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ul. Gustawa Herlinga-Grudzińskiego 1 b, C 224

30-705 Kraków

tel. 12 25 24 665, 25 24 666

e-mail: wydawnictwo@kte.pl

Adiustacja, skład i redakcja techniczna/Proofreading, dtp, and technical editing:

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Andrzej Bryk

INTRODUCTION: CULTURE WAR, MODERNITY AND LIBERAL MONISM

The idea that the United States found itself in the situation of “culture wars” or “culture war” was identified and popularised by the sociologist James Davison Hunter at the beginning of the 1990s,¹ but the term was already being used in the 1970s. Hunter simply gave it a certain sociological framework which began to be used in analytical terms. The very word “culture war” was not, of course, of American origin. It referred more or less consciously to a German term *Kulturkampf*, which described a conflict of Otto Bismarck with the Catholic Church between 1871–1878.² Since the beginning of its creation the term “culture war” or “culture wars” touched in the deepest sense a question of cultural, in a narrower sense also religious identity of a political community. In this sense, the term described one of the most laden with conflict categories of self-definition of groups and individuals in modernity visible in the public language of liberal democracy by discussions about such terms as “exclusion”, “justice”, “equality”, “charity”, and “rights” or relations between the public and the private sphere. Around such issues revolved the most important conflicts within modernity and thus liberal democracy since the 18th century, but they were essentially political, economic and social conflicts fought within the perimeters of the

¹ J. D. Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, New York 1991.

² Precisely it referred to a bitter Protestant-Catholic conflict related to teaching religion in schools. But, from the very beginning, the very term denoted a much wider conflict concerning the right to a public professing of the truth, and by implication the right of the Catholic Church to be independent from the state. M. B. Gross, *The War Against Catholicism: Liberalism and the Anti-Catholic Imagination in Nineteenth-century Germany*, University of Michigan Press 2004.

same anthropology, openly contested, in fact, only by philosophers and some public intellectuals.

The “culture war” today is characterised by a much more visible cultural conflict stemming from a profound and widespread disintegration of a shared traditional cultural code, essentially based on the Judeo-Christian anthropology of the West and an attempt to substitute for it a liberal-left anthropology of the autonomous imperial self with moral auto-creation as its basis. A denial that this anthropology assumes a moral auto-creation by the proponents of this new anthropology, and attempts by them to create a universal and inescapably accepted by all moral code within liberalism, turned out to be woefully unconvincing, exactly by the inability to convince others why such a code should be accepted.³ This breakdown of a common cultural code and a language of its articulation means that particular words ceased to mean the same thing for many who are becoming more and more violent, even if only verbally. Culture has become a province of an incessant shouting match with the inability to create any shared framework of moral axioms and an equally helpless inability to create any convincing hierarchy of moral goods.⁴

Such a situation was already known in the ancient world. In Thukydides’s “Peloponesian War” such ideas as equality, justice, liberty in a situation of a lack of a cohesive incognitant cultural vision taken for granted, gave rise to a confusion of language, the very essence of the biblical Tower of Babel, a wrong recognition of reality, the other word for a rebellion against *Yahveh*. Such words allegedly denoting a shared meaning of moral goods were subjected to pressures of particular interests, and they did not refer any more to anything in a cultural code which would give them metaphysical cohesiveness. This is a situation of the entire liberal-democratic world today. But in a still decentralised, financially even more decentralised, with a grass roots political culture of organisation in the United States, this situation seems to be much more visible than in the traditional state – the European Union, with its oligarchy trying to impose such cultural cohesion from the top down on extremely pliant populations.⁵

³ See a most thorough investigation of this problem by M. J. Perry, *Toward a Theory of Human Rights: Religion, Law, Courts*, Cambridge 2007; L. Kołakowski, *Kant i zagrożenie cywilizacji*, [in:] idem, *Czy diabeł może być zbawiony i 27 innych kazań*, Kraków 2006, p. 185–197.

⁴ Everything within such a disintegrated cultural code has thus to be thus of the same worth, people ceased to have morality, they can only have their own “values”, except the “value” of pretending that there is a universal standard of judgement ordering the hierarchy of goods. This is essentially an anthropology which is an obverse side of the liberal-left countercultural revolution of a doctrine of “emancipation” from all “oppressions” when morality was taken over by good “social causes” which are to build a “good society”. Bad “social causes” have thus to be eliminated and the “good” ones promoted without any ability to form a hierarchy of goods. Thus, for instance, a murder is on the same moral plane as smoking or “hate” crimes.

⁵ In the European Union such a “culture war” conflict became exacerbated, for many reasons, after the East-Central post-communist states joined it. A. Bryk, *The United States, the European Union, Eastern Europe: Challenges and Different Responses to Modernity*, “Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe” 2008, No. 1, p. 119–169. A model document of the Tower of Babel language is the

What Hunter meant in case of the United States was actually a common sense observation that Americans were divided fundamentally on the meaning and purpose of human life. In particular, religious and moral issues were looked upon differently and generally termed as the cultural issues they had become so important that they began to determine the way Americans vote in a much more important way than their traditional economic interests. According to Hunter the culture war

is rooted in an ongoing realignment of American public culture and has been institutionalized chiefly through special purpose organizations, political parties, and branches of government. The fundamental disagreements that characterize the culture war have become ever further aggravated by virtue of the technology of public discourse, the means by which disagreements are voiced in public. In the end, however, the opposing moral visions become, as one would say in the jargon of social science, a reality *sui generis*: a reality much larger than, and indeed autonomous from, the sum total of individuals and organizations that give expression to the conflict. These competing visions, and the rhetoric that sustains them, become the defining forces of public life.⁶

The “culture war” idea which quickly caught on as a shortcut for a description of an increasingly bitter contentious character of social and cultural debates over issues so far taken by nearly all for granted, was as commonsensical as it was, indeed, narrowly delineated, if not shallow.⁷ For some there is one foundational basis

Charter of Basic Rights of the European Union. It is very imprecise, mixing anthropological orders and thus giving the judges incredible room for free interpretations of its provisions according to their own anthropologies relating to a definition of man and his dignity. A. Bryk, *Karta Praw Podstawowych Unii Europejskiej*, “Międzynarodowy Przegląd Polityczny” 2008, No. 21, p. 239–243.

⁶ J. D. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 290–291.

⁷ Hunter seems to use terms “culture wars” and “culture war” interchangeably, although one may point out that these terms are not necessarily synonymous, even if a semantic precision is not always necessary. The term “culture war” can mean a situation in which particular people encounter different interpretations, sometimes being in bitter conflict, of an existing common culture, but with all sharing more or less the same basic ontological and anthropological assumptions about reality. In other words the conflict is within the same language of discourse and within the same foundational, meta-political principles defining an identity of a particular community. Such a situation does not exclude the possibility that one side in this conflict would not like to impose on the other its own interpretation of reality, or it would not succeed in it. Such a situation has happened a couple of times in American history, for instance the victory of the Federalists over the Anti-federalists, of the progressive interventionists at the beginning of the 20th century over *laissez faire* supporters, or in foreign policy terms, interventionists over isolationists right before the Second World War. The term “culture wars” would, in turn, mean that we encounter a conflict between two separate cultural worlds not sharing the same ontological, anthropological, meta-political assumptions, having no common foundational basis, no language of designating the same aspects of reality. Today, the proponents of such a view seem to be represented from a liberal side, in the American sense of this word, by Hunter himself, from a different neoconservative or conservative perspective, in the American sense of the word by, for instance, G. Himmelfarb, *One Nation, Two Cultures* (New York 1999), P. A. Lawler, *Aliens in America: The Strange Truth about Our Souls* (Wilmington 2002), R. Bork, *Coercing Virtue: A Worldwide Rule of the Judges* (Washington DC 2003). The term “culture wars” in this sense would be close to a conflict over culture understanding it as a structure of sense about which a battle is being waged. See: K. Koehler, *Wojna w kulturze – list z Ameryki*, “Frona”, zima [Winter] 1999, p. 295–305. Such a conflict, for instance, exploded in the United States with the Civil War over slavery in 1861–1865

of American culture still intact, and “culture war” represents more a typical political commotion within a common American framework than a fundamental split.⁸

According to Hunter the most immediate cultural conflict is visible between the “orthodox” people and the “progressive” people, that is between the religious and the secularists”. The conflict was to revolve around fundamental world outlooks that is “different and competing attitudes about good and evil”.⁹ Such a thesis is not new, because such a conflict has been visible in the United States since the beginning of the 20th century. Some scholars, recognising a legitimacy of the new changes reject the term “culture war” and the simple division of society which it is meant to denote. For instance, Jeremy Rabkin claimed that if “culture war” was to be understood as a clash between the “orthodox” and the “progressive” forces, then it was too simple. Americans were in the middle of many overlapping and interacting social conflicts, and although divisions concerning, for instance, the public role of religion or a definition of “family values” really existed, they did not resemble just a simple cultural division between religious conservatives and secularist progressives.¹⁰ Others thought that Rabkin’s view represented wishful thinking, and a wrong definition of the reality around him. Thomas Sowell, a leading black conservative economist and social critic pointed out that Rabkin misunderstood the very reasons why such a conflict existed in the first place. For Sowell

all across the country, counter-cultural values are being relentlessly promoted in schools, libraries, museums, and even in corporations where diversity consultants harague the employees with a counter-cultural interpretation of race and sex differences. We are not talking about mere differences of opinions or media biases or academic political correctness. We are talking about very well-thought out and systematic institutional efforts, including indoctrination that begins on campus with freshmen orientation and includes whole departments of victimhood studies, coed bathrooms, and the portraying of paedophilia as just another lifestyle.¹¹

defined by Abraham Lincoln as a conflict over the proper metaphysics of the Declaration of Independence. See, for instance, G. Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg*, New York 1992.

⁸ This view is visible again among the liberal-left scholars as A. Wolfe, *One Nation, After All: What Middle Class Americans Really Think about God, Country, Family, Racism, Welfare, Homosexuality, Work, the Right, the Left and Each Other*, New York 1998.

⁹ J. D. Hunter, *Reflections on the Culture War Hypothesis*, [in:] *The American Culture Wars: Current Contests and Future Prospects*, ed. J. L. Nolan jr., Charlottesville 1996, p. 253; idem, *Culture Wars...*, p. 42–43; idem, *The American Culture War*, [in:] *The Limits of Social Cohesion: Conflict and Meditation in Pluralist Societies*, ed. P. L. Berger, Boulder 1998, p. 3.

¹⁰ J. Rabkin, *The Culture War That isn't*, “Policy Review” 1999, No. 96, p. 3. One can often discern in all such observations some unreflexive assumptions about different meanings of the term “culture wars”.

¹¹ T. Sowell, *The Question of “Culture War”*, “Policy Review” 2000, No. 98, p. 89. Rabkin responded that one should not be depressed because the students of a contemporary generation “are far more likely to be involved in prayer or Bible study groups (than in the 1970’s). They are far more respectful to fellow students in military uniforms (as ROTC Cadets). They display far more understanding and appreciation for the benefits of free markets. In a lot of ways, students are much more conservative than they used to be. I expect that, eventually, the faculty will improve, too.” Quoted in: N. Podhoretz, *My Love Affair with America*, San Francisco 2000, p. 220. In turn the neoconservatives

Without a doubt, culture war conflicts in America were politically significant when they became politically instrumental, which happened in the 1960s and the 1970s.

