally. There may be other reasons not to lie as well, but to say nothing about them is also to say nothing against them.

Conservative claimants of cultural oppression seem either unable or unwilling to recognize some simple distinctions that are obvious to liberals. In *Schempp*, this was the distinction between not celebrating religion and disparaging it, between the non-affirmation of a proposition and its negation. In *Smith*, this was additionally the distinction between the promotion of individual autonomy and the individual's choice of substantive ends, and between beliefs that fall within an overlapping consensus—like the harmful consequences of lying—and those that lie outside of it—like deific proscriptions against bearing false witness. It is self-evident to liberals that religious conservatives who bewail the encroachment of secular humanism are arguing in bad faith.

Basking in their sense of righteous besiegement, religious conservatives simply ignore whatever facts give the lie to their grievances. As the *Smith* Court of Appeals observed, "many of

[43] Ibid., pg. 695.

the books specifically acknowledge that religion is one source of moral values and none preclude that possibility."[44] Indeed, one passage observed that religion "offers psychological security which can be helpful in your life" and also "broadens the dimensions of your faith in yourself and in others."[45] As to tradition more generally, another passage clarified that students shouldn't hesitate to follow their dreams even if they "fit into the more traditional mold" because students should "think well of themselves and their individuality."[46] Would it not have been more reasonable, ask secular liberals, to interpret the offending passages against the backdrop of such declarations? It seems that religious conservatives will say absolutely anything to cloak a theocratic agenda in the garb of equal respect, which they have already received.

2. The Meaning of the Secular

Although the Websters' arguments about secular humanism in textbooks sound more conspiratorial than the ostensibly more temperate arguments of Justices Stewart and Scalia, these arguments' conceptual nucleus is the same, and it originates in a basic disagreement about the *meaning of the secular*. This is the question that is always being implicitly adjudicated in religious neutrality cases. It is the root cause of the communication breakdown that undermines every attempt to negotiate the issue.

This was highlighted in *County of Alleghany v. ACLU,* which ruled on the constitutionality of a nativity scene situated inside a government building. Adopting the "endorsement test" first developed by Justice O'Connor in her *Lynch v. Donnelly* concurrence, a majority of the Justices agreed that the question turned on whether these displays would, given their settings, broadcast the state's endorsement of a particular religion or religion in general. The state endorses religion in violation of the Constitution when its action is intended to send, or can be reasonably interpreted as sending, a message to non-believers "that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community" and, correlatively, "an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community."[47]

The *Alleghany* Court held that the nativity scene indeed sent this message. The nativity scene in *Lynch* had been upheld as constitutional. But it had been only one component of a larger

[44] Ibid, pg. 692.
[45] *Smith v. Board of School Commissioners of Mobile County*, 655 F. Supp 939, 1000 (S.D. Ala. 1987).
[46] Ibid., pg. 1004.
[47] *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S 668, 688 (1984) (O'Connor, J., concurring).

display, whose otherwise secular contents—a Santa Clause, a talking wishing well, etc.—had satisfactorily subdued the religious significance of the nativity scene. Taken in context, it could be plausibly read as a mere depiction of the holiday's religious origins—a bare historical fact which the state may acknowledge, just as it may display religious paintings in its art museums. By contrast, the nativity scene in *Alleghany* stood in prominent isolation by the grand staircase of the county courthouse. It was accompanied, not by secularizing chachka, but by a banner proclaiming "Glory to God in the Highest" in Latin. The Court therefore ruled the display unconstitutional. While the "government may acknowledge Christmas as a cultural phenomenon," the Establishment Clause prohibits it from observing "it as a Christian holy day by suggesting that people praise God for the birth of Jesus."[48] The function of the display was to communicate precisely this message.

Writing in dissent, Justice Kennedy objected to what he saw as the merciless logic of the endorsement test:

> Rather than requiring government to avoid any action that acknowledges or aids religion, the Establishment Clause permits government some latitude in recognizing and accommodating the central role religion plays in our society… Any approach less sensitive to our heritage would border on latent hostility toward religion, as it would require government in all its multifaceted roles to acknowledge only the secular, to the exclusion and so to the detriment of the religious.[49]
>
> If government is to participate in its citizens' celebration of a holiday that contains both a secular and a religious component, enforced recognition of only the secular aspect would signify the callous indifference toward religious faith that our cases and traditions do not require; for by commemorating the holiday only as it is celebrated by nonadherents, the government would be refusing to acknowledge the plain fact, and the historical reality, that many of its citizens celebrate its religious aspects as well.[50]
>
> The approach adopted by the majority contradicts important values embodied in the Clause. Obsessive, implacable resistance to all but the most carefully scripted and secularized forms of accommodation requires this Court to act as a censor, issuing national decrees as to what is orthodox and what is not. What is orthodox, in this context, means what is secular; the only Christmas the State can acknowledge is one in which references to religion have been held to a minimum. The Court thus lends its assistance to an Orwellian rewriting of history as many understand it. I can conceive of no judicial function more antithetical to the First Amendment.[51]

[48] *County of Allegheny v. ACLU*, 492 U.S. 573, 601 (U.S. 1989).
[49] Ibid., pg. 657 (Kennedy, J., dissenting).
[50] Ibid., pgs. 663-64 (Kennedy, J., dissenting).
[51] Ibid., pg. 678 (Kennedy, J., dissenting).

The Court responded in the usual liberal fashion. Outraged and incredulous, it answered that "nothing could be further from the truth, and the accusations could be said to be as offensive as they are absurd."[52] It was in fact Justice Kennedy who had descended into "Orwellian newspeak" by characterizing the secular as a sectarian ideology. To say that the First Amendment privileges atheism over theism would indeed be an Orwellian rewriting of history. But to speak of the secular as having been somehow privileged over the religious is to lapse into category error: Since a "secular state establishes neither atheism nor religion as its official creed," Justice Kennedy "has it exactly backwards when he says that enforcing the Constitution's requirement that government remain secular is a prescription of orthodoxy."[53] The "government does not discriminate against any citizen on the basis of the citizen's religious faith if the government is secular in its functions and operations."[54] Echoing the Court of Appeals' rebuke to Judge Hand, the Court accused Justice Kennedy of misconstruing "a respect for religious pluralism, a respect commanded by the Constitution, as hostility or indifference to religion." "No misperception," lamented the Court, "could be more antithetical to the values embodied in the Establishment Clause."[55]

This disagreement crystallizes the conceptual core of the religious neutrality problem. Concurring in *Schempp*, Justice Goldberg warned that "untutored devotion to the concept of neutrality can lead to invocation or approval of results which partake not simply of that noninterference and noninvolvement with the religious which the Constitution commands, but of a brooding and pervasive devotion to the secular and a passive, or even active, hostility to the religious."[56] However, *Alleghany* suggests that to frame the issue in terms of a quantitative distinction between moderation and excess, as Goldberg does, is to overlook the fundamental problem. And this is the *meaning* of the secular, its conceptual relationship to the religious. It was on precisely this question that the *Alleghany* Court and Justice Kennedy simply locked horns. The question was whether it is not only the atheistic, but also the merely secular, that stands against the religious. Whereas the Court believed that the secular occupies a neutral ground in between theism and atheism, Justice Kennedy implied that the secular is somehow allied with atheism

[52] Ibid., pg. 610.
[53] Ibid., pgs. 611-12.
[54] Ibid., pg. 610.
[55] Ibid., pg. 610.
[56] *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 306 (U.S. 1963) (J. Goldberg, concurring).

against theism. This was the result, not of anyone's "brooding and pervasive devotion" to the secular, but of something *inherent to the secular itself*.

This problem was taken up explicitly in *Grove v. Mead School District*, where plaintiffs objected to a school's use of a novel, *The Learning Tree*, which chronicled the adolescent rebellion of an African-American male grown cynical about religion. The book, plaintiffs argued, violated the Establishment Clause by promoting "a set of secular, if not anti-religious values," which they labeled secular humanism.[57] Incredulous, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals concluded, like Dr. Kurtz in *Smith*, that the plaintiffs had collapsed the crucial distinction between critical questioning and dogma. While *The Leaning Tree* "poses questions and ponders doubts with which plaintiffs may be uncomfortable, to pose questions is not to impose answers."[58] The novel did indeed qualify as secular, as plaintiffs contended. However,

> The analytical difficulty with plaintiffs' approach is that it tends to divide the universe of value-laden thought into only two categories -- the religious and the anti-religious. By adopting this dualistic social outlook, and by denominating the anti-religious half of their universe as "secular," plaintiffs erect an insurmountable barrier to meaningful application of the establishment clause to controversies like this one. Whether the inclusion of The Learning Tree in the curriculum violates the establishment clause depends, under Lemon v. Kurtzman, upon whether that inclusion reflects a secular purpose and produces a secular effect. The difficulty is that plaintiffs might well concede that the primary purpose and effect was secular; indeed, that is precisely their point.[59]

> It is apparent that so long as plaintiffs deem that which is "secular" in orientation to be anti-religious, they are not dealing in the same linguistic currency as the Supreme Court's establishment decisions. If the establishment clause is to have any meaning, distinctions must be drawn to recognize not simply "religious" and "anti-religious," but "non-religious" governmental activity as well. In the parlance of Lemon v. Kurtzman, "secular" must mean "non-religious." Therefore, plaintiffs cannot succeed in demonstrating a violation of the establishment clause by showing that the school authorities are somehow advancing "secular" goals.[60]

As in *Alleghany*, the issue was not *degree* of devotion to the secular, but whether such devotion qualifies as non-religious or anti-religious, or indeed counter-religious, in the context at hand. It was a question about how the universe of possible state activity and inactivity is to be divided as between the religious, the non-religious, and the anti-religious. Like Justice Stewart in *Schempp*, Judge Hand in *Smith*, and Justice Kennedy in *Alleghany*, the *Grove* plaintiffs defined the religious

[57] *Grove v. Mead School District*, 753 F.2d 1528, 1535 (9th Cir. Wash. 1985).
[58] Ibid., pg. 1541.
[59] Ibid., pg. 1536.
[60] Ibid., pg. 1536.

and the anti-religious in a way that leaves little room for the non-religious. In all these cases, the argument was that the ostensibly non-religious is in fact anti-religious, that what gets passed off as just *different from* the religious is covertly *opposed to* it. This is why the *Grove* plaintiffs defined the "secular" as they did.

But as liberals see it, this is an exercise in rhetorical obfuscation that disingenuously equivocates between two plainly distinct senses of the "secular." As the *Grove* Court observed, the plaintiffs failed "to distinguish the process of secularization from the promotion of secularism." Though the Establishment Clause prohibits "the promotion of secularism as a body of anti-religious doctrine," the "process of secularization has been the means of achieving compliance with the establishment clause."[61] The plaintiffs failed to distinguish between the secular *qua* universalistic dispensation—the "non-religious" wherein religious questions are simply not implicated—and the secular *qua* parochial worldview—the anti-religious, "freethinking," or "skeptical," which involves a negative judgment on religion. Both senses of the "secular" put religion out of play. But there is a difference between forbidding religious *questions* and forbidding religious *answers*. Only the latter qualifies as a secularist orthodoxy. And this is not what the state is doing when it refrains from sponsoring school prayer or municipal nativity scenes.

These distinctions are the reason why public school teachers are constitutionally obligated to provide students with a wholly secular educational product yet constitutionally proscribed from promoting a secular way of life—just as they may not promote a religious way of life. A municipal law providing that all a city's funds be expended for primarily Christian purposes would establish the religion of Christianity. And yet a law that, in codification of the *Lemon* test, required that they be expended for primarily secular purposes, like Christmas trees free of religious accoutrements, would survive constitutional scrutiny—notwithstanding that the state could not constitutionally *say* that the holiday season should be celebrated in a secular fashion. The state cannot pursue religious purposes without implicitly endorsing the religious to the detriment of the non-religious, but it *can* pursue non-religious purposes without implicitly endorsing the non-religious to the detriment of the religious.

Religious conservatives seem to be denying this, denying that the secular has a dual meaning as either non-religious or anti-religious and that one can be the former without also being the latter. This denial strikes secular liberals as transparently disingenuous. The problem with

[61] Ibid., pg. 1538.

denying the dual meaning of secular isn't just that it erects an "insurmountable barrier to the meaningful application of the Establishment Clause," as the *Grove* Court admonished, but that it does not ring true to our everyday lives and common sense. After all, religious conservatives engage in the very same "secular" activities—shopping, driving, etc.—as do secular liberals, without feeling that they have thereby abandoned their religion for a secular counter-religion. And if religious believers can undertake secular activities without thereby repudiating religious faith, then why isn't the government doing the same when it sponsors Christmas trees and Santa's sleighs but not nativity scenes? Justice Kennedy's sense that that the secular operates "to the exclusion and so to the detriment of the religious" is simply at odds with the everyday common sense of believers and non-believers alike.

David Limbaugh relates that a receptionist in a Dallas school district was reprimanded for sending a group e-mail message from her office computer promoting President Bush's National Day of Prayer. The school district admonished her that this violated its prohibition on messages for "commercial, for-profit, purposes, political purposes, religious worship, or proselytizing." But Limbaugh observes that the school district "had no problem with its employees sending non-work-related messages over its email system, including jokes, secular messages of encouragement, event invitations, and chain messages."[62] Limbaugh sees a double-standard motivated by anti-Christian sentiment. But liberals disagree. A "secular message of encouragement" like "have a nice day" does not promote an orthodoxy that excludes religious believers, who also send secular messages of encouragement from time to time. This is why permitting only secular, but not religious, messages of encouragement doesn't rob religious believers of equal dignity or respect. Religious believers can in practice recognize the distinction between the non-religious and the anti-religious, whatever they may imply and their lawsuits and polemics. The dual meaning of the secular, then, isn't some convenient rationalization for liberal ideology. On the contrary, it is attested to in the speech and conduct of Christian conservatives themselves.

It is also attested to by Justice Kennedy's own reasoning. Justice Kennedy argues that while the "Religion Clauses do not require the government to acknowledge these holidays or their religious components… our strong tradition of government accommodation and acknowledgment permits government to do so."[63] The question we posed to Justice Stewart reappears. If the secular

[62] David Limbaugh, *Persecution: How Liberals Are Waging War Against Christianity* (HarperCollins, 2004), pg. 35.
[63] *County of Allegheny v. ACLU*, 492 U.S. 573, 664 (U.S. 1989) (Kennedy, J. dissenting)..

really is an exclusionary orthodoxy, then why should the Establishment Clause not also *require* that secular holiday displays be counterbalanced by religious ones? Perhaps the government can forgo all acknowledgment of the holiday season without affront to religious believers. But having elected to acknowledge it, why should it then be allowed to promote a historically revisionist secular orthodoxy? Justice Kennedy would allow Alleghany County to establish a policy providing that only secular holiday symbols like Santa's sleighs and giant dreidels may be officially sponsored by the city. But why should the County be allowed to act on a principle that qualifies as latent hostility toward religion when implemented by the Supreme Court? If the holding in *Alleghany* is a "national decree as to what is orthodox and what is not," as Kennedy charges, then this ordinance would be a local decree to that effect, and that is constitutionally speaking a distinction without a difference. Once again, we see that conservatives are unprepared to take their logic to its ultimate conclusion. And this once again suggests to liberals a certain disingenuousness, conservatives' Orwellianism readiness to manipulate language in the service of theocratic ends.

A thought experiment highlights the problem. Suppose that Alleghany County had instituted a policy providing that only Christian, and not Jewish, holiday symbols may be officially sponsored. We can easily transpose Justice Kennedy's reasoning to this hypothetical and object:

> If government is to participate in its citizens' celebration of a holiday season of which there are both Christian and Jewish versions, enforced recognition of only the Christian one would signify the callous indifference toward Judaism that our cases and traditions do not require; for by commemorating the holiday only as it is celebrated by Christians, the government would be refusing to acknowledge the plain fact, and the historical reality, that many of its citizens celebrate the season in the Jewish fashion as well.

But in *this* case, Justice Kennedy would presumably insist that Alleghany County juxtapose a menorah by any nativity scenes or do away with holiday displays altogether. By contrast, he is not prepared to compel the placement of nativity scenes alongside any Christmas trees or Santa's sleighs. Why, then, does he *describe* the secular and the religious as ideological competitors, in the way that two religions might be, when he is not prepared to actually *treat* them this way? Justice Kennedy's argument is belied by the fact that the reasonable Christian does not walk past a government-sponsored Christmas tree and conclude that the government is pursuing an agenda of secularist hegemony. "Secular" they may be, but Christmas trees, elves, and Santa's sleighs are not alien symbols to the believing Christian in the way that a cross will be an alien symbol to the believing, or non-believing, Jew.

This is, once more, because real, flesh-and-blood religious believers are capable of distinguishing between the two senses of the secular, distinguishing between the secular *qua* anti-religious and the secular *qua* non-religious. In what, then, can the alleged secularist orthodoxy possibly consist? Given the many contexts in which religious conservatives' own conduct acknowledges a distinction between the non-religious and the anti-religious, their readiness to collapse it in others suggests to liberals a disingenuous ploy to impose their religious preferences. By characterizing the facially non-religious as the anti-religious or counter-religious, they create cover for their own religious imperiousness, casting this as a benign corrective to state-perpetuated inequality.

Seeing themselves as engaged in a rearguard action to salvage some small vestige of their traditions, religious conservatives insist that it is these secular liberal anxieties about theocratic encroachment that stand suspect. They are mere pretexts for the venting of anti-religious hostility, which conservatives are only resisting. The Websters were anguished that "the "fringe has become the center, and everything that has gone before -- including (or perhaps especially) [their] Christianity -- appears scheduled to pass away under the raised regimen."[64] But liberals answer that while these conservatives may be on the defensive relative to their ambitions, they are on the offensive relative to their actual rights, and that these feelings of being on the defensive are themselves offensive ploys. The *Alleghany* Court observed:

> To be sure, in a pluralistic society there may be some would-be theocrats, who wish that their religion were an established creed, and some of them perhaps may be even audacious enough to claim that the lack of established religion discriminates against their preferences. But this claim gets no relief, for it contradicts the fundamental premise of the Establishment Clause itself. The antidiscrimination principle inherent in the Establishment Clause necessarily means that would-be discriminators on the basis of religion cannot prevail.[65]

The Establishment Clause would be eviscerated of all meaning if the principle of non-discrimination prohibited "discriminating" against the discriminatory impulses of would-be theocrats. And it seems that conservative claimants of cultural oppression are demanding nothing less than this evisceration. Is it not obvious, ask liberals, that it is these claimants of cultural oppression, and not they, who assert rights they will not extend to others? What else explains their inability or unwillingness to appreciate distinctions that are obvious to liberals, like the distinction

[64] *Smith v. Board of School Commissioners of Mobile County*, 655 F. Supp 939, 993 (S.D. Ala. 1987).
[65] *County of Alleghany v. ACLU*, 492 U.S. 573, 610-11 (U.S. 1989).

between first-order discrimination, which the Constitution proscribes, and second-order discrimination—discrimination against discrimination —without which the Constitution could not be enforced?

The religious conservatives' logical position seems akin to that of a prisoner who, having been convicted of kidnapping—and so imprisoned in consequence of his own attempts to imprison others—proceeds to accuse his jailers of hypocrisy for permitting themselves what they will not permit him. Just like this convict, the conservative overlooks that, to the extent he is being oppressed, this is only in his capacity as a would-be oppressor. And so there is no moral symmetry between the oppression he claims to suffer and the oppression he would inflict upon others in order to relieve it. The conservative's indignation at secularist oppression seems directly proportional to his own desire to oppress secularists—and is indeed the frustrated expression of that desire. His humble pleas for greater sensitivity toward religion are a siren's song, an invitation to take the first step down a slippery slope that ends in theocracy. Judge Hand concluded that the educational establishment could no longer see Dewey because it now sees through the eyes of Dewey. But if religious conservatives fail to recognize the incipiently theocratic nature of their arguments, this can only be because they see through the eyes of theocrats.

3. The Immanent Frame

Do conservatives complaining of secularist oppression genuinely fail to understand these points? Are they merely pretending not to understand? Do they perhaps not *want* to understand? Or is it rather this very secular liberal incredulity that calls for an explanation? Here as elsewhere, the mutual incomprehension originates in a clash of cosmological orientations. What liberals see as religious conservatives' disingenuous equivocation between two plainly distinct senses of the "secular" is in fact the logical expression of a pre-modern sensibility, which compels religious conservatives to perceive liberal neutrality as fraudulent. Conversely, liberals' incredulity before the accusation of fraudulence is another outgrowth of the modern, buffered identity, which is what compels liberals to view the secular as they do. As we will now see, what presents itself as a conflict between the religious and the secular is in fact a conflict between the modern and pre-modern understandings of *the relationship* between the religious and the secular. This is what drives the antagonists and why the religious neutrality problem has proven intractable.

As we noted in Chapter Five, "religion" as understood by pre-moderns did not refer to a distinct sphere to which people turned now and again for spiritual solace. On the contrary, religion constituted the total background against which people made sense of their lives. The existence of God wasn't just a theological proposition, but what allowed the entire world to make sense, including ostensibly "secular" spheres, whose meaning was a function of their place in a religiously-defined cosmos. This, we saw, was why one could speak of parish priests as members of the "secular clergy." They were secular, not in the sense of being "non-religious," but because they acted in the day-to-day world of village life, away from the higher rungs of religious devotion occupied by monastics. The medieval world was divided between those who worked, those who fought, and those who prayed. And while working and fighting were indeed "secular" undertakings, this very division of labor was part and parcel of a God-ordained order.

The "traditional religious conception of the division between religious and secular realms," writes Stoltzenberg, "partakes of the more basic theological conception of a divide between the heavenly realm of the spirit and the earthly realm of matter."[66] And so the "temporal world's secularism consists in nothing more or less than its (necessary) estrangement from the sacred."[67] The secular was in no way "non-religious" because it was only intelligible through religion, through a religious hierarchy between the higher and the lower. The *Grove* Court would divide the "universe of value-laden thought" between the religious, the non-religious, and the anti-religious. But pre-moderns divided it as between the more religious and the less religious. The secular realm, was defined, not by the *absence* of religion, but by its *remove* from the higher rungs of spiritual devotion, its remove from the heavenly realm, and so it *presupposed* religion as its broader cosmological framework. The medieval concept of the secular was, Stolzenberg says, *theological*.[68]

This pre-modern understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular was just the corollary of what we observed to be the pre-modern, porous self's total immersion in an order of things from which it could take no distance. As Taylor explains, pre-moderns submitted to "the imbrications of higher times" as "a matter of common, 'naïve' experience,

[66] Nomi Stolzenberg, *Theses on Secularism*, 47 San Diego L. Rev. 1041, 1057 (2010).
[67] Ibid., pg. 1069.
[68] Nomi Stolzenberg, "The Profanity of Law," in *Law and the Sacred*, eds. Austin Sarat, Lawrence Douglas, and Martha Merrill Umphrey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007) pg. 38.

something not yet a candidate for belief or disbelief because it is just obviously there…"[69] Pre-moderns did not possess a "secular consciousness" in the contemporary sense, not because they were "dogmatic," but because religion informed their very being, and thus their pre-reflective sense of things' meaning. They didn't just have different religious beliefs than us. They also a different understanding of *what it is to believe*. The contrast is illustrated by Wittgenstein when he observes:

> When I sat down on this chair, of course I believed it would bear me. I had no thought of its possibly collapsing.
>
> But: "In spite of everything, I held fast to the belief…" Here is the thought, and perhaps constant struggle, to renew an attitude.[70]

Whereas the pre-modern, porous self "believes" in the first, "enfleshed" sense, the modern, buffered self believes in the second, "excarnated" sense. Understanding the secular in abstraction from the religious, the buffered self is no longer unselfconsciously immersed in an enchanted world of charged objects. With its disengaged "inner base area" confronting only bare "nature," it cannot be brought into the sacred's "field of force" and so must, as Wittgenstein says, "hold fast" to its religious beliefs, by self-consciously cultivating its faith. By contrast, the porous self of the enchanted world is held fast *by* its religious beliefs. Religion is here lived, not as a hypothesis about the world, but as the world itself, the pre-reflective given alluded to in Wittgenstein's first sense of belief. Faith was an attitude of adhesion rather than theoretical agreement. The question wasn't whether one assented to the existence of God *qua* causal hypothesis but whether one clung to him *qua* the foundation of one's being. A pre-modern might concern himself with the strength of his faith. However, this was not a faith *in* a religious worldview but a faith *within* a religious worldview. One had more or less faith in *God*—the way one might have more or less faith in friend—not more or less faith in the *religion* that posits this God. The idea of "religion" hadn't yet been compartmentalized away from the totality of the human condition as just one component thereof.

This "blurring" of the religious and the secular did not mean that the religious and the secular could never enter into conflict. But they did so, not as *two incompatible worldviews*, but as *two sets of prerogatives within one worldview* that have for some reason been brought into disequilibrium. The secular wasn't inherently "anti-religious." God had created the secular no

[69] Ibid., pgs. 58-59.
[70] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Invetigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Pearson, 1973), pg. 575.

less than the eternal. But the secular and the eternal could, as Taylor puts it, "flare into opposition when humans cling to their 'secular' condition as ultimate."[71] The risk represented by the secular was the risk of "invest[ing] our little parcel with eternal significance, and therefore divinizing things, and therefore falling deeper into sin."[72] The secular could challenge the religious, not as the theorized denial of God's existence or relevance, but as the temptation to fetishize the lower at the expense of the higher. Only at this point did the otherwise "less religious" become anti-religious. In this way, the meaning of the secular was *indeterminate*.

This indeterminacy was why St. Augustine could write that "the goods that are pursued by sinners are in no way evil things, and neither is free will itself, which we found is to be counted among the intermediate goods." The evil lies, not in the intrinsic character of these goods, but in "the turning of the will away from the unchangeable good and toward changeable goods."[73] The secular was the realm of "changeable goods," which were legitimate only inasmuch as their lesser status within a religiously defined hierarchy was kept in view. To forget this status was to descend into evil. While secular desires are appropriate to our fallen nature, they also fall short of the highest good—God—who must always be borne in mind as the wider context of these desires if they are not to devolve into sin and pride. The secular could not represent "neutrality" as between theism and atheism, as it does for modern liberals, because its meaning varied according to whether its correct relationship to the eternal, or religious, was recognized.

What the *Grove* Court called the "process of secularization" is not just the quantitative displacement of the religious by the secular in the sense of the waning of strong religious belief or effective religious authority, but also *a qualitative transformation in the very concept of the secular and its relationship to the religious*. Secularization is the transformation of the secular into a self-contained realm that is intelligible apart from what pre-moderns understood to be the secular's wider religious context. For pre-moderns, the secular and the eternal were related to each other as what Taylor calls an *internal dyad*. As with the dyads "up" and "down" or "left" and "right," the one side was simply inconceivable apart from the other. But with modernity, they become related as an *external* dyad. The secular and the religious remain *defined* by one another, because to say something is secular is to say that it is not religious, and vice versa. But the interdependence is

[71] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), pg. 265.
[72] Ibid., pg. 57.
[73] St. Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapoliis, IN: Hacket Publishing Company, 1993), pg. 68.

now *conceptual* rather than *ontological*, because it has become possible to believe that the secular, temporal world is all there is. Only at this point can one entertain a secular worldview in opposition to a religious one, because only at this point does the existence of a religious reality become open to doubt.