The politicians then decided to construct a real, politically defined conflict which ceased to be rooted in traditional, mainly economic considerations, and felt confident that they could use and manage such a conflict. The publicly waged culture war gained an adequate language clearly defining the lines of divisions, ending conceptual chaos existing as a consequence of mass dislocations in the wake of the 1960s.¹² Although the social and cultural sources for a political polarisation had been present for a long time, the most important impulse was given at the Democratic Party convention of 1972 when the party, captured by the liberal-left faction, made its platform overtly ideological. As a consequence the conservative politicians grouped in the Republican Party sensed a chance to polarise the conflict along such lines so as to break the electoral hegemony of the Democrats established by F.D. Roosevelt in the 1930s, and regain control over the political system which seemed to drift beyond any control in the 1970s. Such a drifting in the conditions of an international conflict with communism and the Vietnam debacle threatening a delegitimisation of the American global power, looked dangerous.

But the “culture war” term contained more in it than just a simple observation that there was a conflict of values between different groups of people manifested in political choices. This was also a growing conflict between the “elites”, a large part of them liberal-left in its social and cultural outlook. They looked at themselves as not representing their own society but as educators of recalcitrant, “backward” people, a phenomenon which Christopher Lasch termed a revolt of the elites.¹³ Several years after publishing his famous essay and Lasche’s book, Hunter discerned this conflict himself writing that this culture war was a clash of two visions

one moral vision ... predicated upon the assurance that the achievements and traditions of the past should serve as the foundation of communal life and guide us in negotiating today’s and tomorrow’s challenges. Though often tinged with nostalgia, this vision is misunderstood by those who label it as reactionary. In fact this vision is neither regressive nor static, but rather is both syncretic and dynamic. Nevertheless, the order of life sustained by this vision does seek deliberate continuity with the guiding principles inherited from the past. The goal of this vision is the reinvigoration and realization in our society of what traditionalists consider to be the noblest ideals and achievements of civilization. Against this tradition is a moral vision that is ambivalent about the legacy of the past – it regards the past in part as a curiosity, in part as irrelevance, in part a useful point of reference, and in part a source of oppression. Its aim is the further emancipation of the human spirit.¹⁴

of the old generation were more prone to think that the culture war would end with some kind of *modus vivendi*, probably a sign of the old-age wisdom. One of the leading early neoconservatives Norman Podhoretz wrote in 2002 that “as a longtime warrior against political leftism I embraced in my thirties and liberationism in which it expressed itself culturally, and as a more recent soldier in the fight against the anti-Americanism of the Right I think that some kind of peace was at hand”. *Ibidem*, p. 220.

¹² On a scale of these dislocations see, for instance, D. Frum, *The 70s: The Decade That Brought You Modern Life*, New York 2000.

¹³ Ch. Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*, New York 1995.

¹⁴ J. D. Hunter, *The American Culture War*, [in:] *The Limits of Social Cohesion...*, p. 2–3.

But this “emancipation of the human spirit” was an euphemism and it needed to be properly defined. It was just another name applied to the New Left phrase of “liberation” or “emancipation” from any “oppression” of a bourgeois, capitalist society, and its social and cultural arrangements. This method was accepted as part of transforming liberalism itself, which abandoned the traditional limits of political liberalism and changed it into a doctrine of transformation of a society by the new elite, the doctrine which was defined in America as liberal – left or socialism. Hunter’s “emancipation of the human spirit” is in fact, as one conservative critic wrote, a

code for cultural revolution that seeks to change [American] values. The culture war ... is also a class war [between] the New Class ... call[ed] often the “intellectual class”, the “intelligentsia”, the “elite”, the “knowledge class”, or, dismissively, the “chattering class”. Most of these names have the unfortunate connotation of superiority to the general public. That implication is not justified. Individual members of the intellectual class are not necessarily, or even commonly, adept at intellectual work. Rather, their defining characteristic is that they traffic, at wholesale or retail, in ideas, words, or images and have at best meager practical experience of the subjects on which they expound. Intellectuals are, as Frederick Hayek put it “secondhand dealers in ideas” ... These intellectuals as the “New Class” ... a term suggest[ing] a common class outlook and indicat[ing] the group’s relatively recent rise to power and influence ... characteristically display a strong desire for meaning in life, and for them meaning requires transcendent principles and universalistic ideals. These qualities were once conferred by religion, but religion is not an option for intellectuals; the only alternative is the utopian outlook of the [liberal] Left. Once the hard-core varieties of the Left were put out of favour by the Second World War and the Cold War, the intelligentsia turned to the softer and eclectic socialism of modern liberalism [liberal-left]. The various attitudes expressed in modern liberalism add up to an overreaching sentiment that must, for the time being, make for a more utopian vision. Socialism [liberal-left] is the only available secular utopian vision of our time. As a political and cultural philosophy or impulse, conservatism or traditionalism offers no comparable transcendentalism, no prospect for utopia. What these rival philosophies all add up to is a revolution or war within the culture. In its overt form the culture war is fought by “elites”, the large majority of them liberal [left]. The New Class’s problem in most nations is that its attitudes command only a political minority. It is, therefore, essential that the cultural left find a way to avoid the verdict of the ballot box so to outflank majorities and nullify their votes. The judiciary is the liberals’ weapon of choice. Democracy and the rule of law are undermined while the culture is altered in ways the electorate would never choose.¹⁵

The New Class in such a view suspects the people as inherently saddled with the possibility of committing a mistake within the democratic process of finding a way towards a progressive future. This constitutes a rebellion of the liberal-

¹⁵ R. Bork, *Coercing Virtue*, Washington DC 2003, p. 2–6. For Bork this “New Class consists of print and electronic media; academics at all levels; denizens of Hollywood; mainline clergy and church bureaucracies; personnel of museums, galleries, and philanthropic foundations; radical environmentalists; and activist groups for a multiplicity of single causes, clusters of people of like-minded folk and [the people] not like themselves about whom they have little knowledge or appreciation. There is a certain embarrassment in choosing a name for this cultural left group. The New Class despises the few conservatives to be found in its ranks more than it does those whom it regards as the retrograde ‘unwashed’, the general public. Conservative pragmatism, especially its concern with particularity – respect for difference, circumstance, tradition, history, and the irreducible complexity of human beings and human societies – does not qualify as a universal principle, but competes with and holds absurd the idea of a [progressive] utopia in this world.” *Ibidem*.

-left, progressive elites coming from a generation of the 1960s against a large part of their own society considered not so much as a political adversary, but ignorant of the moral “evil”, because of not accepting the non-negotiable and treated as a litmus test of moral virtue progressive causes and values. This phenomenon can of course be considered as an instance of a traditional populist revolt of the “ignorant” against elites, as old as American history with the unique specifics stemming from the 1960s breakthrough.¹⁶

Both sides in the culture war have a fundamental different understanding of politics. For liberal-left politics is a tool of shaping an ideal world. Law and state are treated as tools of social amelioration according to a progressive ideal. Until the time of the arrival of this ideal, *la lotta continua* has to last and it will last indefinitely since the bureaucracies created for its realisation immediately become lobbying groups justifying their own interests, which is why the problems that brought them to existence can never end and that is why they have to supervise a recalcitrant society.¹⁷ Thus politics is a method through which society’s institutions, culture, and mores are to be transformed as seats of “oppression” defined, and one leading value arbitrarily defines as a desired “good”, society.¹⁸ The aim is an enforcement by state power of

¹⁶ The meaning of populism in America is different than in Europe. In the European tradition of *noblesse oblige* the elites, beginning with the nobility, through absolutism, welfare state to the European Union took upon itself a paternalistic responsibility for the direction of their societies. The populist revolts from the bottom up have nearly always had revolutionary, negative, anti-systemic connotations, a sign that the system ceased to function properly. In America, populism constituted an essence of American politics, even if often tainted with xenophobic, for instance anti-Catholic or anti-Semitic, features. But the sources of American populism lay in a radicalism of 17th-century English puritanism, its tradition of Covenant and the Protestant biblical rhetoric with its personal responsibility for oneself and the world around, a tradition of democratic, grass roots organisation, a deep distrust towards the state as organising political and social life. Populism was another name for a distrust and disdain towards “know-better” elites and their attempts to reform top down autonomous localities with a strategy requiring the centralisation of power disregarding those whom allegedly they pretended to help. American politics has been mainly local and the political or cultural-religious populist revolts have been common in America. There has never been a successful formula in the United States for a conservative consensus of a country organized within the state structure as in Disraeli’s England or Bismarck’s Germany in the 19th century, or a liberal-left consensus of a country as in England, Scandinavia, Germany after 1945, or the contemporary European Union. Irrespective of how strong the parties were, they were acting within the framework of the state. In the United States, the polarisations have always been deeper, local confederate politics strong, but could be organised by a deft politician just for a while. That is why “a centralisation of one proper idea” in the United States, to use Mao’s words, has always been difficult and temporary.

¹⁷ This is a liberal version of Stalin’s dogma that “the class war intensifies” in proportion to the advances of socialism. The liberal version of this situation is visible in the so called “defining deviancy up” phenomenon in which more and more facts of life are defined as problematic, so different bureaucracies can deal with them and populations can be controlled. It was described in Ch. Krauthammer, *Defining Deviancy Up*, “The New Republic”, November 22, 1993; it starts with a language change. One example of such a “criminalisation” of so far normal behaviour as problematic, is a category of “hetero-normative” defined “exclusionary” when defining, for instance, marriage or bringing up children.

¹⁸ For a fallacy of such a policy see: J. Kekes, *The Illusions of Egalitarianism*, Ithaca 2003, esp. p. 117–149.

the new morality as a final liquidation of human alienation.¹⁹ We have a situation in which war is declared on an existing, real world and social community, which, by the way the facties which fundamentally differentiates the modern cultural Left from a traditional left professing solidarity and social community.²⁰ The liberal-left does not treat society as a living organism in which it called the majority, in the name of this community, to a solidarity in misfortune, but uses and calls minorities to rebellion and fight with this majority defined as a structure of oppression, an obstacle to a just, equal society. The individualistic liberalism easily accepted this New Left postulate in the 1960s forming a natural alliance with it. The adversaries of such a liberal-left perspective have a different vision of politics. It is just one of the important instruments of creating political order, forming compromises, negotiating interests with a political process recognising a simple truth that the existing world is not reducible to a single, simplistic ideological vision. The creation of a political order has

¹⁹ The aim is “telos of social harmony which will perfect the human condition [which] is the substratum of many varied movements [and] they advance under the banner of ethics”. K. Minogue, *Alien Powers: A Pure Theory of Ideology*, New Brunswick 2007, p. XXXIII.