Whereas the porous self of pre-modernity inhabits an enchanted world in which matter and spirit are deeply intertwined, the modern, buffered self inhabits *the immanent frame*. To inhabit the immanent frame is, Taylor explains, to have accepted

> our familiar picture of the natural, 'physical' universe as governed by exceptionless laws, which may reflect the wisdom and benevolence of the creator, but don't require in order to be understood—or (at least on the first level) explained—any reference to a good aimed at, whether in the form of a Platonic Idea, or of Ideas in the mind of God.[74]

Considered in itself, the immanent frame is neither theistic nor atheistic. It admits of both "open" and "closed" construals according to whether one believes that the natural world is or is not opened out to a transcendent dispensation. But whereas it is the religious that defines the meaning of the secular within the pre-modern dispensation, the order of dependence is reversed within the immanent frame, which provides the context in which the religious must be conceptualized and defended, limiting the shapes it can assume. The immanent frame is the "hiving off an independent, free-standing level, that of 'nature,' which may or may not be in interaction with something further or beyond."[75] And so whatever might lie "further or beyond" must be compatible with this understanding of nature, as a self-enclosed realm of strict physical causality. Religion now functions as a kind of "supplementary explanation" that enriches our understanding of existence writ large but is no longer required to make sense of our day-to-day fortunes. God is less a force to be reckoned with and more a first cause, the god of philosophers, a grand designer rather than a village magistrate. Inhabited a world of "charged objects," pre-moderns believed that certain points in space and time—like sacred relics or holy sites—were infused with augmented levels of divinity, which could then redound to the advantage of those who make contact with them. And this is precisely what the immanent frame rules out, because God cannot be "involved" with the universe at this level of specificity.

The immanent frame's influence on our everyday thinking about religion is illustrated in *Prince v. Massachusetts*, a Free Exercise case where a Jehovah's Witness contested the

[74] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 542.
[75] Ibid., pg. 14.

constitutionality of a Massachusetts child labor law that prohibited her from apprenticing her eight-year old daughter in the religiously compulsory street pamphleteering of Jehovah's Witnesses literature. Massachusetts had proscribed this kind of child labor, and the Supreme Court held this was justified by the state's legitimate interest in preventing "the crippling effects of child employment, more especially in public places, and the possible harms arising from other activities subject to all the diverse influences of the street."[76] Notwithstanding anyone's religious scruples, it was "the interest of youth itself, and of the whole community, that children be both safeguarded from abuses and given opportunities for growth into free and independent well-developed men and citizens."[77] The daughter had testified that ignoring her religious duties would condemn her "to everlasting destruction at Armageddon." But the testimony was excluded from evidence.[78]

The Court framed the question before it as about whether an individual's religious beliefs could trump the state's legitimate interest in protecting child welfare. But the interesting question, and the one the Court did not acknowledge it was answering, is whether those beliefs are relevant to our assessment of whether that legitimate interest *is being effectively pursued*. The state's interest in safeguarding children's "opportunities for growth into free and independent well-developed men and citizens" is clear. But a Jehovah's Witness will argue that this growth will be cut tragically short by everlasting destruction at Armageddon—the precise point excluded from evidence. This exclusion was motivated by the immanent frame, to which a valid Free Exercise claim must conform. A religious claim might be *weighed against* secular considerations. But it cannot be permitted *to inform what those considerations consist in*. These must proceed without reference to their possible embeddedness within a transcendent dispensation. The daughter's anxieties about Armageddon were excluded from evidence, not because the Court judged them false, but because to admit them would be to contravene the immanent frame, which requires that the secular be conceived apart from religion on its own terms.

The *Prince* Court was religiously neutral inasmuch as it did not formally endorse or reject any theological tenets. But it was not neutral inasmuch as it presumed a particular conception of the relationship between the religious and the secular. *United States v. Ballard* upheld the founders' vision that "Man's relation to his God" is to be "no concern of the state."[79] But *Prince*

[76] *Prince v. Massachusetts*, 321 U.S. 158, 168 (U.S. 1944)
[77] Ibid., pg. 165.
[78] Ibid., pgs. 162-63.
[79] *United States v. Ballard*, 322 U.S. 78, 87 (U.S. 1944).

illustrates that "man's relation to his God" must be *defined* in such a way as to not concern the state—as the subject of inner mental asset rather than as a living force in nature. To the extent God is experienced as a causal force, the state necessarily interferes in that relation. And this is why it must be defined in the context of the immanent frame, through a modern conception of the relationship between the secular and the religious. The *Prince* Court was neutral about God's existence. But it was not neutral about what God would have to be like if he exists. Its God was a God constrained by the immanent frame.

* * *

The origins of the religious neutrality problem now lie plainly before us. The neutrality that secular liberals have on offer is neutrality between the religious and the secular *within* the modern understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular—that is, neutrality within the immanent frame. It is neutrality vis-à-vis the question of whether one should believe in a transcendent dispensation to supplement the purely temporal order that is plainly before us and intelligible on its own terms. The immanent frame was being endorsed in Justice Jackson's dissent in *Everson v. Board of Education*, where the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of a school district's policy of subsidizing the bus fares of parochial school students alongside those of public school students. Against this, Justice Jackson argued:

> Our public school, if not the product of Protestantism, at least is more consistent with it than with the Catholic culture and scheme of values. It is a relatively recent development dating from about 1840. It is organized on the premise that secular education can be isolated from all religious teaching so that the school can inculcate all needed temporal knowledge and also maintain a strict and lofty neutrality as to religion. The assumption is that after the individual has been instructed in worldly wisdom he will be better fitted to choose his religion. Whether such a disjunction is possible, and if possible whether it is wise, are questions I need not try to answer.[80]

Here is the basic template of liberal neutrality. To be religiously neutral is to believe 1) that the secular realm can be "isolated" from all religious teaching, 2) that the secular realm is not perforce incompatible with the possibility of some kind of religious truth, and 3) that any religious truth must be compatible with the self-contained nature of the secular realm. This is why the individual will be "better fitted to choose his religion" after he has been "instructed in worldly wisdom," because the secular realm is what shapes the boundaries of religious truth.

[80] *Everson v. Board of Education of the Township of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 21 (U.S. 1947) (Jackson, J., dissenting).

These are the premises of liberal neutrality. What the *Alleghany* Court cast as the distinction between the secular and the atheistic, and what the *Grove* Court cast as the distinction between the non-religious and the anti-religious, is in fact *the distinction between the immanent frame itself and its closed interpretation*. To be non-religious is to posit the immanent frame. To be anti-religious is to posit that the immanent frame is all there is. One can posit the one without also positing the other. And this is why the "secular" has two meaning. There can be a distinction between "the process of secularization" and "secularism as a body of anti-religious thought" because the "secular" refers both to a transformation of our self-understanding from porous selves beholding charged objects to buffered ones beholding the immanent frame *and* to one particular position *within* the immanent frame. The religiously neutral state does not adopt such a position. But it does endorse the immanent frame itself, which is what *defines* the religion toward which it proclaims its neutrality.

As we saw, the *Smith* plaintiffs complained that the contested textbooks noted the availability of social workers, counselors, and psychiatrist to assist students with life's difficulties but made no mention of ministers, rabbis, and priests. The Court of Appeals disagreed that this was religiously discriminatory and chastised Judge Hand for misconstruing "the establishment clause requirement of 'lofty neutrality' on the part of the public schools" as "an affirmative obligation to speak about religion." But had the textbook listed only ministers, rabbis, and priests in the class of helping professionals, then a court would presumably have required mention of these clergypersons' secular analogues—social workers, counselors, and psychiatrists—to save the constitutionality of the passage, which would otherwise be promoting religion over non-religion. So the Establishment Clause can clearly generate an affirmative obligation to speak about *non-religion*—to speak about social workers, counselors, and psychiatrists. And conservative claimants of cultural oppression see this as an arbitrary double-standard betraying latent hostility to religion. Why should the failure to mention rabbis, ministers, and priests be judged as less exclusionary of religious believers than the failure to mention social workers, counselors, and psychiatrists is exclusionary of non-believers? Why does excluding of the religious version of something *not* operate to the detriment of the religious while excluding the secular version of something *does* operate to the detriment of the secular?

The explanation lies in the immanent frame. If the secular is comprehensible on its own terms, without reference to its place in a religious cosmology, then the services of psychologists,

psychiatrists, social workers, and counselors have an equal value for religious and non-religious students alike, who will all encounter "secular" problems to be addressed in a secular fashion. These problems may generate additional religious challenges for religious students, but then they are free to seek out priests, ministers, and rabbis on their own. So long as the state isn't actively discouraging recourse to them, the mere failure to promote them isn't anti-religious hostility, because believers and non-believers both inhabit the secular sphere in equal measure. *This* is the hidden premise that quietly guides the liberal conception of religious neutrality, what allows liberals to see the secular as a neutral sphere that benignly puts religious questions out of play.

If conservatives reject what liberals hold out as religious neutrality, this, then, is because they reject the immanent frame and hence the idea that "secular education can be isolated from all religions teaching" as Justice Jackson says. For them, worldly wisdom and religious wisdom are but two different facets of a single underlying order—not two spheres, with proper entry into the one depending on satisfactory achievement in the other. They may seek to study "secular" subjects like the laws of physics. But they will do so according to a pre-modern understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular, wherein these laws' constancy manifest divine beneficence rather than potentially godless materialism—the risk presented by the immanent frame. Since ostensibly "worldly" education will carry a religious or anti-religious valence according to whether its place in a broader religious order is kept in view, the pretense that temporal knowledge can be pursued with disregard for, but without prejudice to, an "eternal frame" must then be dismissed as a secular humanist ruse. Far from representing neutrality, the cultivation of purely temporal knowledge constitutes a stance of worldly arrogance that sinfully denies the dependence of the lesser on the greater—an "anti-religious" outcome if ever there was one.

If religious conservatives believe that genuine neutrality requires neutrality, not only between religion and anti-religion, but also between religion and non-religion, this is because their pre-modern sensibility recognizes no clear line between the non-religious and the anti-religious. For them, it is only the religious that prevents the non-religious from devolving into the anti-religious. Whereas secular pursuits are definitionally "non-religious" within the modern understanding of the relationship between the religious and secular, they can devolve into the "anti-religious" within the pre-modern one to the extent their proper relationship to the eternal is disregarded. This is why the *Smith* plaintiffs believed that religious neutrality requires that secular

perspectives be supplemented by religious ones—and hence involves an affirmative obligation to speak about religion.

The mayor of Pawtucket, the site of *Lynch v. Donnelly*, explained that he had promoted the nativity scene as part of a crusade to "keep 'Christ' in Christmas."[81] Seen from within the immanent frame, his was an aggressive theocratic agenda that privileges the religious over the non-religious and anti-religious, endorsing one interpretation of the immanent frame at the expense of another. But seen from outside the immanent frame, through a pre-modern lens, this was a *defensive* measure aiming to prevent non-religion from devolving into anti-religion. For this is what must happen once the religious aspect of Christmas is overshadowed by the secular one. Liberal neutrality facilitates this overshadowing, the overshadowing of the City of God by the City of Man, which is why religious conservatives feel besieged by a "war on Christmas." This sense of besiegement is simply the logical playing out of their cosmological orientation. The secular cannot represent neutrality as between theism and atheism for the pre-modern consciousness because the secular assumes a theistic or atheistic meaning according to whether its relation to the religious or eternal is kept in view, and the secularization of the Christmas season undermines this lucidity. Taylor writes that, for pre-moderns, tracts of secular time were "coloured by their placing in relation to higher times,"[82] which "gathered, assembled, reordered, punctuated profane, ordinary time."[83] Liberal neutrality preempts this gathering and assembling, because approaching the secular as a self-contained realm is the essence of "anti-religion" within the pre-modern understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular.

Liberals cannot understand how religious conservatives can cast the secular as some kind of alien orthodoxy when they themselves engage in all manner of secular activities. But what liberals see as the contradiction of opposing the secular as an alien orthodoxy while simultaneously engaging in secular activities is in the eye of the liberal beholder. This apparent contradiction is actually the consistent application of a pre-modern understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular. Whether a believer can engage in a secular activity without making some kind of accompanying religious affirmation is a function of the particular context at hand, the extent to which and way in which secular time has been "punctuated" or "imbricated" by higher

[81] *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 726 (U.S. 1984).
[82] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pgs. 58-59.
[83] Ibid., pg. 54.

time. Where the is imbrication is profound, as in Christmas, the secular will become anti-religious if not accompanied by a religious affirmation. Where the imbrication is "shallower," as in the fallen realm of everyday life, this affirmation is more optional—which is why religious conservatives can convey "secular messages of encouragement" without lapsing into irreligion. What seems like conservatives' disingenuous equivocation between two plainly distinct senses of the secular is just the logical reflection of their cosmological orientation.

The "religion of secularism" that worries conservatives refers, not to the negation of the religious by the secular, but to the modern understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular. Religious believers who have been modernized and liberalized accept the immanent frame and thus distinguish the immanent frame itself from its atheistic construal. They can therefore accept liberal neutrality as genuine. But from *outside* the immanent frame, the immanent frame is itself anti-religious, because to approach the temporal world as self-sufficient or self-contained is the essence of sin. The "orthodoxy" to which Justice Kennedy objected in *Alleghany* is *a secularized iteration of the concept of sin itself.*

Religious conservatives cannot but see the secularism promoted by liberals in this way, just as liberals cannot but misunderstand why they do. A "religion of secularism" will seem oxymoronic once the secular is defined as a sphere of life that puts theological questions out of play. Atheism is a viewpoint about the truth of a religious belief. By contrast, secularism is a viewpoint on when such judgments are or aren't relevant. And so conservative laments about a religion of secularism seem predicated on a gross category error. But this judgment expresses the buffered identity and its epistemological framework, which are what impel liberals to conceptualize religion and anti-religion as rival hypotheses toward which the state can remain agnostic. However, this disengagement is a liberal privilege afforded by the buffered identity. For the porous self of pre-modernity, writes Taylor, "the prospect of rejecting God does not involve retiring to the safe redoubt of the buffered self, but rather chancing ourselves in the field of [spirit] forces without him. Practically our only recourse can be to seek another protector; and in this case the most likely candidate is his arch-enemy, Satan."[84] Moderns can see atheism as a position to be accepted or rejected. But for pre-moderns, atheism is *a direction in which one might fall*. This falling away is an ever-present possibility that can be held at bay only by holding fast to the eternal, and this is precisely what liberal neutrality prevents religious conservatives from doing. The fact

[84] Ibid., pg. 41.

that the state is not formally *endorsing* atheism is little consolation to them, because atheism is what it *creates*.

Religious conservatives are culturally oppressed because they live in a world where grievances that follow *logically* from their cosmological orientation are dismissed as manifest category errors by the dominant dispensation. But this judgment, natural from a modern perspective, is a cultural artifice of the buffered identity as seen from the outside. The distinctions that secular liberals accuse conservatives of eliding are simply foreign to their pre-modern sensibility. The enchanted world of the porous self, writes Taylor, "shows a perplexing absence of certain boundaries" which seem essential in the disenchanted world of buffered selves and "minds." And it is the blurring of these boundaries—between mind and matter, the supernatural and the natural, the religious and the secular—that explains why conservatives ignore distinctions that seem natural to liberals. The *Grove* plaintiffs' "difficulty," wasn't ultimately "analytical," as that court put it, but rather existential and cosmological. The problem wasn't deeply held beliefs, but something deeper than deeply held beliefs, cosmological orientation, their visceral sense of themselves as agents.

Religious conservatives' apprehensions about the connivance of a small coterie of secular humanists whose insidious tentacles now reach into every sphere of life sounds outlandish and conspiratorial. But the conspiracy theories are just distorted anthropomorphizations of these conservatives' visceral aversion to an alien cosmological orientation. They are culturally oppressed, not by the secular, but by the modern understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular. Ravi Zacharias observes:

> The California Supreme Court proved it has little problem with the state endorsing a religion, even forcing religious beliefs down its citizen's throats, provided the religion is secular humanism. On March 1, 2004, the Court ruled that Catholic Charities of Sacramento must comply with the statute requiring California employers to include contraception coverage in their employee healthcare plans. Under the Women's Contraceptive Equity Act of 2000, only religious employers are excluded. The Court had no problem rationalizing its decision, saying that since the Catholic Charities provides services that are secular in nature, such as counseling, immigration services, and low-income housing, for people of all faiths, it is not a religious employer. One would think that the politically correct California court would applaud the pluralistic attitude of the charity in making its services available to non-Catholics. Instead it used the charity's tolerance to punish it.[85]

[85] Limbaugh, *Persecution*, pg. 363.

The religion of "secular humanism" being forced down citizens' throats was the modern understanding of the secular and its relationship to the religious—that is, the immanent frame. This was what allowed the California Supreme Court to conclude that the religious status of the Catholic Charities was somehow compromised by its secular involvements. Correlatively, Zacharias's contempt for this argument reflects his pre-modern understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular. For him and other Christian conservatives, the provision of counseling, immigration services, and low-income housing to persons of all faith is just the secular component of a religious mission, the church acting in its capacity as the "secular clergy," as it were. These services were indeed secular, but the secular derives its meaning from the religious. And so the Catholic Charities remains a religious employer notwithstanding the secular nature of its services. These may not promote religion *qua* religious belief. But they do promote religion as a total way of being, religion as existing not only in the mind but also in the world. This was what the "politically correct" California Supreme Court declined to acknowledge when it distinguished between the religious and the secular according to the logic of the immanent frame, which is inimical to some religious identities. Here as elsewhere, what conservatives condemn as political correctness refers to the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, which are what impose the immanent frame.

Liberals' sense that religious conservatives will concoct whatever hollow rationalizations are needed to privilege religion is *the predictable outcome of interposing modern interpretive categories on a pre-modern sensibility.* *McCreary County v. ACLU* addressed the constitutionality of Ten Commandment displays that two Kentucky counties had prominently installed in their courthouses. The Ten Commandments originally stood alone. But this changed after the lawsuit was brought, when the displays were provided with a secular setting of other historically significant legal documents in order to preempt the inference that the displays' primary purpose was religious rather than secular (just as the presence of secular or Jewish holiday displays might alter the social meaning of a nativity scene). These embellishments satisfied Justice Scalia, who concluded that "when the Ten Commandments appear alongside other documents of secular significance in a display devoted to the foundations of American law and government, the context communicates that the Ten Commandments are included, not to teach their binding nature as a religious text, but to show their unique contribution to the development of the legal system."[86]

[86] *McCreary County v. ACLU*, 545 U.S. 844, 905 (U.S. 2005) (Scalia, J., dissenting).

But writing for the Court, Justice Souter argued that this interpretation was belied by the fact that the historical documents purporting to provide the Ten Commandments with a secularizing context—and thus transform them into a stage of legal history—were pervaded by theistic references.[87] Theistic references alone do not turn a document into a religious text. But the fact that these references were the displays' unifying theme when combined with the displays' history gave the lie to the pretense that their purpose was the secular one of acknowledging the religious historical antecedents of Kentucky's laws. Exasperated with the counties' argument that the later embellishments erased their original religious intent, Justice Souter dismissed the embellishments as a "trivial rationalization,"[88] a mere "excuse" to promote a "religious point of view."[89] "No reasonable observer," Souter inveighed, could "swallow the claim that the Counties had cast off the objective so unmistakable in the earlier displays."[90] And "[i]f the observer had not thrown up his hands, he would probably suspect that the Counties were simply reaching for any way to keep a religious document on the walls of courthouses constitutionally required to embody religious neutrality."[91]

However, the disingenuousness Souter detects dissolves within the pre-modern understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular. To the extent the secular is but one sphere within a broader religious cosmology, the various historical documents did provide the Ten Commandments with a secularizing context notwithstanding their religious undertones and the counties' original religious intent. The documents were "secular" in that they existed at a remove from the transcendent dispensation that created them. But like all else in existence, they originated from God and derive their ultimate meaning from him. To say that the embellishments are secular is only to say that they originated less directly from God than do the Ten Commandments, just as the parish priest's connection to God is less direct and unqualified than the ascetic monk's.

The defendants, then, were not issuing "trivial rationalizations" or "reaching for any way" to circumvent religious neutrality, but merely conceiving of the secular in accordance with a pre-modern understanding of its relationship to the religious. Correlatively, Justice Souter's

[87] Ibid., pg. 870.
[88] Ibid., pg. 859.
[89] Ibid., pg. 869.
[90] Ibid., pg. 872.
[91] Ibid., pg. 873.

exasperation with their argument was a direct reflection of his "secular humanism"—his modern understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular. It was only after first separating the two as he did that he could conclude that the defendants were attempting "disguise" the religious in the secular. There was no such disguising within the pre-modern understanding, however, because the two do not then function as "alternatives," as they do within the modern one. Lacking the ultimate in sophistication, liberals see conservatives through the lens of the latter and so cannot but see disingenuousness—which is why religious conservatives cannot but feel culturally oppressed.

* * *

From the beginning, our question has been whether the principles of liberalism can be plausibly appropriated by conservatives. And we can now see that their claims of cultural oppression raise this challenge in the Establishment Clause context as well, because they are essentially demanding the kind of pluralism that can accommodate their pre-modern sensibilities—precisely what liberal neutrality withholds. Along with Justice Brennan, liberals insist that public schools train "American citizens in an atmosphere free of parochial, divisive, or separatist influences of any sort."[92] But the immanent frame is one such separatist influence. If liberals do not see this influence, this is because every dominant dispensation defines "divisive" in relation to itself, erecting an ideology that looks natural, or "neutral," from the *inside*. Justice Brennan's facially benign admonition obscures the fundamental question of what qualifies as parochial, divisive, or separatist, and whether any answer to it must itself be parochial, divisive, or separatist. Liberalism defines these dangers as whatever violates the immanent frame, which now defines the "neutral." However, this would not be the first time in history when the line between the parochial and the non-parochial has been misidentified.

America's Protestants could at one time allow themselves to believe, against the objections of Catholics, that the ecclesiastically unsupervised reading of the King James Bible in public schools was non-sectarian. And modern liberals are guilty of a similar disingenuousness, which is revealed by the mutation counter-narrative. If nineteenth-century Protestants could imagine that the ecclesiastically unsupervised reading of the Bible was a non-sectarian endeavor, rather than a privileging of Protestantism over Catholicism, this was because they understood Scripture as the

[92]*School District of Abington Township v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 241-42 (U.S. 1963) (Brennan, J., concurring).

common core of all Christianity, the constant upon which all else is a derivation. Catholicism's distinctive interpretations were merely its gloss on this common core, and one that could be effectuated outside of school hours. In hindsight, this is seen as a sectarian rationalization which we in our cosmopolitanism can recognize as such. But liberals effect a similar distortion in assuming that the immanent frame is the common core of our humanity, when it has plainly been rejected by the many who refuse to adapt their religion to it. Just as the Catholic refused to see clerical exegesis as something that merely "supplements" the individualistic religion of personal Biblical exegesis, so the conservative claimant of cultural oppression refuses to see the religious dimension of things as a mere supplement to the secular one. Liberalism offers neutrality between the religious and the secular *within* the modern understanding of their relationship. But the only neutrality that might satisfy the claimants is neutrality *between* the modern and pre-modern understandings of this relationship. This liberalism withholds.

4. Investing in Religion

The liberal may respond that while conservatives' pre-modern cosmological orientation can *explain* their rejection of liberal neutrality, it hardly *justifies* that rejection. As the above analysis clarifies, that rejection manifests a certain theological worldview, the pre-modern understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular. The secularist orthodoxy of which Justice Kennedy accused the *Alleghany* Court's is a secularized iteration of sin. And this is not a neutral measure of liberal neutrality. In short, what liberals condemn as the surreptitious imperiousness of religious conservatives isn't eliminated by a pre-modern understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular because that understanding is itself an imperious theological imposition, which has simply been disguised in the secular lingo of resistance to orthodoxy. The above, then, seems to confirm all of liberals' suspicions.

However, the mutation counter-narrative shows us that liberals' conception of religious neutrality is no less tainted by its religious origins. On the subtraction account, the immanent frame is the mere lopping off certain confining horizons, like a teleological understanding of the universe, which had hitherto suppressed certain underlying features of human nature—like the capacity to view the world non-anthropocentrically and so pursue our autonomous desires unobstructed by illusory teleologies. But on the mutation counter-narrative, the immanent frame is the final outcome of a *religious* movement. It was via a certain conception of divinity—a god

of unqualified transcendence uprooted from nature—that Religious Reform stimulated the development of the buffered self and its capacity for beholding the immanent frame. The pre-modern understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular is indeed theological, but the modern understanding is in its own way no less so, because it grew out of, and incorporates within itself, a particular understanding of divinity. As we will now see, this has profound implications for religious neutrality.

* * *

Mark Lilla observes that Anglo-American thinking about religion has been defined by a "Great Separation" paradigm. Hobbes, who first introduced this paradigm, believed that gods were originally adopted as adjuncts in a struggle against wild, uncontrollable nature. Monotheism then developed out of polytheism as a superior mechanism of control over ill-understood natural causation. However, the God of monotheism then became a source of fear and anxiety in his own right, aggravating the fear and anxiety provoked by nature itself. People came to adopt "strange visions and even stranger superstitions about appeasing God." And this in turn turned religion into a lightning rod of political strife and bloodshed.[93] Hobbes's successors in the liberal tradition were not all as alarmed by the dangers of fanaticism. But they shared Hobbes's assumptions about what religion is, a kind of tool. The Great Separation paradigm is one formulation of the subtraction account, because it casts religion as a confining horizon that impedes us in our true ends. It assumes what Leszek Kolakowski call the "instrumentalist conception of the sacred," according to which "religious beliefs proper are reducible to practical instruments, applied to spheres that are subject to chance and not susceptible to human influence," a "means of imposing order where control is not possible."[94] In other words, religion is a psychologically reassuring attempt to do the impossible. And it is only a short step from this to the conclusion that religion is motivated by fear and ignorance alone.

But Lilla observes that philosophers on the European continent proceeded from a very different intellectual starting point. Though Kant and Hegel both dismissed the claims of revealed religion, they also "believed that the tenacious hold of revelation on Western consciousness must point to something about the human mind, which could have important implications for politics."

[93] Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), pg. 79.
[94] Leszek Kolakowski, *Modernity on Endless Trial* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pg. 65.

Both believed that religion was, at its deepest level, "no alien imposition on the ignorant by self-interested priests" but rather an "expression of the mind's very essence."[95] Accordingly, both believed that earlier empiricists like Hobbes, Locke, and Hume worked with "a crude notion of how the human mind works," blinding them to how the "urge to metaphysics is tied up with all our rational faculties."[96] Man does not simply use religion to realize ends he would pursue in other ways under more auspicious circumstances. Rather, for he is fundamentally "a religious animal seeking psychological and social reconciliation."[97]

This continental paradigm raises a challenge for the Anglo-American tradition, which fails to acknowledge man's essentially religious nature:

> But if their anthropological assumptions regarding ignorance and fear were false or even limited, the political lessons drawn from them might also be false. What would happen to modern ideas of sovereignty, individual rights, separation of church and state, limited government, and consent if different anthropological assumptions had been made? How would the Great Separation have been changed by recognizing greater psychological complexity behind religious belief?[98]

The mutation counter-narrative is a response to this question. It is an attempt to present a systematic alternative to the anthropological assumptions of the Great Separation paradigm and the subtraction account. The mutation counter-narrative conceptualizes religion, not as an instrument for satisfying human purposes, but as what served to develop human *purposiveness*, human agency. Religion isn't an expedient of the self but the expression of a tension *within* the self. This is the tension between the porous and buffered layers of human consciousness, between human beings' immersion in nature as animals and their initially implicit and unarticulated sense of themselves as autonomous agents who can "step back" from, and thus transcend, mere nature. Religion speaks to the "mind's very essence" as Lilla says, because it is what stimulated the development of the human mind in the direction of the modern liberal identity, which is now believed to express this essence. Religion isn't just a set of beliefs, but as a social reality that facilitates our distinctively human interiority.

The subtraction account must cast primitive animism as religion in its quintessential role as a reaction to fear and ignorance. After all, what else could inspire people to impute agency and consciousness to inanimate objects like trees, rivers, and mountains? But on the mutation counter-

[95] Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, pg. 220.
[96] Ibid., pg. 135.
[97] Ibid., pg. 221.
[98] Ibid., pg. 111.

narrative, this inability to distinguish between mind and matter is just the corollary of human beings' default porousness. Animism reflected the impoverished state, not only of our knowledge, but as importantly of our *interiority*. Ludwig Feuerbach writes:

> Nature is to man originally, i.e., where he regards her with a religious eye, rather an object of his own qualities, a personal, living, feeling being. Man originally does not distinguish himself from Nature, nor consequently Nature from himself, therefore the sensations which any object in Nature excites in him appear to him immediately as qualities of the object. The beneficial, good sensations and effects are caused by good and benevolent Nature, the bad painful sensations, by an evil being, or at least by Nature in its state of evil disposition, of malevolence, of wrath. Thus man involuntarily and unconsciously, *i.e*., necessarily—though this necessity is only a relative and historical one—transforms the essence of Nature into a feeling, *i.e*., a subjective human being.[99]

Animism wasn't just an attempt to explain natural causality in the absence of more scientific methods, but more fundamentally a reflection of primitive human consciousness which, lacking our modern interiority, discerned agency outwardly rather than inwardly. Not being even minimally buffered, primitive man could in no way "step back" and distinguish his inner life from his natural environment. His sense of agency was only his sense of *responsiveness* to the spirit forces all about him. This is why religion in archaic society was, as Taylor says, "everywhere," something that "was interwoven with everything else, and in no sense constituted a separate 'sphere' of its own."[100]

While medieval Christianity "blurred" the distinction between the religious and the secular, animism allowed for *no* distinction whatsoever between the two, as they permeated each other to the point of being indistinguishable. The "free exercise" of religion would have been meaningless in this world, not because it was forbidden politically, but because it was unavailable *as a concept*. With religion being identified with Being itself, there was nothing to be exercised, because there was no autonomous agent to do the exercising. Rather, it was religion that exercised itself on man, "pulling" him into action from without.

The subtraction account and Great Separation paradigm call on us to view the development of polytheism along the same lines as animism, as a more systematic but equally mistaken expedient with which pre-scientific humans attempted to cope with fear and ignorance. But on the mutation counter-narrative, polytheism is, as Lilla characterizes Hegel's view, "the first stirrings

[99] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Religion*, trans. Alexander Loos (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), pg. 26.
[100] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 2.

of human self-assertion against fate."[101] Polytheism is not just another failed early attempt to explain what only science can explain, but the human organism's first efforts to *wrest an inner life*, to rescue consciousness from its immediate immersion in an animistic environment that preempts this inner life. Only to the extent consciousness is no longer inundated by animistic spirit forces inhering in every rock, tree, and river can it step back into itself and acquire a sense of its separateness from nature. This is what polytheism first facilitated. Polytheistic man remained beholden to the influence of multiple, often capricious deities, who could in various ways possess him, infusing him with godlike courage, strength, or madness. But he was no longer surrounded by animistic forces with the power to "swallow up" his very sense of interiority.

The development of monotheism out of polytheism, then, must be understood as yet a further stage in the development of this interiority. Monotheism isn't just a theory, but a shaper of human consciousness. Feuerbach writes that it is only where "the earth is depopulated of Gods, where the Gods ascend into heaven and change from real beings to imagined ones" that "men have space and room for themselves without any restraint as men and put themselves forward as such."[102] The heavenly God of monotheism allows humans to "put themselves forward as such" because he expels the forces that would prevent this from the world. It was the progressive disenchantment of the world, initiated by Judaism and reaching its pinnacle in Religious Reform and providential deism, that engendered the human interiority that liberalism mistakes for timeless human nature.

The excarnation of religion gradually stripped the natural world of will and consciousness in the name of a divine sovereignty that stands at an ever greater remove from our immediate environments and does not deign to charge objects, places, and times with divinity. And it is this disenchantment that stimulates the development of *human* will and consciousness. Only by becoming subjected to a single, invisible law-giving deity does the human organism becomes liberated from its own propensity to posit multiple capricious ones. And only then can it internalize the idea of law and see itself as its own law-giver, the autonomous individual of liberalism. Madison wrote in his Memorial and Remonstrance that "[t]he Religion . . . of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man."[103] But the mutation counter-narrative tells us

[101] Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, pg. 188.
[102] Feuerbach, *The Essence of Religion*, pg. 41.
[103] James Madison, Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments, 2 Writings of James Madison 183, 184 (G. Hunt ed. 1901)

that is only by virtue of religion itself, and specifically the emergence of monotheism, that people developed a "conscience" in the first place. Madison's understanding of religion was itself shaped by religion, because religion was what shaped the human innerness he takes for granted.

But why, it might be asked, should this protracted historical development have been necessary in the first place? Why is the interiority of the buffered self not simply a given of human nature? Philosopher Daniel Dennett offers the beginnings of an explanation in his suggestion that human beings' trans-cultural tendency to believe in supernatural agents could be an evolutionary byproduct of our "hyper-active agent detection devices" (HADDs).[104] For obvious reasons, genes impelling us to over-suspect agency—when, say, hearing leaves ruffling behind us—would have carried greater adaptive value in the ancestral environment of our evolution than genes impelling us to under-suspect agency. It was more adaptive to be paranoid than to be eaten by a bear. This basic disposition to see agency operating behind the scenes even on the basis of minimal evidence may then have been cultivated in different ways by different cultures, first through animism and polytheism and then later through monotheism, forming the common biological foundation for the world's diverse religions, which just channel our HADDs in different ways. Speculative though it may be, the hypothesis converges theoretically with the mutation counter-narrative, providing an evolutionary explanation for its starting premise that default human consciousness is forcefully submerged in its environment, first and foremost a conscious *of the world*, one directed outward with no capacity to turn back and take itself as the primary agent. It is religion in its various permutations that first expresses but eventually counteracts this default condition, with monotheism channeling our HADDs in a way that would eventually liberate us from their imperatives.

This gradual historical process is why Lilla can write that Hegel's philosophy of religion "assumed a necessary correlation between the development of human consciousness and how societies represent the divine-human relationship to themselves."[105] Religion is the fulcrum of human self-consciousness because it gives people the "permission" to develop a level of interiority that is absent in our natural state. God is, in a sense, the mirror image of our own consciousness. He enables us, not only to explain what we could not otherwise explain, but also to *be* what we could not otherwise be. Religion isn't just a set of beliefs about the universe, but our *training* for

[104] Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (Penguin, 2007), pg 109.
[105] Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, pg. 229.

what we now take for granted as essential human nature, the buffered identity. Hence Hegel's cryptic claim that God is simply the "Idea of freedom."[106] God is the idea of freedom because it is the idea of God as it progressively unfolded through Western history that spurred the development of the modern liberal identity and its disengaged innerness. We can only understand the mind by understanding the process of its development. And this development is concomitantly the development of religion, which symbolically articulates an initially unconscious yearning to transcend our merely animal immersion in nature, cultivating this aspiration by cultivating the idea of God as an absolute transcendence.

This is the greater psychological complexity lost on the Great Separation paradigm. And this complexity explains why the religious neutrality problem has proven intractable. Liberal neutrality prohibits the state from endorsing religious or anti-religious beliefs. But the mutation counter-narrative reveals that the neutrality at issue isn't neutrality between different beliefs, but between different "stages" in the interiorization of human consciousness, between different cosmological orientations, all of which are equally religious in the context of that narrative. Religion does not presuppose belief because it exists prior to belief in the very structure of consciousness itself. The religious neutrality problem cannot be understood in purely epistemological terms because the true bone of contention is supra-epistemological. Here as elsewhere, the root of the conflict isn't deeply held beliefs, but something deeper than deeply held beliefs.

Justice Brennan observed that the "intent of the Framers with respect to the public display of nativity scenes is virtually impossible to discern primarily because the widespread celebration of Christmas did not emerge in its present form until well into the 19th century." One reason for this was that the Puritans had always opposed the public celebration of Christmas as "a 'Popish' practice lacking any foundation in Scripture."[107] The first "War on Christmas," then, was waged on religious rather than secular grounds, and by a very different group of "east coast elites" than has since assumed responsibility for it.

Is it a coincidence that the Puritans and the lawyers of the ACLU should both be opposed to publicly sponsored nativity scenes? It may seem obvious that it is. After all, the religious

[106] G.W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History*, trans. Robert S. Hartman (Macmillan Publishing Company, 1953), pg 25.
[107] *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 720-21 (1984) (J. Brennan, dissenting).

offense that a nativity scene might cause any latter-day Puritans would be of no concern to the ACLU. The Puritans were opposed to all such displays and on theological grounds. By contrast, the ACLU opposes only state-sponsored ones and then only on constitutional grounds. There may be a narrow convergence of position on the specific question of government-sponsored nativity scenes. But the underlying motivations seem altogether different.

This, however, is to conceptualize the problem within the epistemological framework, in terms of the theological beliefs that are or are not in play. But the problem can alternatively be conceptualized on the level of cosmological orientation, in terms of the religious evolution tracked by the mutation counter-narrative. And with the question thus conceptualized, the answer to the question becomes more complicated. To be sure, the Puritans' motivations were religious whilst the ACLU's are secular. But both are animated by similar cosmological orientations, similar understandings of the *relationship between the religious and the secular*. This is why their convergence is no coincidence.

While the Puritans' objections to nativity scenes were theological rather than constitutional, they might have been satisfied with Justice Brennan's diagnosis of the problem. Disputing the *Lynch* Court's characterization of the nativity scene as "a mere representation of a 'particular historic event,'" Justice Brennan objected that it was rather the "mystical re-creation of an event that lies at the heart of Christian faith." Hardly a neutral representation of fact, the "essence of the crèche's symbolic purpose and effect is to prompt the observer to experience a sense of simple awe and wonder appropriate to the contemplation of one of the central elements of Christian dogma -- that God sent His Son into the world to be a Messiah."[108] This is just as objectionable to the Puritan as to the secularist. God may have sent Jesus to earth as a Messiah. But for the Puritan, this is the object of faith, a faith that must always renew its struggle against our fallen nature, and so a faith that may not take refuge in the mystical promptings of nativity scenes and other charged objects. To receive the mystical "prompt" described by Brennan is to insult the unqualified transcendence of God, who declines to embed his divinity in space and time, including in municipal nativity scenes, and rather seeks to raise us above such idolatry and paganism.

We can define the Puritans according to the content of their theology, but we can also define them according to the cosmological orientation that accompanied that theology. Thus

[108] Ibid., pg. 711 (J. Brennan, dissenting).

understood, Puritanism is the forbear of modern secularism. For it was the work of Religious Reform that first cultivated the kind of consciousness that made secularism possible, the buffered identity no longer beholden to an enchanted world of spirit forces—which Justice Brennan was fearing could be undermined the nativity scene and its mystical promptings. The immanent frame first developed as a religious aspiration, a way of paying homage to the true God. And what liberals uphold as religious neutrality exacts an analogous form of homage, because that true God has been secularized into the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity and its attendant conception of religious neutrality.

* * *

Writing for the Court in *Lee v. Weismann*, Justice Kennedy argued that ostensibly voluntary prayers at public school graduation ceremonies were unconstitutional because of the psychological coercion they exerted on non-believers. Against this outcome, Nathan Bishop Middle School had argued that its non-sectarian graduation prayers were "an essential part of these ceremonies because for many persons an occasion of this significance lacks meaning if there is no recognition, however brief, that human achievements cannot be understood apart from their spiritual essence."[109] Nathan Bishop Middle School thus operated with a pre-modern understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular, wherein the secular, temporal order is unintelligible apart from the eternal order that maintains it in being. While this argument did not overcome Justice Kennedy's worries about psychological coercion, he did acknowledge its weight, avowing that the decision was made difficult by the fact that "these short prayers and others like them at graduation exercises are of profound meaning to many students and parents throughout this country who consider that due respect and acknowledgment for divine guidance and for the deepest spiritual aspirations of our people ought to be expressed at an event as important in life as a graduation."[110]

However, these spiritual aspirations did not win the sympathy of Justice Souter, who did not see the Court's decision as a difficult one. Writing in concurrence, he applied the endorsement test and argued that the prayers were an unconstitutional endorsement, rather than a constitutional accommodation, of religion:

[109] *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577, 596 (U.S. 1992).
[110] Ibid., pg. 583-84.

> Religious students cannot complain that omitting prayers from their graduation ceremony would, in any realistic sense, "burden" their spiritual callings. To be sure, many of them invest this rite of passage with spiritual significance, but they may express their religious feelings about it before and after the ceremony. They may even organize a privately sponsored baccalaureate if they desire the company of like-minded students. Because they accordingly have no need for the machinery of the State to affirm their beliefs, the government's sponsorship of prayer at the graduation ceremony is most reasonably understood as an official endorsement of religion and, in this instance, of theistic religion.[111]

The religious students failed to demonstrate a genuine burden because whatever special religious meaning the graduation ceremony held for them could be acted upon elsewhere at another time. The spiritual significance they detected in the occasion was, after all, "invested" in it by the students themselves, who could therefore divest the occasion of that significance and re-invest it elsewhere in a private meeting. And so no real burden is being imposed when the school refrains from sponsoring the benediction. Had there been a genuine burden to relieve, the prayer might have qualified as constitutionally permissible accommodation of religion. But given that there was none, it was just gratuitous largesse and therefore endorsement, the establishment of religion.

But is Justice Souter's argument from investment itself religiously neutral? Does it rest on secular or religious premises? The argument in fact admits of both interpretations. On the secular one, the spiritual significance discerned by the students is an investment because natural science cannot recognize this significance as an intrinsic feature of graduation ceremony. Described naturalistically, the ceremony is just matter in motion—or perhaps the bonding ritual of large-brained primates. The belief that it carries an inherent (non-invested) spiritual significance is, like the belief that color consists in something beyond light waves of various lengths, a species of anthropocentric projection—albeit one we have it within our power to restrain, which is what Souter was asking the students to do.

We already know what the alternative religious justification would have to look like: The spiritual significance of the graduation ceremony must have been invested in it by the students because God in his absolute sovereignty and unqualified transcendence would not deign to make that significance readily available to human beings in the form of charged objects—or, as in *Lee*, a charged occasion. To the extent the students experience the occasion as religiously "special,"

[111] Ibid., pg. 630 (Souter, J., concurring).

this is because they have idolatrously invested it with a meaning that the unqualified transcendence of God withholds from it. To say that human achievements cannot be understood apart from their spiritual essence, as Nathan Bishop contended, is already to speak too highly of those achievements—the achievements of fallen sinners. The spiritual significance can be divested and reinvested because it is in truth merely a contrivance of a human will that sinfully conflates itself with the divine will—which does not leave the genuine article lying about in the world at designated locations, like nativity scenes and middle school graduations. On this alternative religious interpretation, Justice Souter could not treat the prayers as an accommodation to religion because this would be to imply that the spiritual significance existed objectively in the world and thereby to endorse the golden calf that the school had made of its graduation ceremony.

This religious rationale for church/state separationism—as a form of deference to the unqualified transcendence of God—would be plainly unconstitutional. Yet the secularist dispensation is functionally equivalent to this theocratic regime. And this is why whether one conceptualizes Justice Souter's argument naturalistically or theologically is ultimately irrelevant to religious conservatives' grievance. They object, not to the arguments' intellectual foundation in one or the other of these rationales, but to the cosmological orientation that undergirds both formulations. The issue isn't the religious or secular content of the argument, but the cosmological orientation implicit in the very making the argument.

This cosmological orientation is anathema to religious conservatives and their pre-modern sensibility. For the porous self of pre-modernity, writes Taylor,

> Things can show up as the loci of spirits or forces, and they do so unreflectively, as a matter of immediate "experience", because they are generally understood to do so. A powerful relic, from which I hope for the cure of a debilitating illness, doesn't appear to me as just another bone, about which one might emit the hypothesis that touching it may have curative power. It is phenomenally filled with this power.[112]

Such a relic could not show up as just another bone that might turn out to be different because not only human achievements, but also things in general, could not be understood apart from their spiritual essence. Pre-moderns could entertain no distinction between the relic itself and its spiritual significance. And so too with the traditionalists in *Weismann*, for whom the spiritual significance of the graduation ceremony was a "matter of immediate experience" and not the object of a hypothesis that can as easily be promulgated elsewhere. This was what made the ceremony a

[112] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 324.

charged occasion. The students understood the spiritual significance they encountered as inherent to the fabric of things—as emanating from a "locus of spirits of forces"—rather than as the product of their own investments. The investment of spiritual significance having been made by God himself, they could not be asked to divest that occasion of this significance—to peel it off from its physical substratum as it were—so as to reinvest it elsewhere. This was what made their burden real, precisely what Justice Souter refused to acknowledge.

Justice Souter frames his argument as a descriptive claim about the absence of any "realistic" religious burden. But this understanding of reality expresses a particular cosmological orientation. It is only by internalizing the buffered identity and its ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity that one becomes positioned to recognize one's investments as investments, and thereby assert control over them and not be burdened by them, religiously or otherwise. In insisting on a clean division between inner and outer, between one's religious feelings and the vessels into which they are temporarily poured, Justice Souter is impliedly endorsing this identity, imposing its disciplines and repressions as a normative regime. In declaring that there exists no "realistic" religious burden, he was implying that any burden felt by the students would have to be borne as the penalty for their failure to realize the full agency powers of the buffered self, for their surrender to anthropocentricity, the "consolations of an enchanted world" and the "promptings of the senses." It was this failure that caused the students to experience the graduation ceremony as they did. And the "religiously neutral" state cannot reward this. The students' religion failed to respect the immanent frame, and so Justice Souter would not respect it.

The subtraction account represents the agency powers exhorted by Justice Souter as springing from the brute courage to discard the teleological illusions of pre-moderns, who lacked the psychological autonomy or epistemic savvy to distinguish matter and meaning and thereby direct their investments of spiritual significance in an autonomous fashion. Justice Souter's demand that the students do so would then qualify as non-religious, because the ethos being endorsed is an essential human capacity, human nature unhampered by anachronistic illusions. It can be described in purely negative terms, as what remains upon casting these off. The ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity may carry certain *consequences* for religion, as Justice Souter's concurrence illustrates. But these are being imposed in the name of human self-transparency rather than another religion. Lacking an intrinsically religious meaning, the ethos is in this regard neutral.

But on the mutation counter-narrative, Justice Souter's argument from investment is the sublimation and secularization of a religious ideal. The argument may be neutral as God's existence. But it is not neutral as to what God would have to be like if he exists. If graduation prayers could not possibly qualify as a mere accommodation of religion, this can only be because God, if he exists, is not the kind of deity who would leave spiritual significance lying about in the world at designated coordinates, but rather one who commands us to behold the world in a disenchanted fashion. Justice Souter's argument is framed in secular terms. But his very ability to so frame it presupposes a consciousness that was historically shaped by religiously-driven hostility toward enchantment and charged objects. Justice Souter was not endorsing the god of the Puritans, the god of unqualified transcendence. But he was endorsing the disenchanted *consciousness*, the cosmological orientation, that developed alongside a faith in this God.

This legacy lives on in liberal attitudes toward traditionalists, whose inability to distinguish investments from non-investments liberals see as the idolatrous alienation of essential human agency powers. Liberals now conceive of these powers to be a self-contained feature of liberated human nature, as reason pure and simple. But they were first cultivated by religion, understood as a divine gift for whose neglect one would be answerable to God. And this genealogy is why liberals now attach a quasi-religious significance to these powers and condemn as "fanatics" all who abscond from the responsibilities they impose. Where the traditional Protestant conscience sees idolatry, the secularist sees bad faith or false consciousness. But these are just different languages for the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. And therein lies the conservative grievance. Where the Religious Reformers once felt themselves answerable to God for any failure to overcome idolatry, contemporary traditionalists are now told they will be answerable to liberals, who have secularized a particular understanding of God into the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity and the conception of religious neutrality that flows from it.

Martin Buber defines "religion" as "the sum total of the customs and teaching articulated and formulated by the religiosity of a certain epoch in a people's life." On the other hand, "religiosity" itself is man's "ever anew articulation and formulation of his feeling that, transcending his conditioned being yet bursting from its very core, there is something that is unconditioned." Religiosity is the will "to realize the unconditioned through… action," the

transposition of the unconditioned "into the world of man."[113] Seen in this light, what conservatives denounce as the "religion of secularism" is in fact the *religiosity* of secularism. The religion of secularism may lack any clearly delineated customs and teachings—Judge Hand's efforts to discover them notwithstanding—but it does, like its religious predecessors, represent a will to realize the unconditioned through action. It is the *will to realize the ideal of the buffered self*. The stance that recognizes spiritual significance as an investment isn't just a disinterested receptivity to "the facts," but a theistically-derived form of religious affirmation, one of Nietzsche's "old loves." This is why liberal neutrality is less than neutral in the eyes of religious conservatives, whose own cosmological orientation is tethered to a different understanding of divinity which is incompatible with this kind of affirmation. This secularization of an "old love" is why David Limbaugh objects that "[j]ust the slightest nod to a religion will be enough to trigger an Establishment Clause violation."[114] Though inaccurate as a characterization of Supreme Court precedent, the complaint articulates the underlying logic of the endorsement test: The slightest "nod" to religion is objectionable because that nod is concomitantly a *slight* to the god of unqualified transcendence as secularized by the immanent frame.

* * *

Justice Scalia observes that we "need not delve too far into modern popular culture to perceive a trendy disdain for deep religious conviction."[115] But this "trendy disdain" for religion is in fact only the latest iteration of a very longstanding trend. Lilla writes:

> The pagans did not know, or would not hear, the word of the true God and therefore their analysis of religion did not apply to genuine faith. God revealed his word in the Bible to help man overcome his tendency toward such "religion." Each of the biblical faiths sees itself as overcoming this human tendency, once and for all. Judaism portrays itself as the overcoming of Near Eastern paganism by God's chosen nation; Christianity is the overcoming of Jewish ritualism and narcissism, bringing salvation to all nations; Protestantism is the overcoming of the "whore of Babylon," which perpetuated pagan tendencies within the community of the faithful; Islam is the overcoming of infidelity to the only God and his prophet. We are not "religion," says each of the biblical faiths: we are truth.[116]

[113] Martin Buber, *On Judaism*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (Schocken Books, 1967), pg. 80.
[114] Limbaugh, *Persecution*, pg. xii.
[115] *Locke v. Davey*, 540 U.S. 712, 734 (U.S. 2004) (Scalia, J., dissenting).
[116] Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, pg. 68.

These biblical dispensations can be seen as differentiated from each other and from paganism according to how they draw the line between the spiritual significance that actually inheres in the world and that which has merely been invested there. To lapse into paganism and idolatry—these always being relative qualities—is to mistake the latter for the former, to misrepresent God as more immanent and so more qualified in his transcendence, more a part of the fabric of things, than he actually is. Just as the transcendence of the God of Israel was too qualified for Christianity, because too invested in Israel, so the transcendence of the God of the Catholic Church was too qualified for Protestantism, because too invested in that very Church. Judaism and Catholicism are deficient from a Protestant perspective because they have in the process of freeing themselves from the investments of pagans, articulated this freedom through hierarchies, laws, rituals, ethnic identifications etc., in which they subsequently became reinvested, thereby slipping back into the blindness from which true monotheism is intended to liberate us.

Secular liberalism is but one further step in this historical development, one further extension of a *religious* logic. Secular liberalism does not say "we are not religion; we are truth." But it does say "we are not religion; we are neutrality" or "we are not religion; we are non-exclusion." And as with the biblical dispensations, secular liberalism's self-interpretation is less than religiously neutral. For the mutation counter-narrative reveals Justice Souter's *Lee* concurrence to be the secularization of the religious impulse described by Lilla, that impulse taken to its logical conclusion. Secular liberalism draws the line between the religious and the non-religious as it does, not out of any culturally neutral lucidity, but because it represents the culmination of a historical process whereby the self became ever more buffered, ever more disposed to see as "investments" what earlier dispensations approached as simple reality. And this disposition carries a religious meaning, not as a theological tenet, but as a cosmological orientation, through the self's sense of its relationship to existence as such. Secular liberalism may see itself as "non-religious." But this judgment simply repeats the pretense of all the monotheistic faiths, which also believed they had transcended religion "once and for all."