²⁰ The liberal left onslaught on reality embodies the essence of modern ideological thinking. See K. Minogue, *op. cit.*, p. 33–34. Modernity took over here a hatred of scholastic rationality from Protestantism which became a bridge to modernity by its acceptance of nominalism and a rejection of general categories of metaphysics and natural law with a corresponding helplessness of combining the earth with heaven. Luther tried, of course, to liquidate this helplessness with grace. The Enlightenment took over this Lutheran disdain for reason as understood by classical philosophy and scholasticism. For its philosophers, reason ceased to be a human power. It turned out to be “Reason, an autonomous part of Cosmos, an idea permeating everything, a helmsman of progress, or even Progress itself. Reason liberated itself from the human mind and became an independent deity, it became deified and mystified. Modernity fully accepted this solution. Another modern myth is an alleged belief in man. In fact the founding fathers of the Reformation clearing the way for the Lord, rejected everything which was human. If redemption comes only “by grace” than everything which is human is alien to it. This lack of recognition for things human was shared by the Enlightenment fathers. It is enough to see how much space they devoted to the mob question. The Mob was to be disciplined and trained like a wild animal. Little was said about individual man. But ‘no one saw [humanity] walking along the road’ as Joseph de Maistre said. Its dehumanising character comes from the fact that this is a project of society and the man of the future, the man of today is not real. He will become one. What is then his worth? Nothing. But he is beloved as a material for the New Man [of the future]. That is his real worth. As Luther remarked, the modern mitology did not believe in the possibilities of Man, his transformation was to be done by transcendental Reason, Demiurge, Progress. No power had ever come from Man himself. The Reformation also contributed to this [Enlightenment] “deposit of faith” of modernity with a desire for Total Solutions. A total solution required building of the new world and new humanity, even challenging God. Since the Reformation the moderns have never accepted any half-means. If we change the world lets do it quickly and to the end. Let us built communism, a One Thousand Years Reich, an open society [civil society]. The end of the world becomes a common aim, its only and exclusive eschatology gives direction t social activities. [This is] a bankruptcy of human reason. The first to understand this was Schopenhauer, who wanting to save man, rejected reason for will. When deprived of reason, humanity turned against man. For Luther, a fall in *ratio* did not mean the fall of man, because God saved him [with His grace]. Kant removed God to the metaphysical margin, so a critique of reason turned out to be a critique of man.” N. Bończa-Tomaszewski, *Apokalipsa rozumu*, “Frona” 1999, No. 17–18, p. 49–56.

to recognise a non-reducible character of plural reality and autonomous worlds, in other words, the world, as T.S. Eliot said, in which “There are no finally won causes because there are no finally lost causes.”

The 1960s polarised these two camps. The liberal-left defined American society as an object of its incessant work on consciousness and public institutions. The state began to be seen as a tool of destroying allegedly “oppressive” culture in the name of an ideal of justice understood in simplistic categories of equality in all spheres of life. A resistance to this social and moral engineering soon began, truly a culture war. At stake was a definition of a dominant narrative of a “good” life. Political correctness, at the beginning an innocent idea eliminating offensive language towards “negroes”, or “fags”, turned into an institutionally and legally imposed language defining a “moral friend” and a delegitimised “evil foe” excluded from the public discussion. Different legitimate views ceased to function in public. “The enemy” had no right to possess different views. By definition he was marred by an intellectual and moral mistake, his institutions were redefined as “oppressive”.²¹ The culture war has thus been waged at a meta-political level, deeper than immediate politics, with intellectual elites considering ideas to be tools of consciousness transformation.²² The battle in this sphere of ideas turned out to be decisive, since capturing power now depended on capturing the language, destroying the old and imposing the new. In other words it depended on an imposition of a particular narrative.

The culture war has thus always been in the first place a war of ideas. Its aim was the imposition of a new language so to model an unreflexive response to particular social and moral propositions. Ultimately, a debate was to be shaped in such a way so mere administration was to be substituted for political confrontation, based on the taken for granted meta-political and unreflexively accepted axioms. Language becomes here a tool of manipulation.²³ Some spheres of discussion were to be eliminated as “politically incorrect”. Language as a battle terrain was recognised long time ago by modern linguistics and cultural anthropology which discovered that the proper use of words was always an instrument of establishing social domination. In the language structures there were coded power structures. This observation was especially useful for the New Left constructs incorporated by

²¹ Thus, the traditional family was nearly always pathological, patriotism turned to nationalism, religion ceased to be the most important cultural form of human rootedness, greater than the human contingent of earthly existence. It just became a “fundamentalist” danger. A division began to be formed at the pre-political, cultural level translated into political language.

²² Hayek called them the “professional traders of used ideas”.

²³ As Ludwig Wittgenstein famously said in his *Philosophical Investigations*, “Language is more than blood.” Wittgenstein rejected the referentialist view of language of St. Augustine, believing that it is far more complex. Language was an activity, or connected to a number of activities. Wittgenstein called them language-games for different purposes, not necessarily centred around referring. There are many contexts for using words and many kinds of speech acts. Wittgenstein rejected the logical positivists’ belief that the meaning of a statement depended on the method of verification. Meaning is use. To understand a language is to master its use, including the techniques to impose a narrative. Language is thus behaviour and words are given sense by practice.

individualistic liberalism. The New Left dusted off Gramsci's insight about culture guiding politics. This observation was to be an antidote for the breakdown of a classical Marxist paradigm. The liberal-left began to treat culture as a structure of power, of "oppression" in need of "liberation" in a totalitarian way. The traditional category of "oppression" used by the left in economics and politics was spread over culture, including language itself.

The aim of this operation was yet wider: a creation of the new anthropology as a condition of a true "liberation", the end station of human history. "Emancipation" from any "oppression" required an overreaching analytical subject and was a category of the "minority" used for it. Any minority, including a minority of "one". So a traditional liberal category of individual right, not necessarily entailing a definite anthropology, had to be shaped into an individual right understood as the right of an autonomous, imperial self. Traditional liberalism took for granted existing Christian anthropology assuming that it would sustain radical liberal individualism, thus it did not reject the overtly classical concept of truth. Also, a traditional anthropology or linguistics did not necessarily, as was a case with Wittgenstein, Gadamer and Rene Girard, annihilate a concept of an objective truth. It only made it more difficult to discover showing intellectual structural traps. But for them culture was not a structure of "oppression", but a fundamental universal code of sense, enabling an insight into the true ontological and anthropological structure of human existence, including, especially in Girard and Otto, metaphysics and the sacred.

Culture was a method of deciphering the hidden language of God, that is, the truth.²⁴ But for the liberal-left culture turned out to be a site of "oppression" because categories such as non-discrimination, equality, tolerance, human rights did not have any ontological basis. After post-modernism, it took over the idea that truth does not exist apart from the one created by an autonomous, purified from "oppression", liberated, authentic subject. Ultimately, in a process of moral auto-creation he is ready to endlessly negotiate conditions of equality and non-discrimination, so to create a new world. A precondition of progress towards it is yet a destruction of "oppressive" culture. Yet, this was a fallacy. If a moral subject creates its action on the basis of a moral auto-creation, this means that a moral sense, as such, is created as a sheer act of will, de facto, power against others, since nothing prevents this subject from defining his own desire as his "authenticity", "equality", and "non-discrimination".

It is here that the liberal-left's new concept of toleration comes in. Toleration is a general concept which has to exactly encompass equality and authenticity of all views treated in a non-discriminatory, that is also in liberal parlance, non-judgmental way. Toleration becomes here not a means allowing different people convinced that their views are true and others are in error, but a value in itself, a moral good, a sum of positive feelings towards all other people whatever views or behaviour they may have. This is a new liberal version of the Christian notion of charity, love of one's brother, but without the Christian morality, especially the crucial di-

²⁴ For more on this see R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, Baltimore 1977; T. A. Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity: An Interpretation of Rudolf Otto's Philosophy of Religion*, New York 2000.

distinction between a person and his deed, with charity unconditionally extended to a person and always the possibility of condemnation of the morally wrong action. But liberal tolerance as a moral good is totally imprecise, it becomes just a benign sentiment of acceptance. There are two consequences stemming from a situation where tolerance becomes a moral good identified with charity irrespective of any judgement. Its opposition becomes non-love but understood as hatred, not-understanding, the refusal to accept a particular person unconditionally with all their deeds and judgements without the right to challenge them. First, the classical concept of moral truth is annihilated; second, all such judgements are treated as hatred, a potential hate speech.

The classical notion of toleration was necessary as a tool of social accommodation of different people holding different views deemed by them as true and the views of others considered to be wrong. Tolerance was an important social method of accommodation coming out of the wisdom of recognition that people are not perfect, and an understanding that engaging them in a dialogue about truth is both possible and necessary to create a peaceful political order. Tolerance was extended to views with which we did not agree, since otherwise a conflict would ensue, a situation excluding realisation of any public values of another sort. The liberal-left notion of toleration is different from the classical one, since it demands acceptance and benevolence towards all views and all actions, that is all life choices, except those which are foundational, that is, which lay claim to an exclusive truth. In a situation where everybody should accept and understand everybody, where self-realisation of ones potential according to the liberal notion of the authentic imperial self is not negotiable, there exist no source of a potential conflict. Judgementalism, that is moral hierarchy, creates conflict, and thus it has to be eliminated.

This liberal-left notion of tolerance demands from everybody an acceptance of everything and everybody which amounts to a demand to treat ones identity and moral views as a hobby, as an inconsequential choice of a particular lifestyle, the very demand – and here a paradox is obvious – which is intolerant per se, since it requires guardians with power to eliminate and prevent any judgementalism in the future, the one which would claim to a pretension that it might morally be true. Such a demand to identify with all and a demand to understand them unconditionally makes sense when such a dialogue assumes a common humanity in truth which is bigger than the sum of just desires, opinions and impulses. In other words, that the real world and human existence have a moral value transcending the immediate choices of ours which are just opinions. If not, if the liberal-left tolerance excludes this, it forces people to treat themselves in an unserious way and their moral demands, including, for instance, religious ones, as just inconsequential hobbies, thus hitting the most intimate aspects of human personality, forcing it to be totally accepting of everything and nothing. But instead of creating a decent society of moral people, such a liberal-left demand creates people who are totally indifferent to others if they want to retain their moral sanity. This nullifies the very concept of moral education and produces

morally numb zombies not moral people. They become increasingly indifferent to anything but social causes defined as moral by those in power, who define the proper environment of a tolerant, non-judgemental society mobilising it just for good social causes – the only essence of morality of liberal society, because of the lack of moral grounds. These social causes are of course defined by those in power according to their image of a good society, from the vantage point of their new morality which, in fact, excludes tolerance.²⁵

This new notion of liberal tolerance tries desperately to create moral life while rejecting morality as grounded in any metaphysical sources, including a rejection of any concept of moral evil coming from human nature per se. Moral evil comes not from an individual person but from “oppressions” of society. It is thus necessary to reorganise this society, to create conditions when the true, devoid of evil human nature, can shine. Intolerance, lack of education are direct causes of evil. Properly informed people about the “oppressions” of society, then properly organised can become moral by social engineering, which reveals a rational perfect side of a permissive, tolerant society, beyond good or evil. Tolerance is the greatest virtue and moral value itself, and it is the greatest virtue and moral value because it is a deification of moral choice as the mother of all of morality, the Promethean deification of a human being as a subject of moral auto-creation on the basis of sheer want, a free choice. Thus the liberal notion of tolerance puts an absolute value of the automatic moral gravity of rational choices which, decoupled from reason understood as a tool of God or natural law, become what they have to become, rationalisations of desires defined as morality. Such a liberal tolerance becomes a form of para-religion.