Conservative claimants of cultural oppression cannot accept secular liberalism as neutral because their under-theorized understanding of the mutation counter-narrative reveals its neutrality to be a secularized and modernized outlet for the same impulses that were once channeled by Religious Reform. Taylor observes:

> It is a feature of the whole modern period… that social elites become detached from, even hostile to, much of popular culture, and attempt to make it over. One of the things they

> have frequently imposed is disenchantment, the suppression of "magic" and unofficial religion….
>
> Elites can often have tremendous power to impose these changes; their very secession from the popular forms can destabilize them. It is in the very nature of religion in an enchanted world, as I have just mentioned, that it defines the practice not simply or even primarily of individuals, but of whole societies.
>
> A religion of this kind is uniquely vulnerable to the defection of elites, since they are often in a position severely to restrict, if not to put an end altogether to the central collective rituals. If the king himself will no longer play his role, what can one do? Or if relics and statues of saints are burned, how go on drawing their power?
>
> Reform from on top can thus put a brutal end to a great deal of popular religion, without necessarily putting anything in its place for many of the people concerned. And this was not only an end de facto, it could also be seen as a kind of refutation. For those who believed in the influences and forces residing in certain places and things, the very fact that they could be destroyed without terrible retribution seemed to indicate that their power had fled. In this way, the reformers carried on a practice which had already been used time and again to spread the faith. When St. Boniface felled the sacred oak groves of the pagan Germans, just this demonstration of effect was what was intended. And the missionaries who followed the Conquistadores in Mexico hastened to destroy the temples and cultures of the natives, with the same intention, and similar results.[117]

Secularism is not the subtraction of this religious past but its latest recapitulation, one more extension of the hostility toward enchantment that once assumed an overtly religious form. The locus of concern is now middle school graduation ceremonies, not statues of saints or pagan forests. But the pre-moderns of today, just like those of yesteryear, continue to defend "the central collective rituals," continue to object that religion is not, as Justice Scalia says, a "purely personal avocation that can be indulged entirely in private." The reformers of the early modern period suppressed popular religion—the religion of charged objects, times, and events—not only in order to impose their distinctive religious beliefs but, as importantly, to impose their distinctive form of religious *consciousness*, the special dignity of the buffered self extricated from the enchanted world of pre-modernity. And this impulse continues today under the mantle of secularism. The opposition between religious conservatives and secular liberals is a reprise of what was originally an opposition between pre-modern and modern religion, between the more enfleshed religiosity of non-elites and the more excarnated one of the reformers. And this recapitulated an as yet older opposition between paganism and monotheistic hostility to idolatry. Seen in this light, today's religious traditionalists have been thrust in the role of conquered pagan tribes compelled to relinquish their charged objects (and events) to supervising missionaries—now the secular liberals of the ACLU.

[117] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pg. 440.

The epistemological framework—always a barrier to comprehending conservative claims of cultural oppression—prevents us from seeing this continuity. As we noted earlier, conservative claimants of cultural oppression associate liberalism with a new paganism that turns this-worldly goods into the objects of what should be a strictly other-worldly devotion. However, it is only along the axis of religious belief that secularists qualify as pagans, espousing as they do this-worldly or "man centered" objectives—like social justice—to the disregard of eternal ones. Along the axis of cosmological orientation, it is religious traditionalists who are comparatively pagan. It is they who embody the less disenchanted, less buffered consciousness that Christianity has always associated with paganism. Failing to recognize their own religion's drive toward disenchantment, conservatives interpret as nihilism what is just a further extension of the logic of Christianity. Blind to this continuity, they also cannot see that the arrogance and condescension of the liberal elites is only a novel variant of the arrogance and condescension that Christianity has always meted out to pagans. What they dismiss as the uprooted, *ad hoc* religiosity of liberalism enjoys an internal coherence as an expression of these drives.

The epistemological framework and its focus on belief conceals this internal coherence and with it the internal coherence of conservative claims of cultural oppression. Justice Stewart complained that the *Schempp* majority had commanded the creation of "an atmosphere in which children are kept scrupulously insulated from any awareness that some of their fellows may want to open the school day with prayer, or of the fact that there exist in our pluralistic society differences of religious belief."[118] But the "atmosphere" to which Justice Stewart objected ultimately refers, not to any inaccurate estimates of religion's social prevalence, but to the prestige of a particular cosmological orientation, which was being privileged through the argument that proscribing school prayer is religiously neutral. As with Justice Souter's concurrence, the *Schempp* Court's conclusions can qualify as neutral with respect to religion only once we assume a form of consciousness shaped by religion.

There was no act of affirmative hostility to religion because God, if he exists, as to which the Court could be neutral, is a god of unqualified transcendence, as to which it could not logically speaking be neutral. It is only because God does not avail students of a spatio-temporally embodied presence that he can be ignored without insult for the duration of the school day. Indeed,

[118] *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 242 (U.S. 1963) (Stewart, J, dissenting).

one perhaps venerates his unqualified transcendence most perfectly by so ignoring him, by rejecting the vain ostentation of daily school prayer and soberly devoting oneself to one's academic callings. This is not anyone's official position, of course. But these understandings are implicit on the level of social meaning. And this is why a secular education can "so structure" a child's life so as to place traditional religion at an artificial, state-created disadvantage.

Cosmological orientation allows us to conceptualize the problem of religion, and therefore of religious neutrality, not in terms of religious beliefs or doctrines, but in terms of competing forms of religiosity. These can adopt secular guises and thus persevere in existence even as the doctrines through which they were first expressed are discarded, deemed irrelevant to public life, or declared the objects of state neutrality. As with Justice Souter's argument, the subtext of *Schempp* is that any felt religious burden created by the ruling arises out of, and is therefore punishment for, a failure to embrace the buffered identity and the spiritual purity that would dissolve this burden. The regimentation of the school day is not simply a potential obstacle to the prayer one would otherwise undertake, but the objective embodiment of these social meanings, which is what allows conservatives to associate *not* praying with a "religion of secularism."

Anxieties about a religion of secularism appear outlandish only because the problem of religion has been framed in terms of beliefs rather than the cosmological orientation that is expressed through religious beliefs, through opposition to religious beliefs, or, indeed, *through the ideal of religious neutrality itself*. What was formerly a religious stance has simply mutated into the stance from which religious neutrality is gauged. Hostility toward idolatry has been transmuted into hostility toward religion, which has in turn been transmuted into liberal neutrality. Disagreements about the meaning of religious neutrality are the secularization of what first arose as religious disagreements. They are the sedimentation of the religious past in the jurisprudential present, the surreptitious replaying of a conflict between different kinds of believers as a conflict between different conceptions of what qualifies as neutrality between believers and non-believers.

5. Religious Neutrality as Ideology

Justice Brennan wrote that "historical acceptance of a particular practice alone is never sufficient to justify a challenged governmental action," for "no one acquires a vested or protected right in violation of the Constitution by long use, even when that span of time covers our entire

national existence and indeed predates it."[119] The point is intuitively compelling. It may be sociologically understandable that southern whites should have experienced desegregation as the imperious usurpation of their historic rights. But none would argue that this subjective sense of grievance affects the content of the Equal Protection Clause, however human and predictable it may be. And in the same vein, the judiciary would seem duty-bound to distinguish between mere customary expectations and the logical entailments of state religious neutrality. Even if school prayer was once taken for granted, the Establishment Clause may all the same have been violated.

However, the issue here is not *vested rights* but *established meanings*. History is relevant, not because there is presumption in favor of tradition as such, but because of what Taylor calls "the sedimentation of the past in the present," the *presently existing* social meanings entrenched by tradition. These impinge on the social and cosmological significance of what is transpiring *now*. This is what the mutation counter-narrative reveals and the subtraction account conceals. As we will now see, this concealing yields intellectual contradictions which betray the covert sectarianism of liberal neutrality.

The *Schempp* Court held that a religion of secularism would have to involve an act of affirmative opposition or hostility toward religion. But we do not ordinarily operate by the behavioristic logic that the Court took for granted. An individual who after being introduced to us then declines to extend his hand in order to shake ours is, by the Court's implicit logic, also innocent of displaying affirmative opposition or hostility. And yet we will respond with offense. We do not normally assume that others must have undertaken some physical motion before they can do something that "respects" us. Our introducee's motionlessness notwithstanding, he *did* do something to us—namely, he insulted us—even if that insult cannot be operationalized as the passing of matter through specified spatio-temporal coordinates. We are not pre-social agents living in a Hobbesian state of nature, but denizens of a conventional world built on common social meanings. It is on *their* basis, and not that of measurable physical activity, that we impute action or inaction to people.

This problematizes the *Schempp* Court's analysis. One can *choose* to describe "a refusal to permit religious exercises" behavioristically, as a mere non-occurrence. But one can also describe it as a positive action with a definite meaning, just like a refusal to shake hands. What Justice Stewart calls "permission of such exercises" might then be akin to a handshake, a form of

[119] *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 718 (U.S. 1984) (internal quotes and citation omitted) (Brennan, J., dissenting).

recognition—the "withholding of state hostility"—that falls short of anything like "endorsement," "approval," or "support." Which interpretation is the correct one? This question cannot even be *raised* if behavioristic categories of description are assumed, which is what the *Schempp* Court did in so quickly concluding that a religion of secularism would have to involve "affirmatively opposing or showing hostility to religion."

Liberals who would endorse this policy of "behavioristic preemption" in the Establishment Clause context will reject it in most others. For example, many liberals will condemn America's white majority and its government as racist, not for what they are presently doing or thinking, but precisely for what they are *not* doing and *not* thinking. In failing to redress the racial inequality bequeathed to us by slavery and Jim Crow, the government contributes to the perpetuation of structural racism, which white America prefers to ignore. In describing a certain kind of inattention to race as a form of affirmative hostility—in describing an ostensible non-happening as a happening—the structural racism label advances a moral and political thesis. A single-minded color-blindness that ignores our iniquitous history can qualify as a racism of sorts because the legacy of state-facilitated racial oppression "so structures"—to borrow from Justice Stewart—the lives of African-Americans that the mere failure to address race counts as the latest iteration of that racial oppression. It is this historical legacy that turns what would be mere inattention to race into an attitude *respecting* race. Conservatives disagree, naturally. But this is a question of political philosophy, and so a question that cannot be avoided by the reductive equation of social hostility with specific misdeeds. Liberals reject this equation in the race context. But they accept it in the religion context, dismissing the possibility that a public education might "so structure" the lives of religious students as to generate a form of anti-religious hostility that is irreducible to conscious, intentional animus.

The same intellectual contradiction crops up again with questions of economic equality. Unlike the radical libertarian, liberals do not reflexively equate government impartiality with government inaction and government favoritism with government action. Unlike libertarians, they do not characterize progressive taxation and the redistributive schemes it supports as a Robin Hood policy of robbing from some in order to lavish undeserved largesse upon others. The reason is that liberals do not draw the line between action and inaction along behavioristic lines, in reductive, physicalist or quasi-physicalist terms. This is exactly what libertarians do when they condemn income redistribution as a bureaucratic mugging: On pain of imprisonment, haves are compelled

to surrender their belongings to a frenzied mob of envious have-nots. The meaning of progressive taxation having been thus characterized, it is distinguishable from street crime only by its means, not its principle. But the liberal will retort that the libertarian simply begs the question. Whether coercive usurpation is to be measured according to the baseline of the "free market" or by some other baseline is a question of political philosophy about which people can reasonably disagree. It is our answer to this question that determines whether the welfare state is treating its citizens with equal respect or rationalizing legalized robbery as something nobler. The radical libertarian can make his arguments from the state of nature, of course. He is not, however, entitled to preempt argument by disguising a philosophical position as a straightforward descriptive claim, as he is often wont to do.

But is this not the logic of *Schempp*, a logic that disguises a substantive normative judgment about the respect owed religion in the claim that only an affirmative act could qualify as anti-religious hostility and that anything else is perforce neutral? The Court insisted that the state may not meddle in religious affairs, which sounds neutral indeed. But the *Lochner* Court explained itself in analogous terms, casting the regulatory state as a busybody meddling with the voluntary relations of industrious Americans. Allowing New York to regulate the working hours of bakers would mean that "[n]o trade, no occupation, no mode of living could escape this all-pervading power" of the legislature, as the state would "assume the position of a supervisor, or pater familias, over every act of the individual."[120] Liberals invoke the very same slippery slope reasoning when they suggest that any government involvement in religion is the beginnings of a slide into theocracy. In both cases, the line between the authoritarian and the non-authoritarian is being defined behavioristically—as a matter of physical action and without reference to any social background and the difficult philosophical questions it might raise.

Indeed, Justice Brennan's concurring argument in *Schempp* mirrors the rhetoric of ideological libertarianism:

> In my judgment the First Amendment forbids the State to inhibit that freedom of choice by diminishing the attractiveness of either alternative -- either by restricting the liberty of the private schools to inculcate whatever values they wish, or by jeopardizing the freedom of the public schools from private or sectarian pressures. The choice between these very different forms of education is one -- very much like the choice of whether or not to worship -- which our Constitution leaves to the individual parent. It is no proper function of the state or local government to influence or restrict that election. The lesson of history -- drawn more from the experiences of other countries than from our own -- is that a system

[120] *Lochner v. New York*, 198 U.S. 45, 59-62 (U.S. 1905).

> of free public education forfeits its unique contribution to the growth of democratic citizenship when that choice ceases to be freely available to each parent.[121]

But of course, the choice of whether or not to enroll in a private religious school is "very much" like the choice of whether or not to worship only in that neither is prohibited legally. This aside, the big difference is that while the choice to worship is available to rich and poor alike, the choice to enroll in a private school usually is not, and this is partly the consequence of state action. Justice Kennedy observed in *Alleghany*:

> In this century, as the modern administrative state expands to touch the lives of its citizens in such diverse ways and redirects their financial choices through programs of its own, it is difficult to maintain the fiction that requiring government to avoid all assistance to religion can in fairness be viewed as serving the goal of neutrality.[122]

With this economic backdrop appreciated, direct state subsidization of religious instruction could be conceived, not as unconstitutional favoritism toward religion, but as the rectification of what would otherwise be a state-generated injustice. This subsidization merely compensates for the tax burden which religious believers have incurred in support of secular public schools. Indeed, we might go a step further and conclude that state subsidization of religion is not only permissible but also mandatory if the state is "truly to be neutral in the matter of religion." Dissenting in *Barnette*, Justice Frankfurter warned that this followed logically from any judicial proscription against state orthodoxies: "What of the claim that if the right to send children to privately maintained schools is partly an exercise of religious conviction, to render effective this right it should be accompanied by equality of treatment by the state in supplying free textbooks, free lunch, and free transportation to children who go to private schools?"[123]

Elsewhere, liberals recognize that formal freedom is meaningless absent the economic wherewithal to use it, and believe that government should act to "render effective" rights that would otherwise be purely formal and thus empty. Why, then, will liberals not acknowledge the inadequacy of merely formal freedom when it comes to the religious upbringing of one's children? Why, more generally, are liberals disposed toward thin descriptions in the Establishment Clause context but thick ones in that of race or class? Liberals can recognize the operation of an orthodoxy when government does nothing to rectify the power imbalance between labor and capital. And this is because they recognize that the state is at the origin of the property rights that

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[121] *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 242 (U.S. 1963) (Brennan, J., concurring).
[122] *County of Allegheny v. ACLU*, 492 U.S. 573, 657-658 (U.S. 1989) (Kennedy, J., dissenting).
[123] *West Virginia State Board of Education. v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 660 (U.S. 1943) (Frankfurter, J., dissenting).

permit the imbalance. Why, then, do liberals not perceive an orthodoxy when the state channels the tax dollars of believers and non-believers alike toward the pedagogical preferences of the latter? Justice Brennan's rhetoric *glides over* the obvious fact that parents who would send their children to private religious schools face a financial hurdle that is not suffered by those content with a secular public education—just as cavalierly as the *Lochner* Court glides over the power inequalities between bakers and the bakeries that employ them. In short, the liberal elites offer religious conservatives the same purely formal equality they criticize as grossly inadequate in almost every other context.

The mutation counter-narrative reveals the hollowness of this equality in the context of religion. Liberals emphasize that the Establishment Clause prohibits theists and atheists alike from using the schools to disseminate their tenets. But it is also the case, as Anatole France remarked, that "in its majestic equality, the law forbids rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, beg in the streets and steal loaves of bread."[124] And like the rich in relation to the right to sleep under bridges, the religion of secularism does *not need* to formally inculcate its tenets in order to propagate itself, which is what Judge Hand and the *Smith* plaintiffs were ultimately arguing. For this religion is being advanced on the level of cosmological orientation, where the buffered identity is privileged as taken-for-granted and invisible. "Secular humanism" does not need to be promoted as a set of doctrines because it is already promoted through the immanent frame, the modern understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular, which affords liberals a form of religio-heroic self-affirmation unavailable to more "pre-modern" conservatives.

Justice Brennan observes that the First Amendment has the "purpose of requiring on the part of all organs of government a strict neutrality toward theological questions."[125] But it is only the modern, buffered self who is at liberty to reduce religion to theology, to a particular sphere toward which a "point of view" may be taken. And this possibility is itself the outcome of a *religious* development. The very categories through which Souter frames his argument from investment—"affirming one's beliefs" and "expressing one's religious feelings"—are products of a transformation in Western societies' understanding of God. The doctrinal emphasis on belief in the sense of self-consciously entertained propositions about the world is the outgrowth and secularization of Religious Reform, with its stress on inner piety and hostility to charged objects

[124] https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Anatole_France
[125] *School. District. of Abington Township. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 243 (U.S. 1963) (Brennan, J., concurring).

and enchantment. Secularism is covertly sectarian because the very *capacity* to conceptualize the problem of religious neutrality as secularists do was created by this religious development. If this goes unrecognized, this is because the subtraction account distortively projects what is the outcome of a religious process—the buffered identity and its excarnated conception of religion devotion—into its inception, making it the essence of religion as such. This is the hidden ideology of liberal neutrality, which thereby privileges one cosmological orientation over another.

* * *

Kathleen Sullivan writes that "[t]he right to free exercise of religion implies the right to free exercise of non-religion."[126] But the question is precisely whether "non-religion" is something to be *exercised* and not merely a *condition* to be in. On subtraction account, non-religion is just that, a condition ensuing from the overcoming of certain illusions or constraints. This being its status, religious believers can be asked to bear the costs of their own religiosity, as they would otherwise be demanding something—state support and validation—that non-believers neither request nor receive. But on the mutation counter-narrative, non-religion functions as a religious identity, because it is the secularization of the impulses of Religious Reform. As such, it is just like religion something that must be sustained in existence socially, and at the expense of competing religious impulses, which is what liberal neutrality facilitates.

The school district in *Smith* argued that "any isolation or alienation that can be shown cannot be the result of the textbook passages questioned, but are almost inevitably the result of clashes between views of biblical literalists and our modern society," for which reason "this is not a religious case, but is a case about clashes of cultures."[127] But as Becker observes:

> It is very important for students of man to be clear about this: culture itself is sacred, since *it* is the "religion" that assures in some way the perpetuation of its members. For a long time students of society liked to think in terms of "sacred" versus "profane" aspects of social life. But there has been continued dissatisfaction with this kind of simple dichotomy, and the reason is that there is really no basic distinction between sacred and profane in the symbolic affairs of men. As soon as you have symbols you have artificial self-transcendence via culture. Everything cultural is fabricated and given meaning by the mind, a meaning that was not given by physical nature. Culture is in this sense "supernatural," and all systematizations of culture have in the end the same goal: to raise men above nature, to assure them that in some ways their lives count in the universe more than merely physical things count.[128]

[126] Kathleen M. Sullivan, *Religion and Liberal Democracy*, 59 U. Chi. L. Rev. 195, 197 (1992).
[127] *Smith v. Board of School. Commissioners of Mobile County*, 655 F. Supp. 939, 948 (S.D. Ala. 1987)
[128] Ernest Becker, *Escape from Evil* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), pg. 4.

Secular liberals will reject the *Smith* plaintiffs' contention that humanists and fundamentalists have both "immanentized the eschaton." For secular liberals reject the theological premises that seem built into this very phrasing. But as Becker shows, the very same conclusion—namely, that secular liberalism does not occupy any "neutral ground"—also follows from a purely secular, anthropological account of religion, culture, and their continuities. What liberals call non-religion, religious conservatives call secular humanism. But however it be labeled, it is a hero-system that is as such *symmetrical* with traditional religion. Religion and non-religion are both competing systems of socially-sustained meaning-production supporting the "artificial self-transcendence" of their devotees. What conservatives may present in religious terms can always be translated into this secular language, at which point their grievances begin to make sense.

Offering a common liberal assessment of religion and its psychological appeal for believers, Marshall proffers:

> Religion protects the believer from the tremendum through doctrine and ritual. These devices work to create what James Breech has termed a "holding mode" of consciousness that functions by allowing the believer to anchor herself to what she sees as a stable and comprehensible God. By substituting doctrine and ritual for a naked encounter with the tremendum she is able to construct a sense of order and security that effectively hides the tremendum. The religious belief system, in essence, provides a psychological defense against overwhelming feelings of insignificance and chaos.[129]

Even if Marshall's characterization of religion is correct, there remains a question about whether religion is unique in these regards. I have been arguing that it is not, because the buffered identity and its ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity carry a similar appeal. Like religion, this ethos is a hero-system, a culturally cultivated formula for standing above mere matter. In the case of religion, this formula is provided by faith in God. In the case of secular liberalism, it is provided by the aura of power, dignity, and invulnerability radiated by the buffered identity, which is no less than traditional religion a "psychological defense against overwhelming feelings of insignificance and chaos." Religious conservatives do not accept liberal neutrality as genuine because they sense this aura, sense the identitarian undertones of liberals' devotion to secularism.

Seeing the world through "the eyes of Dewey," liberals are insensible to these undertones, living them as the invisible, taken-for-granted backdrop of things. Not recognizing the cultural contingency of their identity—the fact that it is "one historically constructed understanding of

[129] William P. Marshall, *The Other Side of Religion*, 44 Hastings L.J. 843, 861 (1993).

human agency among others"—they likewise cannot see the ways in which it is being promoted legally and institutionally. This is why Justice Souter could unselfconsciously represent a normative ideal, the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, as a neutral descriptive claim about what qualifies as a "realistic" burden, thus concealing his argument's moralistic subtext that those who do not embrace this ethos deserve no relief. Just like whites so privileged as to not see race, secular liberals are privileged to see non-religion where others, religious conservatives, must see religion or anti-religion.

Secular liberals may not *feel* themselves to be hostile to religion. But feelings are not dispositive. For these feelings are akin to the feelings of the white supremacist who maintains that he is hostile, not to blacks as such, but only to those blacks who overstep their place. And likewise, if secular liberals do not feel hostile to religion, this is because the religion they have in mind is the religion that has adapted itself to secularism. It is only *on the basis of their hostility toward the pre-modern sensibility that secular liberals can aver that they are not hostile to religion as such.* For what they see as "religion as such"—as opposed to the imperiousness that overlays it—is that religion which has adapted itself to the immanent frame. What hostility they do experience, they attribute, not to religion itself, but to the imperiousness of fundamentalists attempting to publicly enshrine their orthodoxy. But as we now see, this very dichotomization is the product of certain religious developments, which is why fundamentalists derive no solace from it.

Hero-systems might clash through the felling of sacred oak groves or the raising of Aztec temples. But they can also clash through the imposition of liberal neutrality. The liberal will say that only the former constitutes affirmative hostility or opposition to religion. But the relevance of this distinction depends on whether the stakes are conceptualized behavioristically or at the level of the hero-system. St. Boniface's ultimate goal wasn't the physical destruction of trees but the symbolic destruction of the hero-system they helped actualize for the pagan Germans. The former was merely a means to the latter, the aim of undermining the pagans' psychological ability to persevere in their paganism, and then replacing this with another religion. It was an "assault on their faith," as conservatives now say. Secular liberalism is engaged in an analogous project, because its version of religious neutrality institutes the immanent frame, which grew out and continues to exude a particular brand of spirituality.

Whereas earlier agents of disenchantment had to fell forests in order to realize their ends, secular liberalism dispenses with such crudity and achieve the same through the disavowed layers

of social meaning that conservatives can sense but are at pains to articulate. Secular liberals will defend the separation of church and state as a preemptive measure against the political havoc that their entanglement has often brought. But beyond this, strict separationism is part and parcel of a spiritual stance, of a hero-system. The lawyers of the ACLU understand themselves as motivated by their political and constitutional ideals. But church/state separation, religious neutrality, and kindred concepts describe the wellsprings of liberals' motivations in "innocently thin terms," concealing the spiritual aspirations that spur the political principles.

Not recognizing this, liberals believe they submit to a certain self-restraint that conservatives stubbornly refuse. Lilla writes:

> Human beings everywhere think about the basic structure of reality and the right way to live, and many are lead from those questions to speculate about the divine or to believe in revelations. Psychologically speaking, it is a very short step from holding such beliefs to being convinced that they are legitimate sources of political authority. We know this from our history books and, in recent years, from world events. In the West people still think about God, man, and the world today—how could they not? But most seem to have trained themselves not to take that last step into politics. We are no longer in the habit of connecting our political discourse to theological or cosmological questions, and we no longer recognize revelation as politically authoritative. That we must rely on self-restraint should concern us.[130]

But we do not rely only on self-restraint. Secularism is possible, not because individuals have restrained themselves from acting on the political implications of metaphysical beliefs, but because secularism functions as a hero-system and spiritual identity that transforms the very nature of belief and its relationship to the self as a whole. This undermines the liberal diagnosis of Christian conservatives. On the subtraction account, these are people who haven't resigned themselves to the self-restraint on which all depend and others dutifully accept. But this conclusion is upended by the mutation counter-narrative. Seen in its light, religious conservatives aren't attempting to obtain something "extra," something over-and-above what they will permit their fellow secular citizens, but merely attempting to persevere in their hero-systems, as are secular liberals. The conflict is not between those who would imperiously foist their personal theological predilections on others and those so disciplined as to resist this urge, but between two competing systems of meaning-production, both of which are equally imperious on this level of analysis.

If this symmetry goes unrecognized, this is because *we have yet to fully secularize our understanding of secularity itself,* by taking secular naturalism to its logical conclusion and

[130] Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, pg. 7

describing secularism, not as a lofty, disembodied ideal like self-restraint, but as an evolved cultural phenomenon, a socially and physiologically embedded consciousness and ethos. Thus approached, secularism is, to borrow from Kimball, a "realm of habit, taste, and feeling," a repository of Nietzsche's "old loves," a symbolic action system that is always in potential collision with competing such systems. Here as elsewhere, liberalism cannot take its naturalism to its logical conclusion because that logical conclusion is exactly where conservative claims of cultural oppression *begin to make sense*. Liberals cannot understand these claims because their identity calls on them to deny the very existence of that to which these claims are *reactions*, the secular liberal hero-system and its imposition on the unwilling.

6. The Shadow of God

Being sublimated, intellectualized, and etherealized, the hero-systems of the Left elude easy detection. They have been "compressed" into naturalism, which provides them with plausible deniability. As we saw, however, this compression is occasionally betrayed by "wrinkles," those unusual instances on which the requirements of a hero-system enter into conflict with those of naturalistic lucidity, revealing the ways in which the latter functions as a façade for the former. And as we shall now see, the problem of religious neutrality creates its own such wrinkles, which here as well are the consequences of liberalism's inability to take its naturalism to its logical conclusion, where the ostensible asymmetries between liberals and conservatives are dissolved.

Stephen Smith observes that the concept of church-state separation makes much less sense in a modern context than in the medieval culture where it originated. In the pre-modern context, the church was seen as a separate sphere lying beyond the jurisdiction of the state because "it is the representative of a different realm of reality that transcends the secular and hence the state." But this rationale for church-state separation no longer makes sense within a modern understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular, where "there *is* no realm of reality—no realm cognizable by the state, at least, that transcends the secular."[131] Since the religious no longer qualifies as a "special" realm in the eyes of the state, Smith argues that it would be more sensible to classify religious citizens and groups as just "one class among many that the government would

[131] Stephen D. Smith, *The Disenchantment of Secular Discourse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), pg. 134.

need to deal with."[132] A church should be treated no differently than the Rotary Club or the Red Cross, as a group which the state may both regulate and assist without special constitutional hindrances.[133] Though churches are distinguished by religious convictions that may be absent elsewhere, Smith's suggestion is that these convictions can be treated as purely secular phenomena, because the modern understanding of the secular lacks a metaphysical basis for seeing them in any other way.

The contradiction Smith highlights is that while liberals accept, and indeed insist upon, the immanent frame, they refuse to conceptualize the meaning of religion itself within that frame—as a secular, natural phenomenon which, though possibly amenable to some broader transcendent/supernatural contextualization, does not require one in order to be understood in the first instance. Whether or not a church occupies a metaphysical plane distinct from that of a rotary club should be of no concern to the state, something that the religiously neutral state can neither affirm nor deny. Why, then, do liberals insist on treating religious institutions as somehow "special," the subject of special rules and special worries?

This rather abstract question was concretized in *Kiryas Joel v. Grummet*, where the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional a New York statute carving out a school district specifically intended to accommodate the unusual educational needs of the Satmar Hasidim, a community of Yiddish-speaking ultra-Orthodox Jews who seek to insulate themselves from the modern world.[134] While most Satmar children attended private religious schools, the disabled ones required special services these could not provide. And so they were sent to attend public schools in the surrounding school district, where they could obtain the needed services. This proved disastrous, however, given what their parents described as "the panic, fear and trauma [that the children] suffered in leaving their own community and being with people whose ways were so different."[135] The New York legislature responded by creating a new school district whose boundaries coincided with those of the village the Satmar had incorporated under a general law. This, explained the Governor of New York, was a "good faith effort to solve the unique problem" of "providing special education services to handicapped children in the village."[136] Being a creature of the state, the school district

[132] Ibid., pg. 133.
[133] Ibid., pg. 134.
[134] *Board of Education of Kiryas Joel v. Grumet*, 512 U.S. 687, 691 (U.S. 1994).
[135] Ibid., pg. 692.
[136] Ibid., pg. 693.

couldn't offer religious instruction, of course. But it would at least allow the disabled children to remain among their own kind.

Writing for the Court, Justice Souter concluded that this school district violated the Establishment Clause. The state had delegated "its civil authority to a group chosen according to a religious criterion," resulting in an impermissible "fusion of governmental and religious functions."[137] The religious criterion was not expressly spelled out in the legislation, whose text delegated political authority on the basis of geography rather than religion. But under the circumstances, it was plain that the law "effectively identifies these recipients of governmental authority by reference to doctrinal adherence."[138] Dissenting, Justice Scalia argued that Souter's findings were quite peculiar:

> On what basis does JUSTICE SOUTER conclude that it is the theological distinctiveness rather than the cultural distinctiveness that was the basis for New York State's decision? The normal assumption would be that it was the latter, since it was not theology but dress, language, and cultural alienation that posed the educational problem for the children. JUSTICE SOUTER not only does not adopt the logical assumption, he does not even give the New York Legislature the benefit of the doubt.[139]

And so Justice Souter's position boiled down "to the quite novel proposition that any group of citizens (say, the residents of Kiryas Joel) can be invested with political power, but not if they all belong to the same religion."[140] He was announcing that while the state may enact special measures to accommodate the unique needs of cultural groups like "nonreligious commune dwellers, or American Indians, or gypsies," it may not show "the same indulgence towards cultural characteristics that are accompanied by religious belief." This was to arbitrarily disfavor believers as against non-believers,[141] to subject religious practitioners "to a unique disability based solely on their status as religious practitioners."[142]

Why, in other words, was the Court unwilling to conceive of the Satmars' problem as a secular one, as a cultural rather than religious conflict? To be sure, the Satmars themselves do not distinguish between theology and culture, as did Justice Scalia. Their cultural characteristics are not merely "accompanied" by religious beliefs but moreover permeated by them. Their religion

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[137] Ibid., pg. 702 (internal quotes and citation omitted).
[138] Ibid., pg. 699.
[139] Ibid., pgs. 740-41 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
[140] Ibid., pg. 737 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
[141] Ibid., pg. 737 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
[142] Ibid. pg. 741 (internal quotes and citation omitted) (Scalia, J., dissenting).

is the reason why their culture takes the shape it does. Still, the Court might have looked upon this intertwining as just a *cultural* fact. Yes, the Satmars' cultural insularity originated in their understanding of God. But this understanding can still be seen as just part of an overall way of life, part of a *secular* phenomenon that is from the state's perspective commensurable with the folkways of native Americans, gypsies, and non-religious commune dwellers. Satmar culture takes its shape from the Satmars' understanding of God. But the culture of nonreligious commune dwellers may take its shape from their disbelief in, or indifference to, God. These origins, it seems, should be a matter of indifference to the religiously neutral state, which is required to see the world, including the Satmar, in non-religious terms.

David Sloane Wilson argues that the theory of evolution requires us to conceive of religions as adaptive systems that coordinate individual behavior in socially desirable ways in order to produce various forms of "secular utility":

> [P]eople who stand outside of religion often regard its seemingly irrational nature as more interesting and important to explain than its communal nature. Rational thought is treated as the gold standard against which religious belief is found so wanting that it becomes well-nigh inexplicable. Evolution causes us to think about the subject in a completely different way. Adaptation becomes the gold standard against which rational thought must be measured alongside other modes of thought. In a single stroke, rational thought becomes necessary but not sufficient to explain the length and breadth of human mentality, and the so-called irrational feature of religion can be studied respectfully as potential adaptations in their own right rather than as idiot relatives of rational thought.[143]

Religious groups should be conceived of as organisms, as a "social physiology" through which gods, rituals, and sacrifices provide socially-minded behaviors with a meaning and motivation they would otherwise lack.[144] Calvinism for example, could serve as a form of social organization in Calvin's Geneva because it "sanctifies the mundane occupations of life," allowing a baker or a farmer to "feel an element of holiness similar to that of a priest because all are ministers, performing organ-like functions to sustain the body of the church."[145] Calvinism and other religions draw on elements of human psychology that pre-exist religion—like repentance and forgiveness—in order to create new socially unifying systems that coordinate individual behaviors in socially beneficial ways.[146]

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[143] David Soan Wilson, *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), pg. 122.
[144] Ibid., pg. 86.
[145] Ibid., pg. 96.
[146] Ibid., pg. 101.

Wilson believes this approach to religion undermines any rigid dichotomies between religious unifying systems and other, secular such systems. Whether or not they involve a supernatural element, all unifying systems sometimes subordinate factual realism to practical necessity.[147] What is unique is not religion but science, which is distinguished by a single-minded commitment to factual realism at all costs. But this commitment separates, not the secular from the religious, but science from every other form of human endeavor.[148] And so there is no reason to single out religion as uniquely irrational—or uniquely anything. Supernatural beliefs may not withstand scientific scrutiny. But the difference between supernatural beliefs and the reality-falsifying heuristics of secular unifying systems is really one of degree. Both make trade-offs between factual realism and practical necessity. And the wisdom of these trade-offs must in both cases be evaluated one-at-a-time in the context of a unifying system's overall adaptive function. As Becker says, culture is the religion, and this is because both serve the same biological functions.

Why, then, are "scientific-minded" liberals so apprehensive whenever it appears that religion is being singled out for some special benefit? The state cannot avoid becoming involved in the promotion of evolved adaptive systems, of which religion is only one variant. So why did Justice Souter treat the Satmar school district as a case of religious favoritism when he might have approached it along Wilson's lines, as an attempt to assist what is one "social physiology" among others? This is more or less what Justice Scalia was proposing. The evolutionary perspective recognizes no distinction between the Satmar and Scalia's gypsies and non-religious commune dwellers. The former's theology as just one adaptive mechanism among others, a conclusion that is consistent with a fully secularized conception of the secular, which encompasses the whole of reality and not just the fallen realm of earthly matter.

Not only did religious neutrality not *compel* Justice Souter's conceptualization, it arguably prohibited it. As an organ of the secular state, the Court was obligated to conceptualize the Satmars' predicament in secular terms, as a problem of cultural alienation whose possible religious significance is immaterial. Upholding the constitutionality of the school district would have represented, not religious favoritism, but, on the contrary, a secular-minded and scientifically-motivated *indifference* to what the faithful believe about their religion. That religion will have been approached naturalistically, in wholly secular terms, as an evolutionarily adaptive system of

[147] Ibid., pgs. 41-42.
[148] Ibid., pg. 230.

meaning-production and behavior-coordination whose ultimate metaphysical status is irrelevant. Justice Souter's argument seems "secular." But it is in fact inconsistent with the modern understanding of the secular, which precludes approaching religion as a special sphere with special rules. Souter concedes nothing to religion politically or financially, but he concedes a great deal to it *conceptually*, because he concedes the existence of a religious *reality* that cannot be cognized in secular terms.

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What accounts for this tension? The explanation is provided by Justice Stevens's concurring opinion. Rather than addressing the Satmar children's social difficulties by more aggressively cultivating respect for diversity, the state had, complained Souter,

> …responded with a solution that affirmatively supports a religious sect's interest in segregating itself and preventing its children from associating with their neighbors. The isolation of these children, while it may protect them from "panic, fear and trauma," also unquestionably increased the likelihood that they would remain within the fold, faithful adherents of their parents' religious faith. By creating a school district that is specifically intended to shield children from contact with others who have "different ways," the State provided official support to cement the attachment of young adherents to a particular faith.[149]

Justice Scalia dismissed these concerns as "less a legal analysis than a manifesto of secularism." For Justice Stevens was announcing "a positive hostility to religion -- which, unlike all other noncriminal values, the State must not assist parents in transmitting to their offspring."[150] This positive hostility consists in Stevens's assumption that religious values pose a special hindrance to the mental freedom of their adherents as other cultural values do not. This is a common liberal assumption. While liberals recognize that we are all shaped by our social environments, they also believe that religious environments are uniquely constraining, impeding the liberal virtues to a greater extent than secular ones. All social environments influence, but it is only religious environments that risk "cementing" us to our worldviews, Justice Stevens's concern. Such cementing offends the buffered identity. And this is why liberals will not treat the Satmar as a secular phenomenon, because the Satmar reject the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity in terms of which the secular has been defined.

[149] *Board of Education of Kiryas Joel v. Grumet*, 512 U.S. 687, 711 (U.S. 1994) (Stevens, J., concurring).
[150] Ibid., pg. 749 (Scalia, J., dissenting).

This ethos is why Steven Gey defends French laws restricting religious clothing in public schools as creating a "buffer zone between an individual student and the social matrix in which the student's family and religious community apply intense pressure to conform to a specific religious regimen."[151] Gey believes that the same principle also justifies prohibiting religious clubs in American public schools. Though these clubs operate after school hours and under private sponsorship, their goal is "to present young children with an all-encompassing and exclusive perspective on the world."[152] Prohibiting them will be denounced as an infringement on religious freedom, but Gey believes it is consistent with liberals' commitment to critical thinking. The proscription targets, not religious liberty, but "coercive religious inertia," a "subtle pressure directing religious students not to deviate from a religious path already chosen."[153] Far from burdening religious liberty, prohibiting these organizations would expand "the horizons of children who would otherwise be cloistered in a monotone world of predefined absolutes."[154] It would merely free children "from their most immediate influences" in order to develop "intellectual muscles" and a "spirit of independence."[155] Just like Justice Stevens, Gey sees himself as concerned, not with the substantive content of religious values—as to which the state must remain neutral—but with the constraints that religious subcultures impose on the ability to freely choose those values.

However, these worries are incongruous with a genuinely naturalistic understanding of both the religious and the secular as alternative "social physiologies." Students with strong religious upbringings may appear "cloistered," as Gey says. But a naturalistic approach to human nature tells us that we are all cloistered by synaptically encrypted identities and the social physiologies from which they derive. Gey celebrates the "intellectual muscles" instilled by a secular education and stunted by a religious one. But a fully neurologized political science reveals that the intellectual muscles of believers and non-believers alike operate by a logic that is less flexible and open-ended than is suggested by grand talk of a "spirit of independence"—which bespeaks an outdated "Old Enlightenment" view of human nature. Whether religious or secular, we are all "neurally bound" to our worldviews, as Lakoff says—or all "cemented" as Justice

[151] Steven G. Gey, *Free Will, Religious Liberty, and a Partial Defense of the French Approach to Religious Expression in Public Schools*, 42 Hous. L. Rev. 1, 26 (2005)
[152] Ibid., pg. 26.
[153] Ibid., pg. 25.
[154] Ibid., pgs. 50-51.
[155] Ibid., pgs. 68-69.

Stevens says. Here as elsewhere, liberalism will not take its naturalism to its logical conclusion, to where it exposes the symmetries that conservatives understand intuitively.

Observing that the religion clauses of the First Amendment presuppose some distinction between genuinely religious beliefs and those resting on political or philosophical foundations—that is, "ideologies"—Stanley Ingber writes that religion "provides a cosmology or explanation of the meaning of life and the ordering of the universe by answering questions many feel are beyond the capacities of reason and logic."[156] Whereas ideology is based on "reason, rationality, and sensory experience,"[157] religion is based on a transcendent reality, the "peculiar otherness – the extraordinary, momentous, set-apart quality of sacred (or taboo) acts and objects."[158] But these distinctions are incongruous with what Becker describes as the anthropological consensus and what Wilson defends as the evolutionary perspective. *Every* social physiology, whether secular or religious, will involve a transcendent element that resists the scrutiny of individual reason. For individual reason is always being guided by vast unconscious neural networks ordered by a complicated array of ill-understood cultural forces. The sense that the mental freedom of religious believers is uniquely compromised, that there exists some rigid dichotomy between the autonomous self-directedness of secularists and the heteronomous blindness of religionists, is simply incompatible with a fully naturalistic, New Enlightenment understanding of human beings, as organisms whose inner workings have been profoundly structured by their social and cultural environments.

If liberals nevertheless insist that the mental freedom of religious traditionalists is uniquely constrained, this is because they have defined mental freedom in accordance with the dominant dispensation. The cultural transmission of religious values could strike Justice Stevens as uniquely coercive because the Satmar are being seen through the lens of the buffered distance, as the less fortunate peoples of a barbarian past. If they are "cemented" to their worldviews as others are not, this is because they are porous selves who have not internalized the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, and instead surrender to the "promptings of the senses" and the "consolations of the enchanted world." What Stevens represents as a concern about the degree of freedom that Satmar culture allows its children was a rhetorically palatable way of objecting to

[156] Stanley Ingber, *Religion or Ideology: A Need Clarification of the Religion Clauses*, 41 Stan. L. Rev. 233, 278 (1989)
[157] Ibid., pg. 279.
[158] Ibid., pgs. 285-86.

this culture itself in the name of the buffered distance—which liberals believe affords them a superior, more self-transparent and self-regulating form of human agency.

This is liberal ideology, however. Secular liberals claim to promote "freedom." But this freedom describes a specific ethos that is just as "fixed" as are Satmar sensibilities. "Freedom" is always the freedom to operate within a hero-system. While liberalism holds itself out as the transcendence of all hero-systems, no social unifying system can deliver the absolute self-possession promised by the buffered identity, a promise inconsistent with these systems' embedded socio-biological nature. This undermines any sharp dichotomies between the self-awareness of the properly civilized and the self-oblivion of those who refuse the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity and instead cling to the teleological illusions of a religious past. If secularists think inconsistently with their own understanding of the secular in refusing to look upon religion as a secular phenomenon, this is because that understanding is not, in fact, fully secularized. Rather, it is inflected by a religiously-inspired hostility to the enfleshed pre-modern religiosity for which the Satmars stand as symbols. Our contemporary understanding of the secular grew out of Religious Reform. And this legacy's ongoing influence is betrayed in liberal attitudes toward religious conservatives, who are seen to embody all the vices that Religious Reform once associated with paganism. This is why liberals can feel comfortable projecting what is a human constant—being "cemented"—onto religious conservatives alone, because this cementing is but a secularized translation of what was once condemned as fallenness into idolatry.

* * *

This same less than fully secularized understanding of the secular was at work in Justice Brennan's concern that the nativity scene in *Lynch* constituted a "mystical recreation" of the birth of Jesus that might "prompt" in the casual passerby a sense of "simple awe and wonder appropriate to the contemplation of one of the central elements of Christian dogma -- that God sent His Son into the world to be a Messiah." However, it is not obvious why any such prompt should be attributed to the state action. One would think that whether or not a nativity scene exerts this power to stimulate feelings of "simple awe and wonder" will have something to do with the identity of the casual passerby in question. To the extent a sense of mystical awe is in fact prompted, this is presumably because the passerby is already religious. For this is what gives a nativity scene a genuinely religious meaning. By contrast, an atheist could be expected to view the nativity scene

as a purely secular phenomenon, as a collection of plastic figurines rather than a mystical recreation eliciting religious awe. In both cases, the religiosity of the display is a function of the identity of the passerby, and not an inherent quality of the state action, which considered in itself seems neutral.

Why, then, does Justice Brennan follow Justice Souter in assigning a religious significance to something that can be as easily understood in purely secular terms? We could, as Smith observes is required by the modern understanding of the secular, look upon state sponsorship of a nativity scene as akin to state sponsorship of St. Patrick's Day festivities. In both cases, the state is sponsoring something that will not be valued equally by all taxpayers. But this unfairness can itself be seen as a secular phenomenon, as a matter of cultural preference. Why should non-believers feel put upon when they can conceive of whatever mystical awe was being "prompted" in their fellow citizens as the product, not of divine revelation, but of a biological process, the exuberance of some onlookers' hyper-active agency detection devices—a purely secular phenomenon. A state action must have a secular purpose to be constitutional. But this secular purpose can simply be the stimulation of an evolutionarily ingrained disposition in those seeking that stimulation, just as the secular purpose of St. Patrick Day's festivities is to satisfy an affinity for things Irish. Whether the state action was religious or secular would then be in the eye of the beholder. Why not define *this* as true pluralism and neutrality?

We already know the reason. If secularists refuse to conceptualize the infusion of mystical awe detected by Justice Brennan in secular terms—as a natural phenomenon commensurable with the enthusiasm stimulated by a St. Patrick's Day celebration—this is because secular wariness about religion recapitulates Religious Reform's hostility to the pagan idolatry of earlier, more "enfleshed" forms of Christianity. What worries Justice Brennan isn't the state coercion of mystical awe, but the mystical awe itself. And this is because his secularism is inflected by religiously-inspired hostility to enchantment and porousness.

Justice Scalia was discerning this hostility when he objected to the *McCreary* Court's judgment that the Ten Commandments display indicated "a purpose to [call on] citizens to act in prescribed ways as a personal response to divine authority." Disputing this interpretation, Justice Scalia retorted that the reasonable observer "would no more think himself 'called upon to act' in conformance with the Commandments than he would think himself called upon to think and act like William Bradford because of the courthouse posting of the Mayflower Compact--especially

when he is told that the exhibit consists of documents that contributed to American law and government."[159] Whether with nativity scenes or Ten Commandments displays, the sense that passersby may feel "called upon" to experience strong religious feelings is the buffered self's anxiety before the porousness of the porous one, before the threat which traditional religion poses to the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity. This is what the liberal elites are actually upholding in upholding religious neutrality, the purpose of which is to *police* those who resist that ethos.

If these elites distrust the decision-making capacities of the "ordinary American," this is because the ordinary American is seen to lack the disengagement and self-possession that would enable him to look upon the Ten Commandments or a nativity scene as secular phenomena. Both are potential "charged objects." And secular liberals are haunted by the prospect that these objects will provide religious conservatives with an infusion of religious meaning that validates them in their pre-modern sensibility, their continued resistance to the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. There would be no religious endorsement to the extent a state action is merely acknowledging religion's historical relevance. But this assumes that we first conceive of religion in secular terms, subsuming it fully within the immanent frame. And this is precisely what religious conservatives cannot, given their pre-modern sensibility, be entrusted to do. This distrust has a religious subtext, the legacy of its religious origins, as the secular analogue of traditional religious fears about a fall into paganism and idolatry, the will's surrender to sin and temptation, which are now associated with religion itself.

John Gray observes that "[u]nbelief is a move in a game whose rules are set by believers."[160] And this is because religion now provides the lens through which even secularists understand religion and the problem of religious neutrality. As we saw with Gillespie in Chapter Five, "[w]hat actually occurs in the course of modernity is thus not simply the erasure or disappearance of God but the transference of his attributes, essential powers, and capacities to other entities or realms of being." The concept of religious neutrality is one of these other realms of being, because it is an outlet for a religiously-inspired ethos, a secularization of the what was once formulated as the unqualified transcendence of God.

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[159] *McCreary County v. ACLU*, 545 U.S. 844, 905 (U.S. 2005) (Scalia, J., dissenting).
[160] John Gray, *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2007), pg. 126.

Nietzsche writes that we do not yet grasp the momentousness of the Death of God, because we do not as yet grasp "how much must collapse now that this faith has been undermined because it was built upon this faith, propped up by it, grown into it."[161] He explains:

> After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the ways of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. –And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow too.[162]

There can be a "shadow of God" because contemporary secularism is not what naturally ensues upon some religiously neutral liberation of timeless human faculties, but rather the immanetization and internalization of a particular kind of monotheistic religiosity. Secularism may reject monotheism *qua* religious belief, but it incorporates it *qua* cosmological orientation, which is what casts the shadow of God on liberal neutrality. This shadow is why liberals cannot look upon religion as a secular phenomenon. For the secular is defined, not by any culturally neutral naturalism or pluralism, but by *resistance* to the pre-modern sensibility, resistance to the "embodied feelings of the higher" by which traditionalists risk being overtaken. The ordinarily unarticulated social meaning of religious neutrality is to delegitimize these embodied feelings, which is why conservatives are correct to detect anti-religious hostility where they do.

They were reacting to this hostility in December 2008, when Fox News's Bill O'Reilly spearheaded a campaign against an atheist placard that had been placed adjacent to a privately-sponsored nativity scene on the grounds of the Washington State capitol. The placard, which exalted reason and disparaged religion, had been sponsored by the Freedom from Religion Foundation, an advocacy group for atheists, agnostics and other freethinkers. And O'Reilly objected to the Governor's decision to allow the sign to be placed near the nativity scene rather than elsewhere on the capitol grounds, where it would not function as a standing rebuke to the nativity scene. Atheists and liberals predictably responded that this reaction betrayed the dogmatism of those who fear a free market of ideas: "If the state is going to permit religious believers to erect a nativity scene on public grounds, then it cannot stand in the way of those who would challenge its message." But the mutation counter-narrative reveals this as disingenuous. The purpose of the atheist sign wasn't to challenge an opposing viewpoint but to sustain a semantic

[161] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 279 (Sec. 343).
[162] Ibid., pg. 167 (Sec. 108).

context that *reduced* the meaning of the nativity scene to a viewpoint—that would impose the immanent frame. And this was in order to suppress the nativity scene's power as a charged objects and source of spiritual sustenance. The atheist placard was facilitating, not a free exchange of ideas, but one cosmological orientation's transgression against another. What secularists framed as a struggle between dogmatism and free thought, religious conservatives experienced as the buffered identity's aggression against the porous one, and this was why they claimed cultural oppression.

This aggression is concealed by the epistemological framework. Here as elsewhere, that framework obscures the problem of cosmological orientation and, with it, the subtle changes of social meaning which liberals attempt to impose on conservatives. The rhetorical advantage this gives liberals is illustrated when Macedo takes on Stephen Carter's argument that mere tolerance for religious believers is inadequate because:

> Tolerance without respect means little; if I tolerate you but do not respect you, the message of my tolerance, day after day, is that it is *my* forbearance, not *your* right, and certainly not the nation's commitment to equality, that frees you to practice your religion. You do sit by my sufferance, but not with my approval.[163]

But Carter's argument, retorts Macedo, is "strangely confused," because it improperly conflates citizens' duty to respect each other's *rights* with a duty to approve of the *choices* made within the limits of those rights.[164] And this duty has no place in a pluralistic society. Conflating "intellectual disagreement with physical vulnerability," Carter is attempting to protect, "not the freedom to disagree vigorously, but the psychological fragility and sensitivity of religious believers, a sensitivity that is inconsistent with vigorous disagreement."[165] However, the disrespect felt by religious believers cannot be dismissed as just the travails of vigorous disagreement, because this disrespect reflects how the buffered identity, as a value-charged understanding of human agency, must look upon the porous one—not merely as mistaken, but as fundamentally deficient in the agency powers that define fully realized human nature. Having been so judged, traditionalists cannot but exude an "animal-pole negative magnetism" to liberals. And in demanding equal respect from liberals, traditionalists are reacting to precisely this. If they feel that they sit by the

[163] Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust*, pg. 222.
[164] Ibid., pg. 223.
[165] Ibid., pg. 223.

"sufferance" of liberals, this is because they correctly sense that their pre-modern sensibility is a continuing affront to them.

Here as elsewhere, liberals' conservaphobia originates in the challenge that conservatives pose to the distortive naturalization of the buffered identity. Michael Novak writes:

> Many Americans may have a bad conscience about their rejection of the traditional views of Judaism and Christianity. They know deep down that something vital and true springs from those roots, and still moves them. On the other hand, they have 'modernized' in certain parts of their mind, and they do not know how to put this modernization together with their traditional longings. They hate those who exacerbate this tension in their own souls.
>
> You will note, for instance, the difference between American and European atheists. The Americans who reject religion do so with a kind of emotional violence, and at the same time are quick to boast about their own moral superiority… By contrast, the European atheist is much more self-assured, and often manifests the sly smile of the complete cynic and nihilist, who happily believes in nothing at all.[166]

Novak articulates the tension within the souls of secularists in epistemological terms, as a conflict between their rejection of traditional religious values and a suppressed faith in them. But in the context of the mutation counter-narrative, the dissonance originates in human nature's default porousness, of which religious conservatives are unwelcome reminders. This being our default state, what the buffered identity is called upon to resist—the porous submersion of subjectivity in nature—arises from *its own nature* (whether through our HADDs or some other mechanism). The modern, buffered identity is a cultural superimposition on a layer of human experience that resists its conventions. And this renders it a precarious thing. "Anti-religious hostility" is a response to this precariousness, an attempt to suppress liberals' own default porousness and so preempt any potential regression toward it—a danger that can never be permanently eliminated. Like the ropes that bound Odysseus to his ship's mast amidst the songs of sirens, this hostility is the glue that binds liberals to the buffered identity, which cannot be sustained by "enlightenment" alone. Just as homophobia may be driven by an inner conflict with one's own homosexual inclinations, which are disingenuously externalized and then opposed as an alien force, so the anti-religious hostility of liberals arises from the buffered self's need to deny its own default porousness. Anti-religious hostility is how liberals project this porousness onto traditionalists.