But it does not defend reason against the irrationality of religion and other “oppressions”. In fact, it destroys the classic Augustinian religious neutrality of politics and turns politics into an arbiter of truth, that is becoming para-religion itself. And it is a para-religion since it wants to create a total world-view project, which has to provide all answers to metaphysical questions in this world, not only questions of political order, but questions concerning the existential sense of individuals. It becomes a para-religion and a total culture, a new paradigm wildly intolerant towards all competitors, not only at the political level, but as well as the personal level, which has incessantly to be watched over so a new thinking and moral error can never be born again.²⁶

²⁵ Mass mobilisation for such causes as non-smoking, against global warming etc., etc., reminding war campaigns to “end all wars”, or the war campaigns so to finally “secure peace” is an instance of such behaviour. For more on that see K. Minogue, *The New Epicureans: Permanent Values in a Virtual Age*, Chicago 2002, p. 24–25; on the liberal-left notion of the New Tolerance as a menace to freedom see J. Kekes, *The Illusions of Egalitarianism*, Ithaca 2003, esp. p. 169–186; on the issue of tolerance towards any sexual behaviour as a way to a total moral numbness see W. Shalit, *A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue*, New York 1999.

²⁶ See an excellent article on this totalitarian aspect of the liberal-left culture of tolerance: D. Gawin, *Miłosierdzie liberala*, [in:] *W obronie zdrowego rozsądku*, eds. M. A. Cichocki, T. Merta, Kraków 2000, p. 49–60.

We have here a classical instance of Nietzschean nihilism, which requires incessant administrative regulations by those who command power. On the one hand they guarantee this drive to tolerance, non-judgementalism, non-discrimination and equality, while on the other they search for instances of inequality. In such a situation, it is not only “bourgeois” society and its culture which should be an object of emancipation, but any society which tries to construct any culturally solidified patterns of behaviour which may, by definition, harbour oppression. Constant fluidity of identities rooted in an authentic self, deciding by choice a new course of life is the essence of this true personality, always ready to try something new, defining any allegiances and hierarchies as limiting, that is “oppressing” him and dangerous to others.²⁷ This category of “oppression” is delineated so widely that it becomes self-contradictory. On the one hand, it demands from an autonomous subject its own definition of authenticity, while on the other, it demands from it an utter tolerance towards reality which needs to be steered by those who define “good” social causes as a point around which social cohesion can coalesce.²⁸ *La lotta continua* against an oppressive society in the past and present, and against a threat of it in the future must continue. A paradox of such a *lotta continua* is that it must be constantly defined anew by those who nominate themselves as the class of “experts”, as guardians of “political correctness” having an insight into a just society, a totalitarian impulse to build, control, oversee, punish or administer psychotherapy so to ensure that no error can be born. What has to continue is the incessant “work” on the society and relationships so that no “error” can ever happen.²⁹ As such, a conflict goes international and tries to subject democracy into world governance in the name of justice. This additional culture war front cuts across countries, also affecting the European Union. Here America’s

main competitor in ordering and dominating the world is not some other great power but something quite different: the project of internationalism. A new world is being built by international organisations, with the Olympians as the officer class and an army of moralising non-governmental organisations as its voluntary foot soldiers. The Olympian project cannot, therefore, be anything other than a bid for power by a new class of power holders.³⁰

This international conflict is at the very same time a culture war conflict, extension of internal conflicts, between secularists, pretending to represent liberal rational, human rights civilisations and religious people. At the popular and at the elite level, this secularist culture is increasingly hostile to the religious people, especially to Christians, subsuming them under a rubric of religious fundamentalism.³¹ Such a pressure

²⁷ K. Minogue, *The New Epicureans...*, p. 26.

²⁸ “Oppression” means not only improper language masking the oppression of institutions defining it, for instance family, or churches, but any moral hierarchy or assessments which must be done on a basis of this new anthropology as an arbitrary act of moral auto-creation, and thus by definition do not have any compelling universal legitimacy.

²⁹ For a good analysis of this *la lotta continua* mentality of modern liberalism see the last chapter of K. Minogue, *Politics*, Oxford 1995.

³⁰ Idem, *Transnational Interest*, “American Outlook”, Spring 2000, p. 54.

³¹ For an excellent study showing the gross manipulations and lies of such thinking see W. T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, Oxford 2009, esp. p. 15–56, 181–230.

for delegitimation on the part of the secularists is usually formulated with a feeling that they have already “won the argument” with no turning back the clock. A resistance of the religious people, legitimate and done in self-defence, is treated as an utter arrogance of people which have been defeated on rational grounds by the secularists, a sheer liberal-left superstition itself. The marriage of the American liberalism with secularism after the incorporation of New Left “liberation” ideology into its orthodoxy gave the religious people no chance to be part of such a worldview, unless by inertia. Secularism’s claim to victory as a rational and the only legitimate way of civilised behaviour in the public sphere, makes resistance to ghettoisation and the will to present public religious argument treated as a scandal offending a secularist.³² Hatred for the defeated enemy no doubt religion on the defensive has ceased to move culture is more intense but puzzling only partially. This is because

secular rationalists in the West believe that their enviable rationality has emerged only after a long struggle with superstition, prejudice, obscurantism and all of the intolerance and oppression and violence they have caused. Building on the rationality of the Greeks, the modern world has created the empirical viewpoint of modern science in a long struggle against the repressive authority [or so they think] of Christian church. As rationality, it is believed to be – and I use “believe” very deliberately – the expression of pure human intelligence, owing nothing to culture. Whereas religious and social mores are cultural products, reason is presumed to transcend culture to become the bridge by which humanity finally achieves the unity previously frustrated by religious and nationalist conflict. One might say, ironically, that secular rationalists see themselves as being on the side of the angels. Secular rationalism (incorporating the politics of liberalism) thus becomes the appropriate meta-religion for humanity as a whole. It is for this reason that the triumph of secular rationalism, in its long march through international institutions, has been based upon treating Christianity quite differently from other religions. Christianity has been pitted against science as an answer to scientific questions, and inevitably [so they think] has been found wanting; for this reason it can be discarded as outmoded. Other religions, however are treated as a part of culture rather than intellectuality, and thus benefit from the tenets of multiculturalism.³³

Religions must be respected on condition that they fit into the new world order of human rights as defined by the new secularists. This world order must be based on reason if it wants to commend itself to the wider world. Pure intelligence and secular rationality must be a language of communication, a language allegedly neutral. In such a perspective Christianity, the inherited religion of the West, has constituted a situationist cultural imperialism, and its history of proselytising was a history, the secularists think, of imperialism conflicting with other cultures, a form of domination.³⁴ Secular rationalists think they are capable of bringing order and progress as a transnational ideology of justice and equality to the world, but they trade in superstition. They can bring such a transnational ideology to the world

³² On this self-defence attitude of Christians see: *Disciples and Democracy: Religious Conservatives and the Future of American Politics*, ed. M. Cromartie, Michigan 1994, esp. p. VIII–XI.

³³ K. Minogue, *Religion, Reason and Conflict in the 21st Century*, “The National Interest”, Summer 2003, p. 131.

³⁴ This was the reason the liberal-left was so panicky over George W. Bush’s religiosity and references to it made in connection with foreign policy measures.

only so long as it can be understood as the bubbling into consciousness of pure reason. For this reason it must liberate itself from any connection with Christianity. The real situation, however, is not merely that religion is alive and kicking, and that Christianity itself is far from dead, but that there is a Western, secular, post-Christian version of redemption also seeking to dominate the world. Christianity thus finds itself assailed not only by competing religions in the wider world, but from secular rationalism arisen within its own camp.³⁵

This secular rationalism is in itself a form of false “religion” defining itself as a transcultural and transnational pure rationality disseminated by the new class of secularists.³⁶

In general, one might just say that the culture war since the 1960s is truly about culture, since the capitalist economy and parliamentary politics were directly resistant to utopia. The utopia was to be introduced, as the New Left slogan indicated by “liberating” people’s consciousness from all “oppressive” cultural restraints, a tactic taken from Antonio Gramsci’s plan for a successful revolution, a reversal of the obsolete Marxist slogan that the basis influences the superstructure to which culture belonged. Now it was culture which was to be changed first, and after “the long march through the institutions” the cultural revolutionaries were to impose their own language and definition of reality in an imperceptible way on the properly shaped consciousnesses of the general public. What was needed was a change of meanings of all political, and social terms, that is cultural revolution.³⁷ Economy and the institutions of the liberal state were left alone, but what

has not changed is the deep passions of reformers and idealists in our civilisation to take over governments and use their authority to enforce a single right way of life. This impulse now focuses on social issues like sex, drugs, education, culture and other areas where a beneficent government aims to help what they patronisingly call “ordinary people”.³⁸

One of the most important institutions of such incessant reforms in America has been the Supreme Court promoting rights with an anthropology of the imperial self. The Court took upon itself a role of implementing justice and reconstructing society putting itself into the culture war fray. As Robert Nisbet noticed,

the crusading and coercing roles of the Supreme Court and the federal judiciary, which have been increasing in size almost exponentially this century, have created a new and important model for all those whose primary aim is the wholesale reconstruction of American society. There are more and more judges, more and more lawyers, and more and more law students and professors who have entered easily into a state of mind which sees in the Supreme Court precisely what Rousseau saw in his archetypal legislators and Bentham in his omnipotent magistrate sovereign forces for permanent revolution.³⁹

³⁵ K. Minogue, *Religion, Reason...*, p. 131–132.

³⁶ See: A. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, Tradition*, Indiana 1990; E. Thompson, *Czy potrafimy się porozumiewać? Uwagi o współczesnym dyskursie*, “Rzeczy Wspólne” 2012, No. 4.

³⁷ In the course of it, natural law was to be transformed into natural rights, and then into modern human rights, as an embodiment of progressive vision of the world beyond any meddling by the democratic process.

³⁸ K. Minogue, *The Escape from Freedom*, “Times Literary Supplement”, January 2000, p. 13.

³⁹ R. Nisbet, *Prejudices: A Philosophical Dictionary*, Cambridge Mass. 1982, p. 210.

Part of this “progressive” reconstruction is a politically correct language. Its aim is not to explain anything, or engage the other side in an argument of morally equal partners, but to stigmatise, to criminalise by association. Anyone not agreeing with the progressive liberal-left becomes “radical Right”, “reactionary”, “fascist”, at best “anachronistic”. Any protests and attempts to engage the other side in an argument are treated as a corroboration of an intellectual and moral error. Progress of history not only has to go in one direction decided by the ones who monopolise the discussion, but this progress makes suspect the set ways of life and institutions supporting and organising them, that is culture as such, a declaration of war on ordinary people incapable of understanding the great advantages of “emancipation”. Civilisation has to be “liberated”, a massive act of detachment from culture treated as a “house of slavery”, not of meaning and archetypical sense.