Macedo is correct that vigorous disagreement shouldn't be conflated with physical vulnerability. But religious conservatives' allusions to physical vulnerability bespeak the fact that

[166] Qt. in Limbaugh, *Persecution*, pg. 331.

religious disagreement is never a purely theoretical matter. The "disagreement" of liberals is directed, not only at arguments, but also at identities. Physical violence may be out of the question, but secularist attitudes embody another kind of violence to which religious conservatives are keenly attuned—the sublimated, intellectualized, and etherealized violence of which liberalism is uniquely capable. Though operating under the veneer of dispassionate ratiocination, this violence is but the deceptive and self-deceptive mimicry of that dispassionate ratiocination, whose social meaning is in fact highly aggressive. If Carter's argument is "strangely confused," the strangeness and confusion is, here as elsewhere, attributable to the rhetorical supremacy of the buffered identity, which forces conservatives to articulate cosmological grievances in epistemological terms, at which point they are easily discredited as outlandish, conspiratorial, or authoritarian.

7. Concluding Reflections

Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore observe that while "America's original founding as a Christian state is central to the Christian Right's conspiratorial view of history," this view stands truth on its head.[167] The Christian Right's claim that the Constitution was originally envisioned as a Christian document is belied by what was a "concerted campaign to discredit the Constitution as irreligious, which for many of its opponents was its principle flaw."[168] Such attacks were commonplace, both at the founding and later. The "no religious tests" clause generated a firestorm of controversy at state ratification conventions.[169] Running for president, Thomas Jefferson was vilified as anti-Christian in a fashion reminiscent of today's politics.[170] The War of 1812 was cited by some as divine retribution for the country's failure to acknowledge God in the Constitution.[171] There was also a campaign during the Civil War to directly insert God and Christ into the Constitution by enacting a Christian amendment.[172] And it took nearly a century for opponents of Sunday mail to achieve their goal and finally persuade Congress to close all post offices on Sunday for good in 1912.[173]

[167] Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore, *The Godless Constitution: A Moral Defense of the Secular State* (New York and London: W.W. Nortion & Company, 2005), pg. 22.
[168] Ibid., pg. 28.
[169] Ibid., pg. 32.
[170] Ibid., pg. 88.
[171] Ibid., pg. 105.
[172] Ibid., pg. 144.
[173] Ibid., pg. 142.

Taken together, these facts give the lie to the Christian Right narrative. The Christian Right insists that the country was erected on Christian foundations that were later undermined by the machinations of secular humanists. But this rhetorical strategy is the result of fundamentalists' repeated failure to reverse what they once acknowledged were the Constitution's secular foundations. Retaining the hope that the Constitution might be suitably amended, earlier iterations of the Christian Right could concede the historical truth of a godless Constitution. But their contemporary heirs have lost this hope and instead engage in revisionist history. It is they, not secularists, who have pitted themselves against America's founding vision.

Kramnick and Moore's argument is entirely cogent. But conservative claims of cultural oppression are distorted articulations of conservatives' under-theorized understanding of the mutation counter-narrative. Seen in this light, what religious conservatives hold out as America's Christian founding is a symbolic representation for their sense of a time of lost origins, their visceral conviction that liberalism inauthentically betrays something that lives in us all. And this something is revealed by the mutation counter-narrative, which explains the sense in which liberalism constitutes an artificial or inauthentic overlay on something older. Religious traditionalists may downplay the secularism of America's founding generation. But this downplaying is a distorted articulation of their primordial intuition that we are porous by default and that what now presents itself as essential human nature—the buffered identity—is a cultural superimposition upon this default condition. This is why traditionalists believe they represent the common sense of humanity—the "center" rather than the "fringe" as the Websters put it—and that "religious neutrality" unjustly compels them to undergo a cognitive dissonance with which the liberals who reject that common sense are not burdened. Taken literally, the Christian Right narrative is largely false. But taken allegorically, it is a distorted articulation of this "higher truth."

Contemporary liberals cannot grasp this higher truth, however. Lilla writes that while the Anglo-American liberal tradition of religious tolerance has been successful on its own terms, it lacks the resources to grapple with the full psychological complexity of religious commitment:

> Success has bred complacency. The success is real: contemporary liberal democracies have managed to accommodate religion without setting off sectarian violence or encouraging theocracy, which is a historic achievement. But accommodation is not understanding. Though Britain and the United States can pride themselves on having cultivated the ideas of toleration, freedom of conscience, and a formal separation of church and state, their success has depended on a wholly unique experience with Protestant sectarianism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Anglo-American liberal tradition lacks a vocabulary for describing the full psychological complexity of its own

> religious life, let alone for understanding the relation between faith and politics in other parts of the world.[174]

If the Anglo-American liberal tradition lacks a vocabulary for describing the full psychological complexity of America's religious life, this is because it lacks a vocabulary for describing the pre-modern sensibility and the cultural transformations through which the modern emerged from it. The liberal tradition may have brought old conflicts between Protestants, and then between Protestants and Catholics, to a successful resolution. But there is, I have been arguing, an equally venerable struggle between moderns and pre-moderns, which is in turn a variant of an as yet more venerable struggle between monotheists and pagans. This conflict is not officially announced. But it transpires through the imposition of the immanent frame and conservatives' resistance to it. This is the root of the psychological complexity that liberalism is ill-equipped to understand.

Dissenting in *McCreary County v. ACLU*, Justice Scalia objected that the outcome was untrue to the original understanding of the Constitution. The Court's assertion that the Establishment Clause "lacks the comfort of categorical absolutes" was merely a "lovely euphemism" for the fact that "sometimes the Court chooses to decide cases on the principle that government cannot favor religion, and sometimes it does not."[175] Nothing, argued Scalia "stands behind the Court's assertion that governmental affirmation of the society's belief in God is unconstitutional except the Court's own say-so, citing as support only the unsubstantiated say-so of earlier Courts going back no further than the mid-20th century."[176] Against this accusation of fecklessness, Justice Souter retorted:

> The fair inference is that there was no common understanding about the limits of the establishment prohibition, and the dissent's conclusion that its narrower view was the original understanding… stretches the evidence beyond tensile capacity. What the evidence does show is a group of statesmen, like others before and after them, who proposed a guarantee with contours not wholly worked out, leaving the Establishment Clause with edges still to be determined. And none the worse for that. Indeterminate edges are the kind to have in a constitution meant to endure, and to meet "exigencies which, if foreseen at all, must have been seen dimly, and which can be best provided for as they occur."[177]

Justice Souter's argument is that the Establishment Clause has proven recalcitrant to consensus because opinion was divided at the founding, because subsequent opinion has been divided as to the nature of these original divisions, and because unprecedented fact patterns have further

[174] Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, pg. 304.
[175] *McCreary County v. ACLU*, 545 U.S. 844, 891 (U.S. 2005) (Scalia, J., dissenting).
[176] Ibid., pg. 890 (J. Scalia, dissenting).
[177] Ibid., pg. 879 (quoting *McCulloch v. Maryland*, 17 U.S. 316 (1819)).

ambiguated the ambiguity that was there from the beginning. What Justice Scalia unfairly dismisses as judicial caprice, then, is only an honest acknowledgment of this ambiguity, which the quest for original understanding disingenuously elides. However, there is a third way of accounting for these "indeterminate edges." While Justice Souter's argument is reasonable as far as it goes, it also obscures something essential. The indeterminacy he discerns is the result, not only of divided opinion at the founding, but also of tensions that are inherent to the *development of monotheism itself*, tensions concerning the relative immanence or transcendence of God. These tensions now structure the very categories through which the problem of religious neutrality is framed, determining the kind of god with respect to which the state is being neutral. It is these *theological* tensions which undergird the indeterminate edges discerned by Justice Souter.

Concurring in *Schempp*, Justice Brennan wrote that the "difficulty of delineating hostility from neutrality in the closest cases" cannot justify making exceptions to the principle of strict neutrality.[178] However, the problem presented by the Establishment Clause isn't a proliferation of "close cases" where a generally clear concept becomes difficult to apply but, more profoundly, the fact that our conceptions of neutrality find no justification outside themselves. Neutrality with respect to religion has proven to be an intractable problem because any conception of neutrality must lend surreptitious expression to the very things with respect to which judicial impartiality is ultimately being expected. These aren't our religious or non-religious beliefs but our religious or "non-religious" identities, the cosmological orientations according to which God is pre-reflectively felt as more immanent or more transcendent. The meaning of the secular being a creation of religion, ostensibly secular reasoning can never entirely escape its origins. If secularization is always the secularization of something that is not itself secular, then we can expect that *arguments about the meaning of religious neutrality can always be reconstructed as theological claims* about the relative immanence or transcendence of God.

Secular liberals and religious conservatives keep talking past one another, not because one party obtusely refuses to see the truth, but because they are *different kinds of people* who process the world, and therefore the meaning of religious neutrality, in very different ways. What each side represents as its attempt at logical persuasion is, on a deeper level and more thickly-described, a demand for *conversion*, not to a theological tenet, but to a cosmological orientation, a way of

[178] *School District of Abington Township. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 245-46 (U.S. 1963) (Brennan, J., concurring).

being that implicates us in a pre-conceptual understanding of the relation between self and world and, through this, of the relation between the religious, the non-religious, and the anti-religious.

This is why the Establishment Clause has engendered an interminable dance of claims and counterclaims about who is the oppressed and who is the oppressor, about who is the free-thinker and who is the zealot. It is the reason why secular liberals and religious conservatives seem to differ, not only in their narrowly prescriptive claims but, as significantly, in their basic characterizations of the status quo, in their understandings of their own and one another's motivations, and in their assessments of the present distribution of suffering as between believers and non-believers. Is it non-believers who suffer discrimination at the hands of would-be theocrats? Or is it secular humanists who promote an insidious program of rigorous ideological indoctrination? The intractability of these disagreements is no accident, but a logical reflection of the fact that there is no religiously neutral vantage point on religious neutrality. Whether the cessation of organized school prayer effectuates that neutrality or establishes a religion of secularism is a function of God's relative transcendence or immanence, a question whose answer is built into our very sense of self, into an inarticulate sense of the human-divine nexus that is always implicit in human consciousness.

Stolzenberg notes the paradox that while some criticize the ideals of liberalism as overly "thin" for resting on moral abstractions like tolerance, reason, and choice, others attack liberalism on opposite grounds, casting these ideals as "the socially produced, enforced, and reproduced artifacts of a liberal culture"—as "thick" values imperiously foisted on those with a different conception of the good. The puzzle, then, is how liberal institutions can be at once "both thick and thin," how what seem like deracinated abstractions can function as substantive cultural impositions.[179] The solution to the puzzle lies in the mutation counter-narrative, which explains how liberalism can be thin on the level of belief and yet thick on the level of cosmological orientation, which is where the substantive cultural imposition is taking place.

This is what drove the Websters' complaint that the contested textbooks had characterized the values they were encouraging in their children as "our values" when those values had in fact emanated from Jesus Christ. The textbook's characterization of the Webster's values as their own might seem religiously neutral because it takes no position on whether these values are *also* God's

[179] Nomi Maya Stolzenberg, *"He Drew a Circle that Shut Me Out": Assimilation, Indoctrination, and the Paradox of a Liberal Education*, 106 Harv. L. Rev. 581, 663 (1993).

values—no position on the relative merits of the closed and open construals of the immanent frame. But this kind of neutrality *comes too late* for the Websters, who were oppressed by this very conceptualization of the problem. In rejecting the home economics textbook's remarks about "our" values, the Websters were objecting that what they experience as their participation in a transcendent dispensation was being articulated naturalistically, as the reproduction of settled values and attitudes via the socialization of malleable children.

They objected to talk of "our" values, not because they were imperiously demanding that the state attribute these values' ultimate authorship to Christ, but because this talk was incongruous with their basic experience of the world as pre-modern Americans. The latter feel connected to Christ, not by way of any causal hypotheses about the origin of their values, but by way of immediate attunement, which is what the textbook passages were seeking to erode. In representing the Websters as the substance rather than the accident, as the subject rather than the predicate, the textbook was propounding what was religiously discriminatory ontology. The religion being impugned by the passage wasn't a set of values and beliefs, but the horizon of meaning against which the Websters' values and beliefs made sense to them. Their grievance wasn't the imposition of a secular belief system to the implied disparagement of a theistic one, as Judge Hand framed it, but the imposition of one spirituality to the exclusion of another.

And yet traditionalists have always been at a loss to articulate the nature of this imposition. Conservative claims of cultural oppression sound extravagant and outlandish because they anthropomorphize into quasi-conspiratorial schemes what is in fact the cultural logic tracked by the mutation counter-narrative. If the claimants seem benighted, they are so, not relative to secular liberals, but relative to the level of philosophical abstraction that is actually needed to claim cultural oppression cogently. Liberals who would accuse religious conservatives of being incipiently theocratic need only aver that they have not engaged in affirmative hostility or opposition to religion. By contrast, religious conservatives who would expose the machinations of a "religion of secularism" must also expose the subtraction account as a cultural distortion that conceals the implications of the mutation counter-narrative. This is a much taller order, which is why conservative claims of cultural oppression are an "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" operating "beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity."

Here as elsewhere, this problem is rectified by a more fully theorized understanding of the mutation counter-narrative, because this enables us to *conceptualize traditionalist hostility toward*

secularism in secular rather than religious terms. While traditionalists will be dismissed as demanding some special deference toward their religious preferences, these demands can always be reframed in secular terms as an expression of human nature's default mode of consciousness. If the counterculture of the Left called for sexual liberation, so the counterculture of the Right now calls for teleological liberation, for the right to relate to the world in a pre-modern fashion without penalty or stigma. For those standing outside the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, secular liberalism is a narrow-minded Puritanism that fanatically targets our natural impulses toward teleological thought and feeling. What qualifies as neutrality from within the agency-structure of the buffered self is, from within that of the porous one, the imposition of an alien identity—not a Platonic ideal but a particular form of embodied human activity.

Church-state separation is part and parcel of the civilizing process, part and parcel of a disciplinary regime, part and parcel of liberalism's "hidden curriculum." The high ideal of religious neutrality is, in its unacknowledged subtext, a policing of social reality that upholds some identities while stigmatizing others. This is what the mutation counter-narrative reveals and the subtraction account conceals, and the reason why that narrative enables conservatism to appropriate liberalism—to become the Left in order to accuse the Left of becoming the Right. The mutation counter-narrative is to the Establishment Clause what the studies of segregation-induced low self-esteem cited in *Brown v. Board of Education* are to the Equal Protection Clause. Human nature and its cultural development being what they are, what was previously designated as equality—neutrality between believer and non-believer—can no longer enjoy that appellation.

Chapter Ten

Conclusion: Liberalism De-Intellectualized

I have been seeking, not to promote some ultimate judgment toward conservatives and their claims of cultural oppression, but rather to develop a morally neutral language that can articulate the nature of this oppression. This language, we have seen, reveals that many seemingly unrelated social controversies are all local eruptions of a conflict broader than our present political languages are suited to capture. Remarking on the culture wars' apparent intractability, James Hunter observes:

> No one is so naïve as to believe that under present circumstances the consensus pursued could be or even should be some form of consensus of values and beliefs. The divisions, at this level, are firm and unyielding. If any consensus is achievable it could and should first be about how to contend over the moral differences that divide—a public agreement over how to publicly disagree. When consensus is realized at this plane, genuine disagreement becomes an accomplishment; authentic debate becomes a virtue.[1]

If a consensus of values and beliefs has proven elusive, the reason isn't anyone's needless obtuseness, but that ostensibly intellectual disputes originate in a clash of hero-systems, in something deeper than values and beliefs. Appiah writes that "[c]lashes between, say, traditionalist and libertarian perspectives express clashes about what people care about more—social stability or expressive freedom; the management of society or individual liberty. They're not over what the world is like but what the world ought to be like."[2] However, my argument has been that the clash between liberal elites and ordinary Americans isn't strictly about either facts or values in any narrow sense. Rather, it concerns rival authenticity narratives each originating in different, historically constructed ways of being human. This is what the parties are ultimately disagreeing about, and why they cannot disagree without becoming disagreeable. The rancor and demonization aren't an unfortunate glitch in what could have been dispassionate deliberation, but a feature of the authentic debate to which Hunter asks us to aspire. Whatever the issue, these authenticity narratives were always the true bone of contention. At stake is neither what the world is like nor what it ought to be like, but what *we* are like, what it *means* to be an authentic human

[1] James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (Basic Books, 1991), pg. 318.
[2] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton University Press, 2005), pg. 58.

agent. "Values" and "beliefs" are simply how these more fundamental understandings are articulated.

Frank observes that conservatives see liberalism as "in power whether its politicians are elected or not," even when Republicans control all three branches of government, and even when "no Democratic presidential nominee has called himself a liberal since Walter Mondale."[3] For conservatives, liberalism is "beyond politics, a tyrant that dominates our lives in countless ways great and small, and which is virtually incapable of being overthrown."[4] This work has been an extended effort to explain the sense in which these perceptions are true notwithstanding their facially conspiratorial character. Conservatives' visceral conviction that liberalism is an omnipresent force that slyly insinuates itself into all the minutiae of our lives is indeed paranoid and conspiratorial once liberalism is intellectualized as a moral philosophy or personalized as a political movement, reduced to the opinions of a Walter Mondale. However, I have sought to *de-intellectualize* liberalism by tracing its roots to the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, of which the opinions of a Walter Mondale are merely manifestations and symbols. The "liberalism" that besieges conservatives isn't the conspiratorial machinations of nefarious East Coast elites, but these disciplines and repressions. The elites have simply internalized these to a greater degree than the "ordinary American," who retains a residue of the pre-modern impulses which modern disciplinary societies seek to extirpate.

Becker writes that, having "made a peculiar kind of investment in the dualism of self and body," the human animal must also "extend and establish his characterological preferences into an ontology, a philosophy of existence."[5] I have endeavored to articulate liberalism and conservatism as rival such ontologies. The buffered and porous selves are ultimately different configurations of "the dualism of self and body," different configurations of the relationship between inner and outer and between mind and body. These configurations are our cosmological orientations. And ostensibly intellectual disagreements originate in a clash of these. It is cosmological orientation, not facts or values, that explains why conservatives condemn liberals as arrogant, pretentious, and alienated whilst liberals condemn conservatives as fearful, primitive, and authoritarian. These judgments follow *logically* from what are opposed ways of "invest[ing] in the dualism of self and

[3] Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2005), pg. 119.
[4] Ibid., pg. 119.
[5] Ernest Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning* (New York: The Free Press, 1971), pg. 37.

body"—the true subject of culture wars vehemence. Liberalism is "beyond politics" because the culture wars are most fundamentally a contest *of human make-ups* rather than beliefs or ideologies, a contest to promote the social conditions under which certain make-ups rather than others are socially nourished and vindicated.

To conceive of the culture wars thusly is to see reason where we previously saw unreason. Conservative claims of cultural oppression seem contrived, histrionic, or downright hallucinatory because they anthropomorphize, and thereby moralize, what are really structural features of modernity. Liberals are merely the agents of these forces, those having most deeply internalized them, and not their directors or originators, as conservatives are wont to cast them. This insight allows us to transcend what I dubbed the "fundamentalist" misinterpretation of conservative claims of cultural oppression and see these claims in a new, more intelligible light. This light is ultimately cast by the mutation counter-narrative, which reveals the contemporary culture wars to be a latter-day recapitulation of the struggles by which the modern first emerged from the pre-modern. The conflict between liberalism and conservatism is a struggle between those who embrace and those who resist the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. This is what undergirds the ostensibly narrower conflicts—from religious neutrality and progressive education to distributive justice and the definition of rape—which must all be understood in this context. While the official bones of contention of today's culture wars are novel and modern, their structural logic reflects historical forces that long predate them. The "elitism" of liberals isn't a "personal taste and pretension" of ambitious Bobos, but a structural feature of modernity that runs against the grain of default human nature and is accordingly resisted by conservatives. Indeed, this default nature is what conservatives are ultimately trying to conserve.

Liberals dismiss conservatives' ad hominem attacks on liberals aren't intellectually idle distractions. But they are in fact expressions of this hidden, pre-political logic. Sowell writes that "[c]ultural wars are so desperate because they are not simply about the merits or demerits of particular policies" but "about the anointed's whole conception of themselves—about whether they are in the heady role of vanguard or in the pathetic role of pretentious and self-infatuated people."[6] Conservatives see liberals as in the "pathetic role of pretentious and self-infatuated people" because they *refuse to take the buffered identity at face value* and instead dismiss it as the

[6] Thomas Sowell, *The Vision of the Anointed: Self-Congratulation as a Basis for Social Policy* (Basic Books 1995), pg. 250.

"deceptive and self-deceptive histrionic mimicry" of the transcendence of all hero-systems. As relative pre-moderns, conservatives can see liberalism "from the outside," as a historically constructed form of human agency that mistakes itself for essential human nature liberated from the confining horizons of a benighted past. Liberalism does not truly liberate us from the authoritarianism and religious zeal that liberals associate with this past, however, because it merely sublimates and intellectualizes them, generating a new social identity on this basis. Conservatives' ad hominems all originate in this visceral intuition, the silent wellspring of their claims of cultural oppression. I have now raised this wellspring into relief, so that what was previous only felt can now also be thought. By showing how these dynamics recur again and again in a host of ostensibly heterogeneous contexts, I have revealed how the ostensible heterogeneity conceals repeating patterns that give the culture wars a concrete, unifying meaning.

This is what the de-intellectualization of liberalism facilitates. To de-intellectualize liberalism is to see both liberalism and conservativism, not as opposed sets of values, but as natural phenomena that can be described in a morally neutral language, as different ways of "function[ing] bodily in the physical and social world," to use Lakoff's expression. In every case, liberals' incredulity toward conservative claims of cultural oppression reflects their refusal to de-intellectualize liberalism, to take their naturalism to its logical conclusion, where it would reveal symmetry underneath asymmetry. Liberals cannot recognize this symmetry because, as the secularization of the Christian soul, the buffered identity has a powerful sense of itself as existing "above" matter and animality, and thus above the brutishness of conservatism, the relic of a barbarian past that liberals have overcome but to which less evolved souls stubbornly cling. Yet we have seen that this dichotomization between the self-aware reflexivity of liberals and the impulsive brutishness of conservatives is at odds with liberals' official commitment to a secular, scientific worldview—which taken to its logical conclusion calls liberals' claims to moral superiority into question. This dichotomization is the perennial subtext of liberal civility. Yet this civility is a social illusion. As physiologically embedded hero-systems, neither liberalism nor conservatism can be truly above matter and animality. But as the dominant dispensation, liberalism has been able to so define itself socially. And conservative claims of cultural oppression seek to undermine this liberal privilege.

I will now conclude this work by tying its recurring themes to recent developments in evolutionary psychology. For these developments raise the same questions posed by conservative

claims of cultural oppression, which we will now see follow logically from premises that liberals cannot so easily dismiss. Evolutionary psychology can de-intellectualize liberalism because it forces us to approach liberalism as a natural phenomenon, as a particular way for culture to interact with biology. In facilitating this insight, evolutionary psychology illuminates the normative dilemmas that are being implied in conservative claims of cultural oppression, which, as we have seen, manifest conservatives more viscerally naturalistic cognition of human beings. This cognition reveals symmetry where liberals see asymmetry, revealing liberalism as no less a cultural imposition than conservatism.

The over-intellectualization of liberalism, I proceed to argue, has its corollary a certain liberal ethnocentrism, which blinds liberals to the ways in which conservative claims of cultural oppression express the shared humanity that evolutionary psychology and the anthropological record alike reveal. It is because liberals associate this shared humanity exclusively with the buffered identity that they cannot recognize how this identity is being imposed by a particular culture and how some human make-ups suffer from this imposition while others may thrive on it. Conservatives may unjustly caricature liberals, but these caricatures arise logically from this inequality, which liberals can come to recognize only inasmuch as they can also recognize their ostensible moral superiority as a kind of privilege. The challenge that conservative claims of cultural oppression pose to liberalism therefore arises from liberals' own commitment to equality. Liberalism challenges us to recognize similarity underneath difference, and this is also the challenge of conservative claims of cultural oppression. Rising to this challenge isn't a purely intellectual exercise, but also a broadening of one's identity, which is what liberals must undertake if they are to understand conservative claims of cultural oppression as a particular expression of a shared humanity.

1. Moral Taste Buds

Psychologist Jonathan Haidt observes that the mainstream of academic psychology now approaches conservatism as "a partially heritable personality trait that disposes some people to be cognitively inflexible, fond of hierarchy, and inordinately afraid of uncertainty, change, and

death."[7] Standing at the forefront of this school, John Jost and his colleagues describe "the core elements of conservatism as opposition to change and acceptance of inequality." Conservatism, says Jost, is "associated empirically with a set of traits that make conservatives look rigid, authoritarian, and dumb: dogmatism, intolerance of ambiguity, high need for order, low cognitive complexity."[8] Conservatism is not a principled philosophy but "a particular pattern of epistemic and existential motives," a "form of motivated social cognition."[9] So taken for granted is this view among academic moral psychologists that they now treat conservativism with "open expressions of self-righteousness and contempt."[10]

Haidt argues that this contempt is misguided, however, and that it betrays the blinkered way in which academic moral psychology conceptualizes the scope of "real" morality. Beginning with Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg, academic psychology has predefined morality as rules of justice while dismissing authority, hierarchy, and purity as mere social conventions that impede "real" morality. The academic consensus is that children reach moral maturity, not by indoctrination into local mores, but by grappling with real moral dilemmas, which teach them to rise above mere habits and conventions and treat others fairly as equals.[11] Working in this tradition, Elliot Turiel emphasized children's inborn capacity to differentiate between genuine morality and arbitrary social conventions about things like food or clothing. The children he interviewed understood that some rules could be suspended by their teacher. But they also recognized that other rules occupy a higher status, that pushing a peer off a swing remains immoral irrespective of whether their teacher allows it, and even if doing so is customary at another school. These children grasped intuitively that while some rules vary across time and space, "rules that prevent harm are special, important, unalterable, and universal."[12]

Some of these liberal moral psychologists prioritize justice, rights, and fairness while others emphasize welfare, care, and harm-avoidance—like Carol Gilligan, who associated the latter with the "different voice" of women. But notwithstanding this internal rift, this tradition is united by the bedrock conviction that "morality is about *treating individuals well*."[13] Its followers

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[7] Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), pg. 2.
[8] Ibid., pg. 113.
[9] Ibid., pg. 101.
[10] Ibid., pg. 101.
[11] Ibid., pg. 9.
[12] Ibid., pg. 10.
[13] Ibid., pg. 10.

uniformly distinguish between harm-tracking morality and non-harm-tracking social conventions. Only the former is "real" morality. Since social justice is a harm-tracking morality that prioritizes the right treatment of individuals, social justice is "morality writ large."[14] And so the conservatives who oppose the social justice agenda are *ipso facto* immoral.