This progress has to be material and organisational, but first of all moral. But moral progress is not possible when the foundational basis of morality, God’s law, natural law, or even, if it were true, the universalistic ethic of a reasoned Kantian argument, are by definition rejected. Morality means here an achievement of an authentic self, the essence of freedom and happiness not curtailed by “oppressions” of culture. Morality is taken over by authenticity, and moral causes are redefined as progressive, “good” social causes of the day, defined by these “experts” who define a progressive direction of history. This constitutes an implementation of Rousseau’s dream of combining a true life, liberated from the shackles of civilisation, and at the same time guided properly in a course of this liberation towards the state of nature of authentic innocence and thus true identity, the “general will”. No custom, no cultural pattern, no arrangement is allowed if not freely chosen. Human authenticity is the alpha and omega of existential truth.⁴⁰ Thus, the aim of life is “liberation” from culture and a corresponding idea that the world, the civilisation

is basically evil because it is restrictive, and hence that the business of life is to detach oneself from it. For we live in a world that suppresses our authenticity by forcing upon us all kinds of pretences, responsibilities, duties. In the rhetoric of the modern revolutionary, this alienating world is referred to as oppressive, and unequal. Abstract [authentic] individualists have [to] detach their loyalties from state, Church and family only to attach them to a range of abstract causes expected through political action to achieve the perfection of human life. The consequence is a transformation of our moral world. Morality has modulated into a kind of sociality and [it] becomes swallowed up in desirable public policy. Evil is identified as failure to support righteousness and, especially, with espousal of the wrong causes. The measure of this moral transformation is the way in which our moral vocabulary is nervous about using “right” and “wrong”. It prefers to talk of the “acceptable” and “unacceptable”. To fail the test of opinionated high mindedness is to reveal oneself not as a cad or a thief, but as racist, sexist, elitist, and so on. Morality which used to be concerned with motive and with doing the right thing, has been politicised as orthodoxy of attitude. Moral relativism of our time is merely a recognition that public policy has replaced morality, and that public policy is essentially circumstantial.⁴¹

⁴⁰ For more see R. Scruton, *Rousseau and the Origins of Liberalism*, [in:] *The Betrayal of Liberalism*, eds. H. Kramer, R. Kimball, Chicago 1999, p. 39–40.

⁴¹ K. Minogue, *The New Epicureans*, [in:] *The Survival of Culture: Permanent Values in a Virtual Age*, eds. H. Kramer, R. Kimball, Chicago 2002, p. 24–25.

Individuals are expected and pushed to detach themselves from any cultural attachment, any allegiances justified by anything else but a free choice of the authentic self. Otherwise they are thought to be limited, “oppressed” in their capability of experiencing authenticity, the true existential humanness. A person has to be always ready to experience everything at once, a race to authenticity from “oppressions” of his or her station in life, an endless multiplication of spurious tolerant diversity when everybody can become everything, but in fact becomes nothing. This is a forced diversity by intellectual schemes implemented by government public policy beyond democratic control, with human rights defined as a reflex of human imperial self, the essence of modern liberal-left freedom. Such diversity in the authenticity of experiencing everything at once and thus radically detached from culture is yet a diversity of homogenised individuals in a process of incessant kaleidoscopic transformations of identity points.

At a time when everybody is expected to experience everything, institutions must change not to limit this new form of authentic, free floating personality. Society is expected to consist of the detached individuals as detached intellectuals are. They are the new “priests” of modernity, free floating and grasping for any ideology which will give them semblance of stability, distributing the ethics of suspicion and relativity, the sophisticated intellect without intelligence and wisdom. Such a war on culture to end all wars of liberation from “oppressions” aims at a new social and moral order, at

the perfecting of community. Yet these rather flimsy creatures with their passions for choice [as a precondition of authentic, liberated Self] and their tiny capacity for facing challenges without choosing the easier option seem hopelessly material for any kind of community at all. Community entails limitation, and the communities of the past were not only restrictive, but also ordered by rules with which people complied. The new [free floating individuals] are not very good at rules, but they are very sensitive to messages, role models, public education programmes, advertising, fictional heroes, and everything else that imitation and fashion feed up. The ideal perfection dreamed of in utopian literature depended upon a community in which everyone shared the same attitude to things. Such unanimity is a condition for a society without moral and political conflict. We live in a world busy constructing the pattern of right attitudes that will orchestrate such a terrifying harmony.⁴²

The ultimate source of culture war in modern liberal society is thus an attempt by the rootless intellectuals to create a perfect world with an anthropology concocted out of their existential misery and public policies implemented by the state with them as advisers of the Prince. They want to ensure that no one else can experience real authenticity but the artificial authenticity of individuals coming from nowhere and going to a society created by them in this limited point in time and place in history. This is a tune of a jammed record sent to the future as the sound of the universe, in fact just an echo of their own hubristic ego.

⁴² These free floating individuals are those who have unwittingly volunteered to be the materials for whatever is the next stage in the West’s search for a perfect society. K. Minogue, *The New Epicureans...*, p. 26–27.

The reason the term “culture war” was coined in the 1990s seemed obvious. This was the first decade when the countercultural consequences of the revolution of the 1960s began to be felt, with a large section of the educated people imbibing its idea of “liberation” from all established political, social, cultural and religious institutions entering positions of public significance and influence, with the foreseeable declaration of war on traditional America.⁴³ Political consequences followed. The political parties’ platforms included morally dividing issues, becoming increasingly ideological ones away from their pragmatic traditions.⁴⁴ A natural tendency to interpret human interactions solely in terms of power followed suit. The culture war has begun to be looked upon in that way, as a substitute for power grab, a Marxist fallacy. In fact it is exactly the other way round. Politics is a power – reflected function of culture, and at the root of culture lie the deepest commitments to what people hold to be true conditions of their identity.

Politicians noticed the culture war phenomenon and tried to interpret it differently. When in 1972 the Democratic Party badly split over the Vietnam War and adopted a radically left programme of abortion on demand, the war overt culture began. Republican president R. Nixon fighting for re-election immediately understood the potential of this ideologisation of the Democratic Party and its rebellion against America as a “good” civilisation.⁴⁵ He decided to polarise the conflict to make the traditional Democratic Party’s electoral base aware that its party was betraying them by betraying America. Nixon appealed to the “silent majority”, America of the interior, blue collar workers, traditional immigrant groups, women against radical feminism, or white men accused of all possible crimes, all representing values the radical wing of the Democratic Party despised and wanted to change. With all his subtlety he called the Democratic Party a party of three “A”: “abortion, amphetamine and anti-Americanism”.

This was simplification but it had a charming political potential organising emotions of the electorate. The Republican Party strategists decided to use cultural issues as polarising tactics since traditional economic issues, the basis of Roosevelt’s

⁴³ A good account of this process see H. Hecla, *Christianity and American Democracy*, Cambridge Mass. 2007, p. 1–145; D. Frum, *How We Got Here: The 70’s: The Decade That Brought You Modern Life – For Better or Worse*, New York 2000. Cultural critic and neoconservative Midge Decter described this attack of the new elites on the traditional American society in the 70’s in: M. Decter, *The Liberated Woman and Other Americans*, New York 1975, p. 244–245.

⁴⁴ The Democratic Party platform of 1972 was a stepping stone in this direction. After being taken over by its New Left liberal wing, the Party declared, among other issues, abortion to be its goal preparing the way for the Supreme Court decision of “Roe vs Wade” of 1973, declaring abortion a constitutional right and opening a never ending cultural and moral battle in America. See: G. McKenna, *Democrats, Republicans, and Abortion*, “The Human Life Review”, Summer–Fall 2006, p. 57–79; for the legal and historical manipulations creating false arguments for an abortion debate see: F. J. Beckwith, *Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case Against Abortion Choice*, Cambridge 2007; A. Hendershott, *The Politics of Abortion*, San Francisco 2007.

⁴⁵ The rebellion was not so much concerning the Vietnam War which Nixon was closing down, let alone civil rights which after the acts of 1964 and 1965 were considered to be a bipartisan affair.

Democratic Party' coalition from the 1930s, ceased to have the electorate's priority. The cultural issues took priority.⁴⁶ If as the feminists argued the "private was political", meaning there were no neutral spheres where the unequal relations of power could not be found, it meant that what was at stake was not the traditional distribution of wealth but culture issues such as racial relations, affirmative action, anti-Americanism, feminism, the definition of America and patriotism, family, marriage, and sexual ethics. Such matters defined American identity in the most fundamental sense.⁴⁷ A new era began in the United States which is still developing in unpredictable directions.⁴⁸

Nixon wanted to turn a gamut of little cultural conflicts into the big one of "we-them", more politically useful than economic matters. But the mastermind behind the plan was Nixon's vice president Spiro Agnew, a man of great intelligence and public arrogance, the villain of the liberal-left.⁴⁹ Agnew did not have mercy for the egotistical moral hubris of his liberal-left critics whom he called a "bunch of sycophants", as well as the radical bourgeois youth pretending to be revolutionaries, individuals "who were taking their tactics from Fidel Castro but their money from daddy", talking to them the way they were not used to and which horrified them. He challenged the media claiming that the

time in which TV commentators as well as gentlemen from the New York Times enjoyed diplomatic immunity protecting them from commentary and critique of what they said belonged to the past. When their critique begins to be excessive or unjust, we will call them from their ivory towers so as to subject them to a ritual of sharp and animated public debate. The time of the blind acceptance of their opinions is over. And a time of a naive faith in their neutrality has passed. They [just] represent shallow, allegedly refined opinions.⁵⁰

Agnew did not just think about winning the next election. At a time of a total paralysis of power, civil disobedience and suicidal attack on all public institutions, he

⁴⁶ J. T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States 1945–1974*, Oxford 1996, p. 710–742.

⁴⁷ Midge Decter, a journalist, traditional liberal and later in life a neoconservative understood immediately that this cultural conflict was total and accelerating. See: M. Decter, *op. cit.*, p. 244–245.

⁴⁸ G. Weigel, *The Sixties: Again And Again*, "First Things", April 2008, p. 32–40.

⁴⁹ J. Witcover, *Very Strange Bedfellows: The Short and Unhappy Marriage of Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew*, Washington DC 2007.