However, Haidt observes that these assumptions are contradicted by the anthropological record. Richard Schweder discovered that Turiel's results couldn't be reproduced in non-Western cultures. Indian practices "related to food, sex, clothing, and gender relations were almost always judged to be moral issues, not social conventions." Unlike their American counterparts, Indian children did not assign any special status to harm-tracking morality or distinguish it from mutable social convention. For them, "the social order is a moral order." These children "were not figuring out morality for themselves, based on the bedrock certainty that harm is bad." Instead, they showed that "almost any practice could be loaded up with moral force."[15] What Turiel mistook for a human universal was in fact specific to the "extraordinary historical exceptions" of the modern West, which somehow managed to "strip down and thin out the thick, all-encompassing moral orders" that anthropologists have discovered everywhere else.[16]

Moreover, this divide between West and non-West is to a degree replicated *within* Western societies. In one study, Haidt investigated the opinions of upper-middle-class University of Pennsylvania students about the morality of eating the family dog after it was accidentally run over or of fornicating with a dead chicken in the privacy of one's own home. Like everyone else, the Penn students were repulsed by these images. But their commitment to "enlightened," harm-tracking morality overrode their gut reactions. So long as no one was being harmed or coerced, they were unwilling to condemn these practices morally.[17] By contrast, the working-class Philadelphians Haidt also interviewed unequivocally condemned such conduct as morally wrong. They attached moral significance to their feelings of disgust and did not distinguish between merely disgusting, taboo-violating behavior and genuinely immoral—i.e., harmful—conduct. Also unlike the Penn students, they were comfortable invoking religious and community values to defend their moral positions.[18]

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[14] Ibid., pg. 101.
[15] Ibid., pg. 17.
[16] Ibid., pg. 12.
[17] Ibid., pg. 96.
[18] Ibid., pg. 100.

Haidt argues that these differences have an evolutionary origin. Developments in evolutionary psychology suggests the existence of six distinct psychological foundations of morality. The first three—"harm/care," "fairness/justice," and "liberty/oppression"—are fairly universal. Only a sociopath is entirely devoid of them. Harm/care reflects "[t]he long history of mammalian evolution" which "has shaped maternal brains to be sensitive to signs of suffering in one's offspring." This sensitivity then became "extended beyond the mother-child relationship so that all normally developed individuals dislike seeing suffering in others, and have the potential to feel the emotion of compassion in response."[19] Fairness/justice developed from "[t]he long history of alliance formation and cooperation among unrelated individuals in many primate species," which "led to the evolution of a suite of emotions that motivate altruism, including anger, guilt, and gratitude," all of which promote the reciprocity and non-zero-sum alliances that social primates need in order to survive.[20] Liberty/oppression is likewise an evolutionary solution to the problem of social cooperation. This foundation "evolved in response to the adaptive challenge of living in small groups with individuals who would, if given the chance, dominate, bully, and constrain others." Aggressive, domineering behavior by an alpha male or female can trigger this foundation, eliciting the righteous anger necessary to mobilize the group against would-be bullies.[21]

However, there are three other moral foundations—"loyalty/in-group," "authority/respect," "purity/sanctity"—whose importance can vary greatly between cultures and individuals. These "binding" foundations promote social cohesion, and they too evolved in response to various adaptive challenges. Loyalty/in-group grew out of our long history of "living in kin-based groups of a few dozen individuals." This "led to special social-cognitive abilities backed up by strong social emotions related to recognizing, trusting, and cooperating with members of one's co-residing ingroup while being wary and distrustful of members of other groups."[22] Authority/respect evolved to facilitate hierarchical social structures wherein "dominant males and females get certain perquisites but are also expected to provide certain protections and

[19] Jonathan Haidt and Jesse Graham, *When morality opposes justice: Conservatives have moral intuitions that liberal may not recognize*, pg. 7 (https://blogs.commons.georgetown.edu/ppol-560-fall2011/files/Haidt-When-Morality-Opposes-Justice.pdf)
[20] Ibid., pg. 7.
[21] Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, pg. 172.
[22] Ibid, pg. 105.

services."[23] This "has shaped human (and chimpanzee and to a lesser extent bonobo) brains to help them flexibly navigate in hierarchical communities," imbuing them with "respect, awe, and admiration" toward legitimate authorities.[24] Purity/sanctity and its corollary, disgust, developed in the context of our transition to a heavily meat-based diet and its attendant dangers. Disgust appears "as a guardian of the body in all cultures, responding to elicitors that are biologically or culturally linked to disease transmission" like feces, vomit, rotting corpses, etc. In the process, disgust also became a social emotion, a response to deformity, obesity, and disease,[25] reminding us that life is threatened by danger and decay on all sides.

These six foundations of morality represent general human potentialities that are latent in us all. We are "multiple from the start," observed Schweder. [26] We do not usually stay multiple, however, because our culture will determine whether and how these potentialities are realized. Our minds, explains Haidt, "have the potential to become righteous about many different concerns, and only a few of these concerns are activated during childhood" while others are "left undeveloped and unconnected to the web of shared meanings and values that become our adult moral matrix."[27] Each of these moral systems "is akin to a kind of taste bud, producing affective reactions of liking or disliking when certain patterns are perceived in the social world."[28] Since different taste buds will be more or less adaptive in different environments, the particular conditions under which a group operates will determine the shape of its members' final, adult "moral palate." Our virtues are thus cultural constructions, because children will develop different virtues to varying degrees according to the specific life-conditions at hand.[29] It is evolution that provides our basic "portfolio" of human impulses, but it is culture that determines the extent to which these are either cultivated or discounted.

Haidt encountered this cultural variability first-hand during a stint in India, where the three binding foundations are more greatly fostered than in the West. This encounter affected Haidt personally, as his travels awoke in him previously unknown feelings of the sacred. In India, he began to feel that "there is an order to the universe, and things (as well as people) should be treated

[23] Ibid, pg. 105.
[24] Haidt and Graham, *When morality opposes justice*, pg. 8.
[25] Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, pgs. 105-06.
[26] Ibid., pg. 109.
[27] Ibid., pg. 109.
[28] Ibid. pg. 104.
[29] Ibid., pg. 106-07.

with the reverence or disgust they deserve." These feelings did not disappear upon Haidt's return to Chicago, where he began to feel "positive essences emanating from some objects." It somehow felt appropriate to "treat certain books with reverence—not leaving them on the floor or taking them into the bathroom." Funeral services, which he formerly dismissed as wasteful sentimentalism, "began to make more emotional sense."[30] These experiences allowed Haidt to understand "why the American culture wars involved so many battles over sacrilege." He could now see why some are so strongly offended when a protestor burns the American flag, which is far more than just a piece of cloth to many people. He could also sympathize with Christians outraged that "an artist submerges a crucifix in a jar of his own urine, or smears elephant dung on an image of the Virgin Mary."[31] Social conservatives "no longer seemed so crazy," and he could now listen to them with clinical detachment.[32] This wasn't because he became persuaded of their views, but because a new cultural environment activated genetic dispositions that were heretofore latent or repressed, revealing an aspect of his humanity that was heavily discounted in his usual "enlightened" academic milieu. Haidt did not adopt any new beliefs, but rather discovered a new way of being.

* * *

Haidt argues that the six-foundations theory allows to see the cultural wars as a conflict within our common evolutionary inheritance. These wars are essentially a clash between liberals, who embrace the first three, harm-tracking foundations to the exclusion of the other three, binding foundations and conservatives, who embrace all six foundations.[33] Conservatives thus have a "broader palate" of moral "taste receptors."[34] All six foundations are equally important to them.[35] Though liberals are more sensitive to the suffering of people outside their immediate ingroup, the care/harm foundation is present in conservatives too. No culture discounts harm-avoidance as unimportant. And though liberals and conservatives conceive of liberty and fairness differently, these foundations can also be discovered across the American political spectrum in one form or another. Conservatives may be less disturbed by historical injustices done to minority groups. But

[30] Ibid. pg. 104.
[31] Ibid., pg. 105.
[32] Ibid., pg. 108.
[33] Ibid., pg. 184.
[34] Ibid., pg. 154.
[35] Ibid., pg. 159.

they still understand the grievances. By contrast, liberals simply refuse to credit the uniquely conservative, "binding" foundations as having any validity whatsoever. Instead, they condemn ingroup loyalty as bigotry, authority as oppression, and sanctity as "religious mumbo-jumbo whose only function is to suppress female sexuality and justify homophobia."[36] Lacking the binding foundations themselves, liberals cannot see conservative values as real values.

This makes liberalism profoundly anomalous. Though liberals insist that conservatism requires a special explanation like "motivated cognition" or the "authoritarian personality," it is actually liberalism that stands out as peculiar, historically speaking. "Looking at the entire range of human societies, the statistically normal human society is built upon all six foundations, not just the three endorsed by modern liberalism," observes Haidt.[37] Conservatism is completely "normal" in the context of the anthropological record. Conservatives may be less committed to equality and certain social freedoms. But this is in line with most traditional cultures, which "do not have highly developed notions of individual rights" and do not "appear to value or seek to create equality among all adult members, or even among all adult male members."[38] Conservatives may be less keen to celebrate diversity, but this too is in line with most historical cultures, which strongly cultivate the loyalty/ingroup foundation. So it is really modern liberalism that demands an explanation. The question isn't how conservatives could possibly believe what they do, but how liberals could be so astonished by what they believe, why it is "that in a minority of human cultures the moral domain has shrunk."[39]

Though liberals charge that conservatives are motivated by fear and hate, the six-foundations theory reveals that conservatives are no less principled than liberals. Thomas Frank is bemused that working-class voters should be voting against their economic interest because he cannot see that they are voting their *moral* interests.[40] Conservatives are more likely to moralize facially non-harmful conduct, not because they are somehow confused about their "real" interests, but by virtue of their broader array of moral taste receptors, which shape the nature of their interests. What liberals castigate as conservatives' hatred and fear-mongering is simply conservatives' appeal to moral foundations to which liberals are insensible—to patriotism and

[36] Ibid., pg. 286.
[37] Ibid., pg. 113.
[38] Ibid., pg. 105.
[39] Haidt and Graham, *When morality opposes justice*, pg. 14.
[40] Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, pg. 185.

military virtue, respect for authority figures like the police, and Christian ideas about sexual sanctity, all of which are incomprehensible from within the first three harm-tracking foundations.[41] Hence conservatives' success in branding liberals as out-of-touch elites while holding themselves out as champions of the ordinary American. Liberals are astonished and aghast at conservative political victories. But this astonishment is a direct reflection of their moral palates' narrowness, which places them at a political disadvantage even when their policies are more appealing. Conservatives are better at connecting with voters because they "trigger every single taste receptor."[42] They understand liberals better than liberals understand them because they too can be moved by the "liberal" moral taste buds whilst liberals are wholly insensible to the conservative ones. This asymmetry is the "invisible wall"[43] that keeps liberals and conservatives talking past one another.

The six-foundations theory might seem like just a causal hypothesis. But Haidt argues that it has normative implications, as it suggests that the moral taste buds animating conservatism are a source of utilitarian wisdom. Liberals would distinguish between conservative prejudice and "the 'real' individual-centered morality of harm/welfare/care and justice/rights/fairness."[44] But what liberals dismiss as conservative authoritarianism reflects conservatives' greater attunement to the problem of moral capital. Conservatives are more aware of the "interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, and technologies that mesh well with evolved psychological mechanisms and thereby enable the community to suppress or regulate selfishness and make cooperation possible."[45] Conservatives are often blind to the victimization of the weak by the powerful. But the "fundamental blind spot of the left" is its indifference to the problem of moral capital. This is why liberalism overreaches, changes too much too quickly, and inadvertently undermines the collective understandings that permit cooperative behavior among otherwise self-interested primates.[46] Conservatives are less focused on harm-avoidance in the direct sense that concerns liberals—i.e., promoting equality and expanding rights. But deficits of moral capital can also impinge on concrete human welfare, albeit indirectly and cumulatively. Conservatives simply

[41] Ibid., pg. 156.
[42] Ibid., pg. 184.
[43] Ibid., pg. 111.
[44] Ibid., pg. 102.
[45] Ibid., pg. 292.
[46] Ibid., pg. 294.

conceive of human welfare in broader terms than do liberals, and their sensibilities are also evolutionary adaptations that would not exist today had they not aided in human survival.

Haidt believes that this insight permits a "Durkheimian utilitarianism" that incorporates conservative ideas in ways liberals should find palatable:

> [A] Durkheimian version of utilitarianism would recognize that human flourishing requires social order and embeddedness. It would begin with the premise that social order is extraordinarily precious and difficult to achieve. A Durkheimian utilitarianism would be open to the possibility that the binding foundations—Loyalty, Authority, and Sanctity—have a crucial role to play in a good society."[47]

Liberals misjudge conservatives as indifferent to real human welfare because they discount conservatives' understanding of its prerequisites, which the six-foundations theory reveals are more complex than liberalism can acknowledge. Liberalism's twin idols of freedom and equality cannot substitute for the complex matrixes of socially constructed meaning that enable social cooperation and cohesion. Blind to the Durkheimian logic of conservative impulses, liberals dismiss these as knee-jerk reaction. But this is a misunderstanding, argues Haidt. Conservatism is actually a strand of Enlightenment thought, a "reasoned, pragmatic, and essentially utilitarian critique of the Enlightenment project." What "makes social and political arguments *conservative* as opposed to *orthodox* is that the critique of liberal or progressive arguments takes place on the enlightened grounds of the search for human happiness based on the use of reason."[48] So understood, conservative ideas can help liberals put a check on their worst tendencies without requiring them to repudiate their ultimate values, which would simply be implemented in a more sophisticated fashion that takes the problem of moral capital into account. While liberals dismiss traditionalism as religious mumbo-jumbo, the six-foundations theory alerts us to the many bits of wisdom scattered all across the political spectrum, revealing that liberals do not have a monopoly on either wisdom or virtue.

* * *

Haidt's theory promises to forge a new moral consensus that integrates the best of both liberalism and conservatism. But whether this promise is realizable is an open question. The theory assumes that the distinctively conservative or non-Western moral foundations are adaptive

[47] Ibid., pg. 272.
[48] Ibid., pg. 289.

in the modern world, and this is not at all obvious. Haidt would integrate concern with purity into his Durkheimian utilitarianism. But it seems implausible that biological mechanisms which evolved to detect contaminated meat could serve a useful social purpose. The notion that certain groups are somehow "impure" or "dirty" has a very dark history. It is also questionable whether instincts that preserved moral capital in our ancestral environment of small hunter-gatherer societies can do the same in the modern world, rather than dangerously "misfiring." A level of group conformity that may have been indispensable to the social cohesion of primitive tribesmen may be immensely oppressive and wholly unnecessary in the context of complex post-industrial societies, which do not stand similarly on the brink of famine, attack, and other disasters. The human sweet tooth usefully prodded hunter-gatherers to consume carbohydrate-rich fruits whenever possible, yet today this adaptation is the root cause of obesity and metabolic disease, and conservatives' distinctive moral taste buds may misfire in an analogous way.

Another problem with Haidt's proposal is that the kind of enlightened, Burkean conservative with whom liberals might envision a dialogue cannot implement his Durkheimian utilitarianism if everyone becomes a Durkheimian utilitarian. This enlightened conservative might agree that loyalty, authority, and sanctity are evolved utilitarian expedients. But his utilitarian calculus forbids him from disseminating this knowledge widely, because the calculus requires that ordinary people continue to see sanctity *as* sanctity, loyalty *as* loyalty, and authority *as* authority. These ideals can only serve their utilitarian function so long as they are viewed, not as mere utilitarian expedients, but as actual revelations of some pre-modern "order of things." This is what the enlightened conservative seeks to conserve in the modern world, now that tradition no longer conserves it automatically for us. This pre-modern mystique may not be defensible scientifically, or even rationally. But it is what the crooked timber of humanity requires to flourish. And the mystique will dissipate to the extent people become aware of its origins as an evolutionary adaptation. Haidt seeks to foster this awareness, but the enlightened conservative seeks to forestall it, because he recognizes its consequences as liberals do not. Scruton writes that the reasons conservatives "observe for sustaining the myths of society are reasons which they cannot propagate; to propagate their reasons is to instill the world with doubt." And so "[h]aving struggled for articulacy," the conservative "must recommend silence."[49] The enlightened conservative may

[49] Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), pg. 181.

have one foot in the enlightenment, but he has the other one in pre-modernity, and his silence is his acknowledgment that the two cannot be reconciled intellectually.

The six-foundations theory does carry important lessons for liberals, however. And these are simply the lessons of conservative claims of cultural oppression. The value of Haidt's theory isn't that it enables a more accurate utilitarian calculus, but that it illuminates the nature of this oppression, which can be readily extrapolated from the evolutionary adaptations Haidt posits. Conservatives feel culturally oppressed, not because liberals overlook the utilitarian wisdom of their distinctive moral taste receptors—the epistemological interpretation of the six-foundations theory—but because these receptors are being targeted by the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. Haidt asks how it is "that in a minority of human cultures the moral domain has shrunk." And the explanation lies in the mutation counter-narrative and the buffered identity, which is what emerges upon the societal suppression of the binding, "pre-modern" moral taste buds. This identity's disciplines and repressions are what "strip down and thin out the thick, all-encompassing moral orders" of traditional societies. Conservatives feel oppressed because they experience liberalism as a "stripping down" of our default human nature, and hence as a form of violence. To de-intellectualize liberalism is to reveal this violence where liberals see only ideas and ideals, to reveal liberalism as an embodied biological phenomenon that impinges on people on a level that precedes ideas and ideals.

The six-foundations theory facilitates precisely this insight. It offers a naturalistic account of why conservatives suffer from liberalism. Their oppression is a function of the dissonance between their particular "moral palates" and the norms that place these moral palates outside the pale of liberal "civility." If the liberal elites are intolerant, it is with respect to these palates. Liberalism is covertly sectarian, not because it discounts the utilitarian wisdom of the binding foundations, but because it favors the flourishing of those in whom these foundations are more greatly suppressed at the expense in whom they are more greatly active. Mill was acknowledging precisely this favoritism in his caveat that utilitarianism promotes the flourishing of "man as a progressive being." Whatever the issue at hand, conservatives understand this to be the "liberal agenda." Though liberals would dismiss conservative claims of cultural oppression as contrived, they are direct reflections of our evolutionary heritage as it interacts with the modern world. Dramatic imagery of a perennial struggle between ordinary Americans and liberal elites is simply a personification of what is a *biological* struggle. If these ordinary Americans think themselves

more "authentic" than their liberal overlords, this is because they associate authenticity with our default, six-foundation evolutionary heritage.

As we saw in Chapter Two, Nunberg rejects the notion that liberals and conservatives are divided by "indelible psychological differences," which he dubs the "psycho-sexual conception of the liberal-conservative distinction."[50] Nunberg concedes that our political attitudes "owe a lot to individual psychology, culture, and perhaps even genes." However, he warns that "there's always a risk of reduction here, where people take political labels as no more than shorthand for a cluster of personality traits, so that it becomes unnecessary to take someone's views seriously in their own terms."[51] This is fair enough. However, the question posed by conservative claims of cultural oppression isn't whether the psycho-cultural-genetic substratums of our political leanings logically preempt discussion of "the issues"—they do not—but whether these substratums can become legitimate issues *in their own right*, just as race, gender, and sexual orientation have become issues in their own right. Conservatives implicitly answer yes. But liberals implicitly answer no, and this is why conservative claims of cultural oppression are unintelligible to them.

Liberals dismiss conservative grievances as "merely symbolic" because they imply some modernized variant of a pre-modern "order of things" that cannot be credited by liberals' naturalistic outlook. Conservatives' "teleological libertinism" is condemned by liberals as self-indulgent and immoral, because it is what allows people to tolerate human suffering and ignore the "real" issues tangibly tied to their objective self-interest—health care, the income gap, discrimination, etc. But we have seen why this dichotomy oversimplifies. Becker once again explains:

> Once you took the general instinct of self-preservation of the lower animals, the basic irritability of protoplasm, the self-identity of physio-chemistry, the vague pulsation of the warmth of the animal's inner processes, the nameless feeling of power and satisfaction in carrying out his instinctive behaviors—once you took all this and gave it a directive self-control via the ego, and a precise, symbolic designation in a world of symbols, then you resulted in nothing less than the need for heroic self-identity. Self-preservation, physio-chemical identity, pulsating body warmth, a sense of power and satisfaction in activity—all these tally up in symbolic man to the emergence of the heroic urge.[52]

[50] Geoffrey Nunberg, Talking Right: *How Conservatives Turned Liberalism into a Tax-Raising, Latte-Drinking, Sushi-Eating, Volvo-Driving, New York Times-Reading, Body-Piercing, Hollywood-Loving, Left Wing Freak Show* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007), pg. 97.
[51] Ibid., pg. 97.
[52] Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning*, pg. 77.

My argument has been that the human constant described by Becker undermines the conventional dichotomy between benighted pre-moderns self-indulgently succumbing to the allure of inherited symbolic regimes and self-aware moderns with the discipline to resist these temptations and attend to more "substantive" aspirations, the fulfillment of ordinary human desire unhampered by teleological illusion. For what liberals dismiss as teleological illusion is part and parcel of *homo sapiens*' very physiology, including their own, part and parcel of how a complex, self-aware organism organizes and governs itself, sustaining an identity where there would otherwise be a chaotic mass of transitory impulses. It is because "symbolic" concerns serve this biological function that conservatives see their moral concerns as no less "real" than those of liberals. Morality, writes Haidt, is defined by what it *does*, and "any effort to define morality by designating a few issues as the truly moral ones and dismissing the rest as 'social convention' is bound to be parochial."[53] This is because what might be dismissed as mere social convention is integral to "the need for heroic self-identity," which is just as present in liberals as in conservatives. As Becker says, man seeks "the nameless feeling of power and satisfaction in carrying out his instinctive behaviors." And anything that can impinge on this nameless feeling will always be incorporated into the moral equation, whose official scope has been artificially and self-servingly narrowed by the liberal elites.

Indeed, these elites acquire *their* nameless feeling of power through this very agenda. Conservative morality is not inherently more "symbolic." But it must *stand out* as symbolic to a greater extent because liberals have defined the line between the substantive and the symbolic congruously with *their* symbolic identities. Liberals can dismiss the merely symbolic in favor of the substantive only because the overcoming of the former in the name of the latter serves *them* as the symbolic affirmation of a hero-system—the buffered identity standing above the brutishness and teleological illusion of a benighted past. But *qua* embodied physiological phenomenon, this aspiration to stand above has a brutishness and teleology of its own, which is precisely what "enlightened" liberals cannot recognize.

As we have seen, the buffered identity is naturalistic inasmuch as it aspires to transcend anthropocentricity and achieve a disenchanted understanding of the world. This is what enables the first three harm-tracking taste buds to predominate over the binding ones. But the naturalistic, disengaged stance comes at an epistemic price, because it artificially intellectualizes our

[53] Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, pg. 270

experience and so conceals the biological embeddedness of human agency and the political expression of that embeddedness in our ideologies. By contrast, a de-intellectualized liberalism would recognize liberalism as a physiologically embodied hero-system that preserves liberals in their organismic integrity. It would recognize ideology as the intellectual articulation of "physio-chemical identity" and "pulsating body warmth," whose social preconditions may be poorly tracked by moral abstractions like freedom and equality.

This pulsating body warmth is the biological bottom line, and it is by virtue of their attunedness to it that conservatives see symmetry where liberals see asymmetry. Dworkin, we saw, accuses moral traditionalists of conflating morality in the "real," "discriminatory" sense with morality in the merely "anthropological" sense—morality as "prejudices, rationalizations, matters of personal aversion or taste, arbitrary stands, and the like."[54] But liberals and conservatives equally have a "personal aversion" to whatever offends against their moral taste receptors and thereby undermines their sense of agency—their "the nameless feeling of power and satisfaction in carrying out [their] instinctive behaviors." Liberalism may appear non-sectarian at the level of articulated principles, but it is functionally sectarian at the primordial level of biological functioning, where the various binaries underpinning liberals' claims to moral and cognitive superiority collapse. Conservatives may be unscientific in their tacit devotion to some "order of things." But liberals are unscientific in their eagerness to detach culture from physiology, not explicitly in their official theoretical positions, but implicitly and unofficially in their easy dismissals of conservatives' "symbolic" grievances. And this dismissiveness simply betrays liberals' inability to take its naturalism to its logical conclusion, where conservatives' ostensible paranoia and conspiracism begin to make sense.

As we saw earlier, conservative claims of cultural oppression manifest what Nietzsche calls a "subtlety of discernment higher than all reason." These claims are not sub-rational but supra-rational. They are a "return of the repressed," a return of what the buffered identity buffers us *from*. Berger writes:

> It may be said that social reality determines not only activity and consciousness but, to a considerable degree, organismic functioning. Thus such intrinsically biological functions as orgasm and digestion are socially structured. Society also determines the manner in which the organism is used in activity; expressivity, gait and gesture are socially structured… In the internal aspect, the dialectic manifests itself as the resistance of the biological substratum to its social molding. This is, of course, most obvious in the process

[54] Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), pg. 297.

> of primary socialization." But it is less obvious, though equally real, in the higher realms of cultural discourse.[55]

Conservative claims of cultural oppression are "the resistance of the biological substratum to its social molding." As Berger observes, this resistance transpires not only in toilet training but also in the "higher realms of cultural discourse." And these claims form part of this higher realm of discourse. As under-theorized articulations of the mutation counter-narrative, they embody a "subjugated knowledge" originating in conservatives' resistance to the civilizing process. This process targets not only harmful behaviors, but everything in the self that might be deemed "uncivilized." And this is why liberalism is "beyond politics, a tyrant that dominates our lives in countless ways great and small, and which is virtually incapable of being overthrown." To the extent conservative claims of cultural oppression can be criticized as "merely symbolic," they are so, not because the oppression being alleged is illusory, but, on the contrary, because it is so internalized—"determin[ing] not only activity and consciousness but, to a considerable degree, organismic functioning"—that conservative resistance feels futile.

Conservative claimants of cultural oppression seek, not to convey mundane, everyday truths, but to narrate a higher truth in whose name all their falsehoods seem forgivable. And this higher truth is their devitalization at the hands of a world in which they are not at home, a world where impulses arising from our default human nature are at every turn punished, stigmatized, and mocked, weighed down by a bad conscience. Conservatives' oppression under the liberal dispensation is analogous to what Nietzsche describes as the fate of the criminal:

> The criminal type is the type of the strong human being under unfavourable conditions, a strong human being made sick. What he lacks is the wilderness, a certain freer and more perilous nature and form of existence in which all that is attack and defense in the instinct of the strong human being *comes into its own*. His *virtues* have been excommunicated by society; the liveliest drives within him forthwith blend with the depressive emotions, with suspicion, fear, dishonor. But this is almost the *recipe* for physiological degeneration. He who has to do in secret what he does best and most likes to do, with protracted tension, caution, slyness, becomes anaemic; and because he has never harvested anything from his instincts but danger, persecution, disaster, his feelings too turn against these instincts – he feels them to be a fatality. It is society, our tame, mediocre, gelded society, in which a human being raised in nature, who comes from the mountains or from the adventures of the sea, necessarily degenerates into a criminal. Or almost necessarily: for there are cases in which such a human being proves stronger than society: the Corsican Napoleon is the most famous case.[56]

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[55] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchorage/Doubleday, 1967), pg. 182.
[56] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Penguin Books, 1990), pg. 110.

As the contemporary apex of the civilizing process, liberalism *excommunicates* human yearnings that are inimical to the buffered distance and its peculiarly courtly rationality. Conservative claims of cultural oppression are the shape which these excommunicated yearnings must assume. They are the *Other* of liberalism, the way in which the binding moral taste receptors protest the negative stimulus that is liberalism. If conservatives despise the Bobo ethos, this is because they see it as the product of a "tame, mediocre, gelded society," the properly ordered sociability of the buffered identity liberated from the pre-modern impulses—manliness, anti-structure, embodied feelings of the higher. These are what conservative claims of cultural oppression seek to resuscitate and reassert against the excesses of liberal civility.

This existential project is why conservatives so easily gravitated to a Donald Trump notwithstanding his lack of conservative bona fides. For he embodies everything that the civilizing process seeks to extirpate and therefore stands as a symbol of "the resistance of the biological substratum to its social molding." His manner, bearing, and personality directly embodied what conservative ideology only intimates, and so could easily overshadow the absence of such an ideology. Conservative claims of cultural oppression protest, not only the liberalism that lies without, but just as much the liberalism that lies within, the "suspicion, fear, dishonor" in which the pre-modern impulses have become weighed down. And Trump's message is that he will not be cowed by these stigmas.

Liberals can dismiss the "psycho-sexual conception of the liberal-conservative distinction" as an idle distraction from the "real" issues only because their normalizing humanism conceals the costs imposed by their "preferred basket of liberal values," conceals how much of human nature it must excommunicate and thereby deform. Until his visit to India, Haidt could easily walk through life suppressing his pre-modern moral taste buds without suffering any serious conflicts as a result. He was at home in a social world that positively stimulated the harm-tracking moral taste receptors while negatively inhibiting the binding ones. But conservative claims of cultural oppression reveal that not everyone is so well-adjusted. And liberals' indifference to this inequality stands at odds with their own professed ideals irrespective of whether the excommunicated, pre-modern impulses are a source of utilitarian wisdom—for their very existence creates a utilitarian dilemma.

Liberals display great sociological and psychological sophistication in articulating the vulnerabilities of their favored groups. At the same time, they regress to a crudely atomistic and

materialistic conception of harm when the cultural oppression is being alleged by conservatives, who are consequently dismissed as confused about their real interests. The more intellectually charitable approach, however, is to accept that conservatives are as well-attuned to these interests as anyone else, and that the zeal with which they claim cultural oppression is a reliable indicator of the oppression's magnitude. Liberals' formal devotion to equality cannot erase the inequality inherent to culture as such, inherent to how different symbolic regimes differentially impact the flourishing of different human make-ups. These are genuine liabilities that are not erased by clichéd celebrations of "civility" or "respect for persons." For the mutation counter-narrative reveals this respect to be respect for "the retrained instinctual and affective impulses denied access to the motor apparatus," and this offers little consolation to those who most suffer from that retraining. This is what the "New Enlightenment" teaches us. Liberals' incredulity toward conservative claims of cultural oppression reflects, not superior insight and sophistication, but liberals' hypocritical refusal to take their naturalism to its logical conclusion, to where it might blur the moral and legal distinctions toward which they are instinctively disposed and thereby modify their prejudices about what qualifies as genuine oppression, revealing them as oppressors by revealing forms of social control which they wield but cannot see.

2. Liberal Ethnocentrism

It is in reaction to this insensibility that conservative claims of cultural oppression attempt to recast what liberals tout as their superior self-awareness and self-control as a culturally induced blindness to a foreign way of life, a parochial outlook that is no less blinkered than the traditionalism against which liberals rail. In claiming cultural oppression, conservatives seek to expose this blindness, demanding that liberals acknowledge and repudiate their ethnocentrism. But what would such a repudiation involve? Taylor explains that overcoming ethnocentrism requires a language

> …that is not our language of understanding or theirs, but rather what one could call a language of perspicuous contrasts. This would be a language in which we could formulate both their way of life and ours as alternative possibilities in relation to some human constants at work in both. It would be a language in which the possible human variations

> would be so formulated that both our form of life and theirs could be perspicuously described as alternative such understandings."[57]

We overcome ethnocentrism by learning to see similarity underneath difference. Insofar as we recognize other cultures' ways as local variants of human constants that we too express in our own fashion, our sense of ourselves and of our differences with other cultures will have to be reconfigured, as we will be compelled to approach these in broader terms than was previously possible. What we formerly saw as a raw deficiency, another cultures' bare failure to realize our particular ideals, we will now be able to see in positive terms, as different "takes" on a shared humanity. In the process, we will have learned to understand our own ideals more profoundly, because we will now see them as particular derivations of something broader than we previously recognized. Overcoming ethnocentrism isn't merely a cognitive act, a casting off of "prejudices," but a broadening of our own identities.

This is what de-intellectualizing liberalism allows, because it is the over-intellectualization of liberalism that conceals the human constants that would enable this broadening of identities. The human constant implied by conservative claims of cultural oppression but denied by ethnocentric liberalism is the hero-system. Failing to recognize itself as a hero-system, liberalism cannot recognize that liberalism and conservatism oppose each other as alternative hero-systems, alternative configurations of our innate moral taste receptors both of which give expression to a shared humanity that liberalism does not alone define.

Nussbaum writes that "[p]erhaps the greatest insight of the classical-liberal tradition is the insight that each human individual is profoundly valuable, spacious and deep, capable of separate life and imagination, of being more than just the continuer of a tradition or a family style."[58] But where liberals see an intellectual insight, conservatives perceive a cultural *agenda*. And this is because the expressive individualism liberals celebrate is *imposed* through the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. These *generate*, against the resistance of our default human nature, the innerness that Nussbaum casts as always latent and waiting to be liberated. As we saw with Macedo, liberalism is *transformative*. It is not only a political theory but a culturally cultivated spirituality that molds people in specific ways and stigmatizes what resists this molding.

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[57] Taylor, Charles, *Philosophical Papers Volume 2: Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, University Press, 1985), pg. 125.

[58] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton University Press, 2004), pg. 318.

This is precisely what ethnocentric liberals cannot see. Nussbaum's spacious and deep individuals may feel that they have realized the timeless essence of human nature liberated from the confining horizons of a benighted past. But this sensation is the outgrowth of a particular identity, the historically constructed secularization of the Christian soul, the buffered identity's compression of the spiritual of the secular. And these transformations have as their corollary cultural practices that cultivate certain biological impulses while repressing others. It is this biological molding, not insight or enlightenment, that allows the liberal consciousness to see itself as spacious and deep.

Scruton writes that "[w]hen liberals try to make concrete the ideal of freedom which they propose, they find themselves always constrained (whether wittingly or no) by the habits and predilections of a particular way of life – the way of life of the emancipated urban intellectual."[59] Being devoted to the subtraction account, liberals cannot recognize these habits and predilections *as* habits and predilections, as expressions of a historically constructed identity that strives to preserve itself against whatever threatens it, just like conservative identities. Liberals imagine themselves as more "open" to difference than "closed-off" conservatives. But the mutation counter-narrative forces us to recast this dichotomy. Conservatives are closed-off, not to any culturally neutral pluralism, but to a specific cultural ethos, the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity. These are what generates liberal "openness."

As we observed in the last chapter, nineteenth-century American Protestants insisted against the objections of Catholics that the ecclesiastically unsupervised reading of the King James Bible in public schools was non-sectarian. They viewed Scripture as the non-sectarian core of Christianity in relation to which the special Catholic demand for clerical exegesis qualified as a sectarian imposition. But we can now recognize Protestantism and Catholicism to be equally sectarian as different variants of Christianity. Whereas nineteenth-century Protestants understood themselves as embodying the pristine core of Christianity, today's more ecumenical Protestants see their faith as a derivation of something more all-encompassing, and not the essential core of the faith from which other forms of Christianity have departed.

Today's ethnocentric liberals are in a position analogous to these blinkered nineteenth-century Protestants. They understand their ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity as the non-sectarian core of essential human nature and dismiss conservatism as conservatives' attempt to impose their own "personal preferences" on unwilling others and thereby suppresses

[59] Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, pg. 112.

this core, whose political expression is modern liberalism. But the mutation counter-narrative undermines this dichotomization, revealing that liberal identities are just as contingent and sectarian as conservative ones. Just as Protestantism and Catholicism are equally sectarian as different variants of Christianity, so liberalism and conservatism are equally sectarian as alternative forms of human agency, social constructions that each "manage" our evolutionary inheritance in their own way. Being immersed in the subtraction account, liberals cannot see this similarity underneath difference, which is palpable to conservatives and their more viscerally naturalistic cogitation of human agency. Hence conservatives' refusal to take liberalism at face value, why they feel, with Scruton, that individual freedom "is the great social artifact which, in trying to represent itself as nature alone, generates the myth of liberalism."[60]

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Not recognizing this artificiality, liberals also cannot recognize the costs of imposing it, cannot recognize liberalism's externalities for non-liberals. These externalities are why conservatives reject the "innocently thin terms" in which liberalism couches itself and instead detect a socially coerced alienation. Scruton charges that liberalism celebrates autonomy at the cost of "isolate[ing] man from history, from culture, from all those unchosen aspects of himself which are in fact the precondition of this subsequent autonomy."[61] Having dismissed history and culture as mere shackles, liberalism "presents no idea of the self, over and above the desires which constitute it" and so it can entertain "no idea of self-fulfillment other than the free satisfaction of desire."[62] In this way, liberalism leaves us with a world that "is no more than the totality of facts," something appropriate to "the clinical vision of a dispassionate scientist" but not to human beings as they truly are.[63] As agents, we need to feel anchored in a social world from which to draw our purposes. But liberalism fantastically posits a self that springs into being by its own bootstraps, a *causa sui* that requires no such anchoring. This is a chimera, say conservatives, which is why liberalism promises freedom at the expense of the self when it eschews the unifying cultural understandings that could give the self content. Liberalism promises freedom but delivers only nihilism and alienation.

[60] Ibid., pg. 66.
[61] Ibid., pg. 112.
[62] Ibid., pg. 112.
[63] Ibid., pg. 180.

Against this indictment, liberals retort that conservative laments about liberal anomie and deracination rest on caricature and misunderstanding. Feinberg argues:

> If liberalism implied that community values were not part of human beings' central sense of identity, that communities were mere aggregations of isolated atoms, that community life was not embedded in traditions, that alienation was not a necessary consequence of isolation from communities, or that it was of no serious consequence in any case, then liberalism would be untenable. There is no denying, furthermore, that liberals in the past (most of them well back in the past) have held these and similar doctrines. But there is no reason why liberalism, defined in terms of its normative commitments, need continue to carry such useless baggage. The liberal no less than the communitarian insists that the individual whose autonomous right of self-government is so important to him is a social being through and through, and that many of his more important interests he shares with others in communities large and small.[64]

Feinberg concedes that, as a matter of intellectual history, the liberal understanding of rights has been interwoven with an implausibly atomistic conception of human nature. But his argument is that the two are theoretically severable, so that liberalism's core commitments needn't be a prescription for atomism and anomie. Liberal morality may seem "thin" by comparison with traditional morality. But liberalism, Feinberg argues, is "not so much vacuous as formal, and the formal framework *can* be filled in by the ideals of sociality, so treasured by the communitarian."[65] These ideals include, not only the sundry beliefs of voluntary sub-communities, but also a general "creed of mutual tolerance and respect for rights"[66] that unifies these sub-communities into a broader community defined by shared liberal values. Contra conservatives, liberalism does recognize a "common good." And this is "mutual respect," the "ideal of a national community in which an unrestricted myriad of social groups prosper and flourish.[67] Liberalism can therefore deliver what conservatives say it cannot. Time and again, our national experience has shown that liberalism is "capable of generating its own nourishing traditions, its folk heroes and exemplary stories."[68]

This response cannot satisfy conservatives, however. True enough, liberalism has fostered its own nourishing folk stories and traditions. But Feinberg describes these in "innocently thin terms." For central among these nourishing folk stories and traditions is the anointed's perennial struggle to expose and reform the benighted. As we have observed again and again in multifarious

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[64] Joel Feinberg, *Harmless Wrongdoing* (Oxford University Press, 1990), pg. 120.
[65] Ibid., pg. 111.
[66] Ibid., pg. 99.
[67] Ibid., pg. 88.
[68] Ibid., pg. 99.

contexts, the freedom and equality Feinberg celebrates will always be harnessed as ideological vehicles for the vision of the anointed, the contemporary apogee of the buffered distance. And this vision nourishes only those who participate in the Bobo ethos of New Class intellectuals, the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity, which presupposes the cultivation of certain moral taste buds to the detriment of others. The problem isn't that liberalism represents some impossible regression to a pre-social state of nature bereft of any cultural commonality, but that the kind of cultural commonality liberalism has on offer presupposes the disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, which are what elevate liberalism into a hero-system for liberals. If liberals do not suffer from what Scruton calls "the clinical vision of a dispassionate scientist," this is because this vision is *for them* also a spiritual vision, the aspiration to rise above the anthropocentricity of the "peculiarly human emotions." Liberalism may not presuppose any implausibly atomistic conception of human nature. But it does presuppose this aspiration, an aspiration inimical to human nature's "default," pre-modern impulses, the wellsprings of conservative claims of cultural oppression.

Appiah writes that Macedo's "transformative liberalism suggests that one legitimate function of a liberal state is, and has been, to attenuate the strong Blut-und-Boden identitarian commitments it encounters; to process the sundry sources of alternative authority—whether Catholicism or English nativism—and leave something diluted by broader liberal commitments: call it Identity Lite."[69] But unlike conservatives, liberals are not asked to resign themselves to "Identity Lite." The disciplines and repressions of the buffered identity, which dilute the identities of conservatives, *are* an identity for liberals, an identity that is in its own way no less "thick" than the traditional "Blut-und-Boden" identities liberalism endeavors to dilute. If liberals seem more "pluralistic" than conservatives, this isn't because they've adopted Identity Lite, but because the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity "subjectifies" otherwise antagonistic worldviews into "preferences," "feelings," "tastes" or "needs." This subjectification isn't the transcendence of parochialism and sectarianism, but itself a culturally specific dispensation, the buffered identity and its aspiration to rise above the "peculiarly human emotions" generated by the binding moral taste buds. What liberals celebrate as diversity is uniformly "imprinted" by this identity, which is what makes their ostensible openness to cultural diversity a culture in its own right.

[69] Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, pg. 203.

It is owing to this hidden thickness that liberals do not experience the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity as the nihilism and alienation prophesied by Scruton. Instead, they are privileged to live this ethos as a hero-system. Conservatives are not so privileged, however, and their indictment of liberalism as alienated and nihilistic follows logically from this position of weakness, from how a more porous self must process a more buffered one. Liberalism does not *presuppose* some implausibly atomistic view of human nature. But it *represents* atomism—and so nihilism and alienation—for those who do not participate in the liberal dispensation. *What liberals see as a dishonest caricature of liberalism is the inevitable experience of liberalism for those who have not internalized the buffered identity*.

Peter Berger writes that modern society "confronts the individual with an ever-changing kaleidoscope of social experiences and meanings," forcing "him into reflection."[70] With the institutional fabric having become "incohesive, fragmented and thus progressively deprived of plausibility," the individual is "thrown back upon himself, on his own subjectivity, from which he must dredge up the meaning and the stability that he requires to exist."[71] This framing of the modern dilemma affirms the subtraction account and accordingly casts liberals in a particularly heroic light. Thus seen, liberals are resilient individualists who have somehow succeeded in "dredging up" meaning and stability in the face of a fragmented world whilst conservatives "escape from freedom" by taking refuge in tradition and orthodoxy. If conservatives feel culturally oppressed, this is understood to be the direct outcome of their escapism and obtuseness, the moral cost of their failure to courageously will the buffered identity—which liberals will not allow them to now shift onto others. But the mutation counter-narrative reveals that the buffered identity requires no such courage. It is not that liberals have the moral courage to stand firm in the face of an incoherent, fragmented world, but that their physiologically embedded hero-systems preempts this fragmentation. The buffered identity is precisely why liberals are *not* "thrown back on themselves" by the modern world as are conservatives, who lack this liberal privilege. For the latter, what Nussbaum celebrates as the spacious and deep is the hollow and empty. Hence Scruton's objection to liberalism as the "creed of an elite" and "an impossible substitute for the pieties of ordinary existence."[72]

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[70] Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pg. 78.
[71] Ibid., pg. 92.
[72] Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, pg. 74.

Not recognizing this hidden parochialism, the socially constructed character of the buffered identity, Feinberg argues that to the extent conservatives feel aggrieved by social change that challenges their moral traditions, then they are victims, not of the social change, but of their own conservatism.[73] But conservatives can with equal justice argue that liberals who feel oppressed by traditional values are the victims, not of those values, but of their own liberalism, which is what makes those values oppressive when they otherwise wouldn't be. This is why conservatives see symmetry where liberals see asymmetry. As relative pre-moderns standing outside the subtraction account, they can see that liberal identities are just as socially constructed as their own, and that the harms that liberals inflict on them are therefore commensurate with the harms they inflict on liberals. In both cases, the harm consists in the satisfaction of certain moral palates and the devitalization of others.

The normative problem for liberalism is not that it is atomistic but, on the contrary, that it is *not* atomistic. Did the expressive individualism upheld by liberalism originate in a courageous will to self-possession, *then* liberals might have standing to condemn conservatives for their moral failure to realize this ideal. But the mutation counter-narrative reveals that the superior self-possession of liberals has been inherited rather than earned, for it is the product of a historically constructed hero-system for which they deserve no moral credit. If racists who excoriate black criminality can do so only by virtue of their white privilege, which relieves them of the incentives for criminality, then liberals who excoriate conservate resentments can do so only by virtue of their liberal privilege, which is what allows them to rise above the peculiarly human emotions, and thus the resentments.

* * *

Yet conservatives will always be hard put to articulate the nature of the liberal privilege that they intuit so powerfully. As we saw in an earlier chapter, Kahane bewails that conservatives have become "inarticulate fish in a barrel" when confronted with the rhetorical onslaughts of the liberal elites. And this is because the sublimated, intellectualized, and etherealized character of the liberal hero-system conceals its status as a hero-system, placing conservatives at a perennial rhetorical disadvantage. Haidt observes:

[73] Feinberg, *Harmless Wrongdoing*, pg. 68-69.

> Liberals sometimes say that religious conservatives are sexual prudes for whom anything other than missionary-position intercourse within marriage is a sin. But conservatives can just as well make fun of liberal struggles to choose a balanced breakfast—balanced among moral concerns about free-range eggs, fair-trade coffee, naturalness, and a variety of toxins, some of which (such as genetically modified corn and soybeans) pose a greater threat spiritually than biologically.[74]

But all is not equal here. Though conservatives can indeed mock various liberal pretensions, it is liberals who will always have the last word. The conservative who scoffs at liberal preferences for free-range eggs and fair-trade coffee is expressing his under-theorized understanding of the mutation counter-narrative, attempting to expose the operations of a hero-system, to reveal that liberal morality embodies an "original spiritual vision" that guides liberals' particular brand of utilitarianism. But liberals can always cast the critical theory of the Right as bare callousness before the suffering of caged chickens and impoverished Guatemalan peasants. Whatever spiritual significance attaches to free-range eggs or fair-trade coffee, these concerns can always be defended as non-sectarian harm-avoidance, which conservatives cannot simply decline to recognize given their broader, more inclusive moral palates. Liberals and conservatives are alike beholden to hero-systems. But the liberal hero-system's status as a compressed spiritual-secular whole means that that the spiritual can always be disguised in the secular. Liberals' moral taste receptors for loyalty, authority, and purity have not disappeared but are rather embedded in concerns about harm-avoidance, presented as mere tools in the service thereof.

Conservatives' rhetorical weakness is furthermore compounded by the subtlety and sophistication with which the liberal elites wield power. Scruton writes:

> But while it is a longstanding principle of British law that the fomentation of hatred (and hence of racial hatred) is a serious criminal offence, it is not clear that illiberal sentiments have to be forms of hatred, nor that they should be treated in a high-handed way that is calculated to make them becomes so. On the contrary, they are sentiments which seem to arise inevitably from social consciousness: they involve natural prejudice, common culture, and a desire for the company of one's own kind. That is hardly sufficient ground to condemn them as 'racism'—an accusation which has no definition in law, and against which there is now no defense. To be accused of racism is to be guilty of it: this is the great achievement of liberal thinking about nationality. One of the most important conservative causes in our time must surely be the attempt to undo the apparatus of censorship and intimidation, which has effectively silenced the appeal to national identity."[75]

[74] Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, pg. 13.
[75] Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, pg. 62.

Liberals opposes "normal prejudice, common culture, and a desire for the company of one's own kind" because these are affronts to the buffered distance and its peculiarly courtly rationality, the relics of a "barbarian past of less fortunate peoples." But these affronts must first be transmogrified into something more nefarious if liberals are to have a pretext for targeting them as they do. And liberals' conduct is unconsciously calibrated to effectuate this transmogrification. This is why liberals treat "illiberal sentiments… in a high-handed way that is calculated to make them become" forms of hatred. By excoriating whatever in human nature resists the ethos of disengaged self-control and self-reflexivity as hatred and backwardness, liberalism's "apparatus of censorship and intimidation" targets the very foundations of conservative identities. And this invariably provokes the hatred and resentment through which liberals can justify their unflattering portrayals of conservatives, which are therefore self-fulfilling prophesies.

Liberals' official attitude toward conservatism is one of exasperation. But this attitude is disingenuous, because liberals *need* their exasperation in order to affirm their heroic identities as opponents of hatred and prejudice. As we have seen, the anointed need the benighted because the liberal identity is premised on a perennial struggle against the continual resurrection of a benighted past through conservatism. And maintaining this identity may require liberals to *provoke* the evils against which they will subsequently rail. Scruton is describing the method of provocation, the way conservatives are baited into reactions through opposition to which liberals can uphold the buffered distance.

Lacking the "ultimate in sophistication," liberals cannot recognize the degree to which they socially construct what they decry. Like every dominant regime, liberalism vindicates itself by *creating* facts on the grounds. By depriving blacks of educational opportunities, white supremacy created the very data needed to sustain its prejudices toward blacks as intellectually inferior. And likewise, the dominant liberal culture sustains its prejudices toward conservatives as hate-mongers by engendering the very hatred it then goes on to cite as reason for ever-greater vigilance. Liberals defend the interests of historical victim groups. But they also use these victim groups as symbols through which to upbraid the "national prejudice" of the ordinary American as one more relic of a benighted barbarian past. The hostile reactions this upbraiding elicits will naturally become directed toward the victim groups through which the upbraiding is being facilitated, legitimating liberals in their heroic roles as these groups' defenders.

Offering an alternative to the social contract theory, Nietzsche proposes that the first primitive state arose when "some pack of blond beasts of prey, a conqueror and master race which, organized for war and with the ability to organize, unhesitatingly lays its terrible claws upon a populace perhaps tremendously superior in numbers but still formless and nomad."[76] To de-intellectualize liberalism is to recognize the liberal elites as the modern, sublimated and intellectualized analogues of these blond beasts of prey. They lay their claws on social rather than physical reality, influencing culture rather than enslaving bodies. But the underlying impulse to dominate remains. Conservatives can recognize these continuities as liberals cannot. Being more viscerally naturalistic, conservatives possess a vantage point from which to recognize liberal openness, not as virtuous self-restraint, but as organismic self-interest, the self-perpetuation of a particular human make-up at the expense of its rivals. The distinction between parochial-minded intolerance and cosmopolitan openness, central to the liberal self-understanding, loses all meaning on this primordial level. Here the distinction between the civilized and the barbaric collapses. And this is why conservatives are forever unimpressed by the nuance and subtlety of liberal argument, which for them merely cloaks liberal power, the power to dictate who is and who is not entitled to a "nameless feeling of power and satisfaction in carrying out his instinctive behaviors."

Having recognized this as the predicament of conservatives, the intellectually consistent liberal must ask how he would assess their claims of cultural oppression from within the Original Position, where we are ignorant, not only of whether we will be born rich or poor, black or white, male or female, but also of whether our psycho-cultural-biological endowment will be more buffered or more porous—that is, ignorant of whether we will be disposed toward the Original Position in the first place. This is the question raised by conservatie claims of cultural oppression. The great irony of these claims is that they demand cosmic justice on a scale that rivals, and perhaps exceeds, any which has ever been demanded by the Left. This is how the Right has become the Left in order to accuse the Left of becoming the Right. Conservative claims of cultural oppression are what must become of liberalism once it is fully naturalized and secularized, uprooted from the spiritual vision that first nourished it.

Faced with this realization, the liberal may be tempted to eschew intellectual consistency and embrace his ethnocentrism. Just as conservatives insists that our constitutional freedoms are

[76] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), pg. 86 (Essay II, Sec. 17).

the specific legacy of Anglo-Saxon history rather than partial instantiations of some universal ideal of expressive individualism, so this ethnocentric liberalism holds that tolerance, neutrality, and associated concepts must be understood in the context of the specifically modern identity, and that the suffering of those who resist this identity cannot figure into the moral equation. Only those who accept this identity's disciplines and repressions—and so become properly "civilized"—are competent to speak the language or tolerance, equality, and neutrality, and any attempt to appropriate these concepts from outside this framework is illegitimate and disingenuous.

But this "conservative" defense of liberalism betrays much of liberalism's animating spirit. As Appiah notes, "[o]ur moral modernity consists chiefly of extending the principle of equal respect to those who had previously been outside the compass of sympathy; in that sense, it has consisted in the ability to see similarity where our predecessors saw only difference."[77] The ideals of liberalism require liberals to strive to see themselves from the "outside," in order to articulate the content of their identities through categories richer than those which presently inform them. This is what the mutation counter-narrative—and hence conservative claims of cultural oppression—enable them to do. Ethnocentric liberalism is in fundamental conflict with liberals' own morally universalistic precepts and inclinations, the imperative to see commonality where one might otherwise see only difference. Liberals cannot better understand conservative claims of cultural oppression without better understanding that toward which these claims are directed, which is to say, *themselves*, their own identities. And this is what conservatives are ultimately asking of them in claiming cultural oppression. What answer they are owed lies beyond the scope of this work. But the nature of the stakes have now been laid bare.

[77] Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, pg. 146.

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