⁵⁰ M. Scully, *Not Made in Heaven*, "National Review", June 25, 2007, p. 48. Agnew was a politician of great humour and intelligence, and assumed the intelligence of his interlocutor airing his analyses in a language both of emotions and logic, destroying the spurious objectivity of the public discourse of the liberal media and showing their manipulations. The conservatives loved him, the liberal-left hated him. The latter understood that he defined a moment of crisis in an unmasking way, even if in a brutal way to which he was challenged. In one of his speeches he stated that "there was a time when the liberalism of the old elite was courageous and lighting philosophy – the avanguard of political dogma of Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman and John Kennedy. But you know, and I know this too, that the old war horses are long gone. Today's race of radical-liberal buffoonery in the Senate has as much to do with Harry Truman as the prairie dog with the wolf". Nixon who used Agnew as every intelligent president uses his vice-president, to attack his political opponents without mercy in a situation politically too dangerous for him remarked: "Do you know why they yell at him? Because he hits them where it hurts". M. Scully, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

wanted to regain a minimum field of a free political manoeuvre by the political elites, breaking the stalemate and chaos so the president could take decisive decisions with a clear mandate to govern. Facing the chance to finish the war with communism in Vietnam, putting in order the welfare state, Agnew, the "Great Polariser" concluded that

It's high time to destroy this mushy rhetoric and divide along the authentic lines [hitting] this castrated masses of impudent snobs in the media, universities and culture.⁵¹

The real brain behind Nixon's strategy of polarisation was Patrick J. Buchanan, one of his youngest and closest advisers, the author of a large part of Nixon's and Agnew's speeches. Buchanan was a brilliant, pugnacious conservative journalist and a cultural critic. As a Catholic he understood that it is culture which constitutes the key to political success and that liberal-left tactics are dangerous, not just a passing fad. First of all, it was necessary not to let it capture the language and impose its own alternative narrative. Buchanan coined Nixon's phrase the "Great Silent Majority" and began to build a cultural front. He understood, as other conservative intellectuals still in their elitist enclaves did not, that the Republican Party winning an election and establishing its long range success required an abandonment by the American conservative politicians of a distrust towards democratic masses, and a real turning around from a plutocratic America. It was the majority, the vast American middle class which was attacked in the first place by the New Class of the liberal-left cognoscenti, full of disdain towards poorer citizens, thinking differently and living in their autonomous worlds, treated as an obstacle towards progress as represented and defined by these cognoscenti.⁵² Here, the American conservatism began to be the conservatism of the "little guy", as American liberalism became during F.D. Roosevelt's coalition. American modern conservatives like Buchanan, Goldwater and Reagan ceased to be elitist and went populist. They understood that in the culture war, American society was, in the majority, on the same side of the culture war. It was not the old "aristocratic" conservatism of Hamilton or John Adams, nor the libertarian conservatism of Nock, Babitt or Santayana, but a modern one. American populism took a stance in the name of freedom of the pluralistic, autonomous worlds, the essence of America and also conservatism, at a time when the liberal-left began to champion an anthropology of the imperial self against any "oppressive" institutions. Thus began an anti-elitist aspect of American conservatism, turning to the American *demos*,

from the Appalachians to the Rocky Mountains" as in the 60's such a program was described by Willmore Kendall. With the creation of the modern interventionist liberal state and its progressive elites

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² This was a phenomenon which Buchanan understood well before Christopher Lasch gave it the catchy name "The Revolt of the Elites" against their own societies in 1995. Norman Podhoretz, a neoconservative critic and a contender in the culture war stated that elites became liberal in a new sense, that is manipulative and mendacious, a colossal transformation of the ruling elite acting against their own society. N. Podhoretz, *My Love Affair with America*..., p. 210.

treating it as a tool of transforming society in the name of justice, there began a radical turning around. It was not the masses which rebelled against plutocratic elites, the new liberal-left elites rebelled against its own society and its values. Such elites located in the interventionist's governmental agendas, the media and in the universities created a multi-current phenomenon, although one of the most important driving aspects of it was a feeling of "white guilt" for a society which suddenly seemed to be totally racist, sexist, imperialist and justifying injustices.⁵³

This was connected with a rise of the huge mass of social science college-educated students thinking that they possessed the tools to ameliorate all ills of society in a process of mass social engineering. The New Left provided these new elites, which considered themselves to be "the best and the brightest" of the liberal America, with intellectual tools of treating society as a province of incessant reforms. This was a category of "emancipation" from "oppressions".⁵⁴ "Oppression" was defined as contrary to the ideal of equality in every sphere of life with an autonomous, "liberated" from any hierarchies self, which essentially meant a declaration of war on the whole of society and culture as such.

Buchanan polarised the conflict in cultural terms defining the battle as waged between a nihilistic liberal-left, which in its passion to "liberate" America from all "oppressions" wanted to build a new utopia in the name of its truth. In 1975 he wrote the strategy of such a polarisation.⁵⁵ As a catalyst of cultural polarisation he chose an issue which from a moral point of view seemed to be suicidal, a nomination for the Supreme Court by Richard Nixon of a judge who used to be a segregationist from the South. When challenged that such a move was morally unacceptable and could backfire within the Republican Party camp, Buchanan argued that he did not care about loyal Republicans who would vote for their party anyway. His aim was to tear with one swift move the South from the Democratic Party, to which it traditionally belonged. Buchanan understood well that the Supreme Court was becoming a terrain of culture war, with liberal judges taking up issues belonging to Congress and engaging in social engineering in the name of justice, especially racial justice. Such a conflict over nomination would be then looked upon, argued Buchanan, as a conflict not over the professionalism of a judiciary nomination, but over matters which engaged a growing number of the electorate worrying about the activist Court. That is why the black

⁵³ For this process of forming new elites and their rebellion against society in the name of the minorities see an influential book from 1991, E. J. Dionne, *Why American Hate Politics?*, new edition New York 2004; also see the best recent synthesis of conservatism in the 20th century, D. T. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the Republican Right Rose to Power in Modern America*, Kansas 2011, esp. p. 153–183.

⁵⁴ If American society was corrupted, imperialist, racist, sexists then nothing short of a total transformation of consciousness could do real work on culture. Thus, the liberal-left began total work over "wrong" consciousness, and as part of this "liberation" all intermediate, autonomous institutions breeding this "bad" consciousness, such as family or churches, had to be defined as suspicious and transformed. John Lennon's song "Imagine" expressing such a utopian dream of creating "good" behaviour outside of culture was a fitting symbol of it. See: A. Kołakowska's chapter *Imagine* in her: *Wojna kultur i inne wojny*, Warszawa 2010.

⁵⁵ P. Buchanan, *Conservative Votes, Liberal Victories: Why the Right Has Failed*, New York 1975.

issue in the South and the way in which racial justice had been realised there by judicial fiat, alienated a large number of the white population there. The understanding of race justice in the South became

a bitterly divisive issue for Democratic candidates. Either they kick their black friends in the teeth, or they kick the South in the teeth. De facto divisive.⁵⁶

Buchanan pressed Nixon to accept this strategy since it would “split the Democratic Party and the entire country in half. I believe that we get a bigger slice”,⁵⁷ Buchanan argued here both from the depth of American populism and its resistance to the interventions of the federal government, and against the New Class which tried to utilise it to implement its progressive ideology in the name of “liberation from oppression”. Buchanan was not racist. He knew the legacy of the segregationists’ policies was dramatic. At the same time he realised that the way the Supreme Court and other branches of government tried to rectify them was wrong, divisive and manipulative, as a consequence hitting the very blacks whom they allegedly were to help. The idealistic and impatient governmental programmes to fight residues of racism and poverty disregarded the cultural matrix, alienated the majority of whites in the South, caused unintended consequences and generated bitter conflicts weakening federalism and the states’ autonomy. But they gave a chance to bring the alienated voters of the traditionally Democratic South to the Republican Party.

Buchanan was one of the first to discern a political potential of culture as a field of battle, devising its strategy and realising that it was generated by the very logic of the post-1960s liberalism, increasingly taking over the programme and rhetoric of the New Left with its “emancipation from oppressions” ideology. Buchanan was convinced that it was not him who chose this war, but that it was imposed on him and the majority of American society. This liberal-left ideology rejected a dividing line between the federal and state governments and autonomous worlds of ordinary pluralistic people.

Moreover, the interventions of the former came to be executed in the name of many lobbying “minority” groups, which tried to redefine cultural paradigm and convert it into a political programme, a truly countercultural revolution first changing the language, then forming a political programme on its basis, then attacking traditional institutions, finally branding them illegitimate and pushing them outside of civilised politics. Buchanan realised that the conflict was a “war of all against all”, since it was a cultural conflict. What was at stake was a total change of the anthropological, not merely political or social, cultural paradigm. Who would be the first to define

⁵⁶ In: M. Lind, *Up from Conservatism: Why the Right is Wrong for America*, New York 1996, p. 138.

⁵⁷ In: K. O’Reilly, *Nixon’s Piano: Presidents and Racial Politics From Washington to Clinton*, New York 1995, p. 308–310.

the language of this battle, define the contours of public debate with a legitimate and illegitimate activity, separate a foe from a friend, would win the war. This battle, Buchanan knew, had already been raging for a while and dividing every American family, nearly every marriage, local community and church.

But the conflict lacked an identifiable language to define it and convert it into political action. Many, even conservative politicians, were afraid of such a devastating conflict. But Buchanan realised that what was at stake was a redefinition of the American political scene for generations, as F.D. Roosevelt did it in the 1930s, regaining political field of manoeuvre for the American elites. He wanted the Republican Party to be a catalyst of this new conflict, mobilising the electorate to win over a large chunk of the traditional Democratic coalition formed by Roosevelt. Buchanan acted by instinct, with his elitist Catholic education helping him understand the decisive role of culture in public debates. Although he was too close to the events at hand to read it impassionately and rationally, he nevertheless was younger than Nixon and the Republican establishment and realized that it was not enough to yell at hippies and be against drugs.

What was needed was a long term strategy and a new language. But Buchanan lost because he did not have enough influence within the Republican establishment. Nixon was not sure how to delineate the front lines after the 1972 landslide. He also knew that from the point of view of gaining a grip of the political system, the most devastating was the Vietnam War conflict, and he managed to end this conflict, even if he alienated his base with the China opening.

As a consequence, Nixon accepted nearly all the progressive causes of the liberals of the 1960s, focusing on waging culture war only on the international scene in a limited sense. His policies did not effectively touch any myths of progressive liberalism from the times of Theodore Roosevelt and Herbert Croly. He continued active state involvement, including some points of the New Left's orthodoxy incorporated into a liberal doctrine. What he was appealing to was rather a traditional "law and order" dream of the Middle America. Nixon no doubt, mastered the "war of culture" politics, but in a reactive, not conceptual sense, a way of drawing political advantage from a situation of the breakdown of the liberal order. Nixon's politics was statist, in an almost orthodox way, and liberal-progressive, but his rhetoric appealed to the emotions and public wrath of the majority.⁵⁸

It was Reagan's revolution which polarised the conflict again, but Buchanan's strategy was used here marginally. Reagan was successful not because the "Great Silent Majority" became mad seeing what was happening in the streets and on the TV screens, but because the liberal-left programmes were hopelessly wrong. Nixon's cultural politics was based on sheer wrath and moral indignation, while Reagan put forth intellectual reasons why the liberal-left had to be stopped.⁵⁹ Buchanan became

⁵⁸ N. Bjerre-Poulsen, *Right Face: Organizing the American Conservative Movement*, Copenhagen 2002, p. 21–37.

⁵⁹ There are yet interpretations which show Nixon as a real warrior in the culture war who prepared the ground for Reagan. See: R. Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing*

his a director of communications between 1985–1987. Buchanan then threw his support behind George Bush in 1988 and during re-election in 1992, when he delivered a keynote address during the Republican National Convention, known as the “culture war” speech, in which he described “a religious war going on in our country for the soul of America”. In the speech, he said of Bill and Hillary Clinton:

The agenda Clinton & Clinton would impose on America – abortion on demand, a litmus test for the Supreme Court, homosexual rights, discrimination against religious schools, women in combat units – that’s change, all right. But it is not the kind of change America needs. It is not the kind of change America wants. And it is not the kind of change we can abide in a nation we still call God’s country.⁶⁰

After Clinton’s victory in 1992 with his victorious slogan “It’s the economy, stupid”, it seemed that economic problems again dominated, but such cultural issues as abortion financed from the federal taxes or homosexuals in the army were soon dividing America again. Clinton, taken by surprise, asked James D. Hunter how one could solve the culture war. Hunter responded “one cannot”, explaining that Clinton did not understand the essence of the culture war in America. Cultural conflicts concern fundamental beliefs and axioms which exclude any compromise. When someone did not share, argued Hunter the same language, had a different description of the world and expectations, this was an impossibility.⁶¹ A common understanding in America of America had broken down.⁶²

At the same time that Hunter conversed with Clinton, the most venerable member of the neoconservatives Irving Kristol published his manifesto locating the culture war in an antinomian character of contemporary progressive liberalism, its incessant aggression against culture, wrong anthropology and metaphysical blindness preventing it from understanding a legitimate place of institutions professing non-liberal values. Kristol, after Reinhold Niebuhr and Lionel Trilling, showed a metaphysical disability of liberalism. He shared their disdain towards the hege-

of America, New York 2008. Reagan’s cultural as well as economic programme was prepared mainly by former Democrats who escaped their party, called the neo-conservatives. For the best account of modern conservatism in America see: J. Mickletwait, A. Wooldridge, *The Right Nation: Conservative Power in America*, New York 2004, p. 71–76; M. Friedman, *The Neoconservative Revolution: Jewish Intellectuals and the Shaping of Public Policy*, Cambridge 2005, p. 139–160.

⁶⁰ 1992 Republican National Convention Speech, Houston, Texas, August 17, 1992. The enthusiastic applause he received prompted his detractors to claim that the speech alienated moderates from the Bush-Quayle ticket, which lost the election. After that Buchanan tried to run for presidency himself without success and became a conservative political commentator.

⁶¹ J. D. Hunter, *Reflections...*, p. 253; idem, *Before the Shooting Begins: Searching for Democracy in America’s Culture War*, New York 1994, p. 8. Hunter described the Tower of Babel in which the Americans had already been living for some time.

⁶² In 1980, one of mothers of a child in a primary school, threw in the face of the members of the state school board in New Jersey, during a discussion about introducing sex education in a particular shape famous, the widely-known words: “What have you been reading? I don’t understand you. I can’t even hold a conversation with you.” J. Zimmerman, *Whose America: Culture Wars in the Public Schools*, Harvard UP 2002, p. 8.

monic position of American liberalism which blinded people to its anthropological limitations, while claiming to be a fully-fledged philosophy. It was impossible to be politically liberal if one rejected liberal metaphysics, because liberal metaphysics destroyed the professed political values which liberalism allegedly wanted to retain. For Kristol liberalism

shaped an utterly false view of the world. This was the beginning of my cold war – a persistent critical inquiry into liberalism, trying to figure out ... the phenomenon of left-wing political romanticism and utopianism that infected the intellectual classes of the West. I was indeed a “Cold Warrior”. ... “Cold War Liberal” ... but I was not engaged in any kind of crusade against communism. It was the fundamental assumptions of contemporary liberalism that were my enemy. What began to concern me more and more were the clear signs of rot and decadence germinating within American society – a rot and decadence that was no longer the consequence of liberalism, but was the actual agenda of contemporary liberalism. And the more contemporary, the more candid and radical was this agenda. I [could] not pretend any more ... that liberals were wrong, because they are liberals. What is wrong with liberalism is liberalism – a metaphysics and mythology that is woefully blind to the human and political reality. It [was] a cold war that, for the last twenty five years, has engaged my attention and energy... [But] there is no ‘after the Cold War’ for me. So far from having ended, my cold war has increased in intensity, as sector after sector of American life has been ruthlessly corrupted by the liberal ethos. It is an ethos that aims simultaneously at political and social collectivism on the one hand, and moral anarchy on the other. It cannot win, but it can make us all losers. We have ... reached a critical turning point in the history of the American democracy. Now that the other “Cold War” is over, the real cold war has begun. We are far less prepared for this cold war, far more vulnerable to our enemy, than was the case with our victorious war against a global communist threat. We are starting from ground zero and it is a conflict I shall be passing to my children and grandchildren. But it is a far more interesting cold war – intellectually interesting, spiritually interesting – than the war we have so recently won and I rather envy those young enough for the opportunities they will have to participate in it.⁶³

Kristol pointed out that the assumptions of liberalism had to be thought through if freedom was to be retained. Liberalism was absolutely incapable of providing reasons why should anyone defend it, it had wrong anthropology and a metaphysical deftness. It was incapable of giving reasons why it fought communism. The Cold War was reduced to a primitive conflict about power between a totalitarian tyranny and a constitutional democracy. But the liberal ethos was aiming at romantic progress. It considered Communism just one of the stages, even if brutal and wasteful, although it was not so for the progressive decadence of America after the Cold War. Yet for Kristol, cultural and moral decadence was not an unintended consequence of liberal policies, but the very essence of the liberal message.

This liberalism had no difficulty, in fact it did it naturally, accepting the New Left progressive programme of “liberation” from all “oppressions”. Liberalism’s accommodation with the radicalism of the New Left made liberalism’s cultural radicalisation against the real world, defined as problematic, natural.⁶⁴ From a doctrine of freedom, liberalism turned to a revolutionary doctrine of enslavement so to create

⁶³ I. Kristol, *My Cold War*, [in:] idem, *Neoconservatism: An Autobiography of an Idea*, New York 1995, p. 484–486.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 485.

a “liberated” world, a perfect realisation of progress, the essence of the modern liberalism. This change was inherent in liberalism’s assumptions, not a betrayal of them. It found in the New Left’s message of “liberation” its logical fulfillment, engaging in a massive culture war against the existing world in the name of the new utopia.⁶⁵

Hunter who tried to describe culture war in academic language defining the warring camps as liberal-left and orthodox-religious, defined a conflict between progressive liberalism and its opponents fighting to retain autonomy, that is freedom. Kristol, writing after Hunter, was more precise. But they differ fundamentally. Hunter does not state who began this war and recognises justifications of both sides as equal, even if not subject to compromise. For Kristol, it was liberalism which began this conflict since aggression against culture and tradition lies in its very nature. The “religious” side simply defends itself against the attack. Hunter does not assess the normative values of both sides. Kristol definitely does so, stressing an inherent totalitarian temptation in liberalism’s normative assumptions, wrong metaphysics and anthropology leading human mind into an arid land, promising something which it can never deliver, and considering this shortage as a proof of its not yet fully applied cultural assumptions.

Kristol, an orthodox Jew until the end of his life, acknowledged Judeo-Christian anthropology as a necessary ingredient of freedom in the West, even for non-religious people, and was in fact an optimist. Others on the non-liberal side were less so. In “An Open Letter to Conservatives” in 1991, Paul Weyrich lamented over the conservative’s failure to address cultural issues.⁶⁶ He argued that it was time for religious conservatives to withdraw from national politics and concentrate on their own communities because the culture war was lost. He did not want to abandon politics completely, but advised the religious conservatives to focus on the real issues of community, family, faith, matters of culture and its nurturing. Politics was just one of the many and not necessarily most important vehicle of change, since

politics itself has failed. And politics has failed because of the collapse of culture. The culture we are living in is becoming an ever-wider sewer. I think we are caught up in a cultural collapse of historical proportions, a collapse so great that it simply overwhelms politics. That’s why I am in a process of rethinking what it is that we, who still believe in our traditional, Western, Judeo-Christian culture, can and should do under the circumstances.⁶⁷

Weyrich made an important observation that it was

⁶⁵ This liberal transformation is semantically difficult to capture, yet that is why the phrase liberal-left is used, or in American vocabulary liberal-left, left, or socialism. On this inherent continuity of liberal assumptions with the modern culture left see: R. Scruton, *Rousseau and the Origins of Liberalism...*, p. 19–42, 43–70; J. Kalb, *The Tyranny of Liberalism: Understanding and Overcoming Administered Freedom, Inquisitional Tolerance and Equality by Command*, Wilmington 2008, esp. p. 3–44.

⁶⁶ Weyrich is the head of the Free Congress Foundation and one of the most important conservative political organisers, and helped create the Heritage Foundation.

⁶⁷ P. Weyrich, *An Open Letter to Conservatives*, [in:] *Conservatism in America in 1930*, ed. G. R. Schneider, New York 2003, p. 428–429.

impossible to ignore the fact that the United States is becoming an ideological state. The ideology of Political Correctness, which openly calls for the destruction of our traditional culture, has so gripped the body politic our institutions are even affecting the Church. It has completely taken over the academic community. It is now pervasive in the entertainment industry, and it threatens to control literally every aspect of our lives. Those who came up with Political Correctness, which we more accurately call "Cultural Marxism" did so in a deliberate fashion. The United States is very close to becoming a state totally dominated by an alien ideology, an ideology bitterly hostile to Western culture. Even now, for the first time in their lives, people have to be afraid of what they say. This has never been true in the history of [America]. Yet today, if you can say the "wrong thing", you suddenly have legal problems, political problems, you might lose your job or be expelled from college. Certain topics are forbidden. You can't approach the truth about a lot of different subjects. If you do, you are immediately branded as "racist", "sexist", "homophobic", "insensitive", or "judgmental".⁶⁸

Weyrich claimed that cultural Marxism was succeeding in its war against American culture. If so and if it was impossible to escape the cultural decomposition of society, what was to be the strategy for conservatives. The situation was new in the sense that the majority of Americans became susceptible to this decomposition, corrupted by this MTV, as Weyrich called it, culture. No more was there any moral majority in America which believed in values not imposed by the cultural left. For the conservatives it was a depressing time, stated Weyrich, because

we probably lost the culture war. That does not mean the war is not going to continue, that it isn't going to be fought on other fronts. But in terms of society in general, we have lost. Even if we win, our victories fail to translate into the kind of policies we believe are important. Therefore, what seems to me a legitimate strategy for us to follow is to look at ways of separating ourselves from the institutions that have been captured by the ideology of Political Correctness or by other enemies of our traditional culture. I would point out that the word "holy" means "set apart", and that it is not against our tradition to be in fact "set apart". There were times when those who had our beliefs were definitely in the minority, and it was a band of hardy monks who preserved the culture while the surrounding society disintegrated.⁶⁹

Weyrich pointed out that by separatism he meant, for instance, an activity of the homeschoolers, who realising that the public school system ceased to educate their children but began to "condition" them in the ideology of Political Correctness, separated themselves from the public schools and set up new educational institutions and schools in their homes. People were also getting rid of the TV sets, and setting up private courts, when they realised that official justice is permeated with ideology and greed.⁷⁰ What was necessary was a search for institutions which could bypass official institutions "that are controlled by the enemy". The energies spent on fighting it on its own turf which they control was useless, would exhaust energy and eventually would amount to fighting battles, the language and the terms of which were to be dictated by adversaries. The strategy of separation in Weyrich's view had to do more with

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 429.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 430.

⁷⁰ The good account of such separate institutions especially homeschooling is in J. Mickletwait, A. Wooldridge, *The Right Nation...*, p. 189–194.

who we are, and what we have become, than it does with what the other side is doing and what we are going to do about it. Young people have absorbed ... much of the decadent culture without understanding that they are part of it. I am not suggesting that we all become Amish [but] I do think that we have to look at what we can do to separate ourselves from this hostile culture. What steps can we take to make sure that we and our children are not infected? We need some sort of quarantine. The radicals of the 60s had three slogans: turn on, tune in, drop out. I suggest that we adopt a modern version. First, turn off the television and some of the garbage that's on the computers, the means by which you and your family are being infected with cultural decadence. Tune out. Create a little stillness. Finally, we need to drop out of this culture, and find places where we can live godly, righteous, and sober lives. I don't have all the answers or even all the questions. But ... what we have been doing for thirty years hasn't worked, that while we have been fighting and winning in politics, our culture has decayed into something approaching barbarism. We need to take another tack, find a different strategy. If you agree, and are willing to help wrestle with what strategy should be, let me know.⁷¹

In 2006 another contestant in the culture war, the conservative Richard A. Viguerie, criticised the Republican George Bush administration for expanding the government's intervention, also for conducting the imperial foreign policy and betraying the cause of conservatism.⁷² He considered the contemporary culture war as the most decisive front line of Americans' history since they

are engaged in a struggle between traditional values and moral relativism; between morality and humanism; between a belief that the universe is built by God on absolute truth, and the belief that life is meaningless, accidental and random. This war – and it is a war, make no mistake – is far greater than any of its individual battles. This is not just an argument about what kinds of TV shows we will have and how important the family will be in American life. It is a struggle between a world of perpetual conflict (the liberal vision) and a world of cooperation based on tradition (the conservative vision). In the liberal view, life is viewed as a constant struggle for power between oppressors and the oppressed. By this light, you can easily see why liberals always speak in terms of victims and refuse to concede even the slightest progress against poverty and racism. In the conservative world, life is often viewed as unfair, but ultimately as a series of opportunities. By representing immutable definitions of right and wrong, men and women are able to support their families and not be dependent on others, but they know the community will help if they face unforeseen hardship. The idea of self-determination is balanced with the idea of compassion, and competition is tempered by caring. For liberals to win this battle of world views, they cannot simply promote their own. For the idea that “the world is struggle” to make sense, liberals must inculcate in people the idea that they are oppressed. If there is no oppression there is no fight. More than ever before, American politics is based on a struggle between two philosophies of life. This struggle has become known as “the culture wars” pitting privileged elites against regular Americans on issues ranging from abortion to gun control; from funding of government – approved art, to the mixing of politics and science in schools’ from “pulling the plug” on disabled people, to the public celebrating of Christmas.⁷³

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 430–431.

⁷² Viguerie, called the “Funding Father of the conservative movement”, transformed American politics in the 1960's and 1970's by the use of direct mail fundraising. He computerised it to help form a conservative coalition which then elected Ronald Reagan. Viguerie motivated millions of Americans to participate in politics expanding the conservative base exponentially. He was cited by the *Washington Times* in 1999 as one of 13 “Conservatives of the Century”.

⁷³ R. A. Viguerie, *Conservatives Betrayed: How George W. Bush and Other Big Government Republicans Hijacked the Conservative Cause*, Los Angeles 2006, p. 101–102.

Viguerie showed how American politics was once based on factors determined at birth, such as the status of one's parents' economics, education, region, religion and ethnicity, as well as the durability of one's stay in the United States, with political party allegiances fairly stable once chosen during the first voting. But by the end of the 20th century, such factors declined somehow in significance and

the crucial division in [American] society is based more on culture. We are divided between liberals (who would use the power of government to overturn traditional values) and conservatives (who support the right of families and individuals to live accordingly to traditional values). The original culture war – Germany's *Kulturkampf* against Catholics – was based on religion, and so it is with today's culture wars, in which radical secularists would deny religion and religious-based values any place in public life. [But] if conservatives want to change culture, we have to begin by speaking up for our own point of view.⁷⁴

In fact, Weyrich postulated the creation of an alternative society to move culture and then influence politics, a kind of tactics the fundamentalists decided to take up in the aftermath of the "Scopes Trial in 1925. But at the same time this was a much more active tactics of self-organisation. He realised that the sides to this culture war may turn out to be uneven and that pushing, in this instance, the religious people into a ghetto might be a possibility, with the rest accepting the point of view of the cultural Left, which aims at a change of a cultural paradigm, a great change of human consciousness. This project, which Weyrich calls by its popular term Political Correctness, has gained popularity but is imprecise. It denotes a massive distortion of ideas, riddled with mendacities, supported by half-baked pseudo-scientific theories with pervasive irrationalism and violence disguised as rationality and tolerance, but first of all using language as a tool of battle to take power. Public life then becomes a battlefield with new superstitions dressed up as theory which, in fact, is radical and totalitarian, not tolerating any other thinking people and considering a "naked public square" to be an ideal. Cultural Marxism is here the twin brother of postmodernistic thinking, which claims that there is no truth and that this claim represents the truth, a self-contradictory statement. But postmodernism is here an ally of a totalitarian cultural liberal-left, since it claims that there is no objective truth, which it calls meta-narrative, and historical truth, that all our convictions are just conditioned by social and historical circumstances. There is nothing neutral, no objective measure of reality which would not be marred by some axioms, and which by definition falsify it. All are just "languages" which need to be decoded and exposed as "power tools", as "symbolic violence" and "subjective narratives". True, language is not neutral as Wittgenstein pointed out. But a claim that language cannot build a common humanity and culture, and that there is no nature, no truth, is tantamount to a statement that the weakest have no chance of survival, because the strongest will always decode their appeal as a sham while realising their sinister interests. The post-modernist theory is a theory which the cultural liberal-left may use as a tool of "liberation".

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 102, 112.

The contemporary culture war in America has been a phenomenon of a much deeper cultural development, with Modernity which began in the sixteenth century and got its full exposition in the Enlightenment in the eighteenth.⁷⁵ This modern project was to reconcile humanity with itself, liquidating the alienation of human existence, creating an alternative to the Christian narrative, a new self-explaining and self-justifying “metaphysics” of liberal monism masquerading as political philosophy. Its essence was the idea that this inhabited world is a world which can be described and explained by a new comprehensive progressive narrative self-explaining itself by and autonomous reason and that it is true, that it can be comprehended without provoking self-contradictory methodological issues, in other words that the world as such has a meaning, derived from its materialistic nature by means of reason alone. Within such a perspective, history becomes just a matter shaped by independent, autonomous reason. The rejected Judeo-Christian narrative contradicting such a modern project claimed that the world in history is congruent with the narrative of God participating at the same time in its creation. It entailed an idea, that there exists a true history of the universe and of human existence, because there exists an eternal universal narrator, who created this history.

Modernity defined itself as a heroic attempt to create a universal narrative independent from God, rejecting this universal author of Christian narrative. The most heroic modern effort to do this and conscious of its gravity was taken up by Immanuel Kant. Kant began with the idea that if God was rejected as the universal Creator imposing his meaning on Being, the modern moral narrative could only be derived from autonomous reason, but could only be legitimate if it could be universally binding in a compelling way, in other words that the cohesive narrative of the world and the human existence within it was meaningful per se. At the very same time he was aware that this task had to be done in conditions in which human self-awareness and reason are self-explanatory, providing solutions out of their limited means. They were purely arbitrary, which makes any coherent history of the Whole doubtful, causing despair. Kant was clearly aware what his project was all about and aware of its inherent limitations.⁷⁶

Within such a modern narrative the world loses its moral meaning, reason pushes humanity to simply justify its autonomous impulses and claim that they are reasonable per se and moral. This is also a modern notion of freedom pursuing its inner choices defined as congruent with universally acclaimed moral precepts.⁷⁷ If there

⁷⁵ For more see: A. Bryk, *The Transatlantic Civilisation and Modernity Today*, “Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe” 2008, No. 8, p. 9–60.

⁷⁶ For more see: L. Kołakowski, *Kant i zagrożenie cywilizacji*, [in:] idem, *Czy diabeł może być zbawiony i 27 innych kazań*, Kraków 2006, p. 189–194.

⁷⁷ The modern notion of freedom is essentially “nihilistic”. The tendency of modern thought is to situate liberty in an individual subjects’ power of choice, rather than in the ends that subjects might actually choose. Freedom is the power of choosing as such. Eventually, not only God is reject-

is no God, a human being becomes a creature eternally taking care of its own material being against others trying to tame this inherent communal conflict by means of all kinds of provisional and, in fact, utilitarian administrative rules, defined at the very same time as moral rules. Such a civilisation can be prosperous, powerful and victorious, but it is becoming morally anarchic, infused with a growing “metaphysical boredom”, with a multitude of idolatrous gods and quasi theories of how to tame and explain the inexplicability of death.⁷⁸

Such theories combined with “good” social causes are declared to be the new morality, inherently incapable of providing universal and compelling reasons why it should be obeyed. They create a world no longer morally comprehensive. The situation resembles that of the late Roman empire in which there were so many gods to worship that it was impossible not to offend at least some of them.

This metaphysical and philosophical modern situation, the lack of the compelling moral narrative constitutes ultimately the fundamental root of the modern culture war. This culture war consists of endless petty wars between different individual and group narratives. Liberal monism declared such a situation as a natural, and the only, legitimate one, demanding from all an abandonment of any pretences that there is a common moral anthropological and ontological point of reference outside of choice. This is the ultimate meaning of the modern liberal notion of tolerance and non-discrimination. Such a common point of reference – whether religious, philosophical, national, educational, domestic – is looked upon in a perspective of liberal monism as a threat to social peace, since the anti-metaphysical perspective taken for granted and nullifying the Christian metaphysical perspective treated as an obstacle to human liberation might be subverted.⁷⁹

ed, pretences of nature and reason are also rejected. They cease to provide “the measure of an act’s true liberty, for an act is free only because it might be done in defiance of all three”. D. Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and It’s Fashionable Enemies*, New Haven 2009, p. 224.

⁷⁸ The phrase “metaphysical boredom” is taken from David Bentley Hart, *Religion in America: Ancient and Modern*, “The New Criterion”, March 2004, p. 8.

⁷⁹ Christianity with its universal narrative is thus treated as a throwback to the past. It can be accepted as a tamed Christianity, a psychotherapeutic device, part of the welfare, liberal monistic state. Philip Rieff, a sociologist and cultural critic, was one of the first in America to analyse this attack on culture and religion of radical emancipators. The language, ideology and methods of this attack by the modern liberal-left he considered to be barbarian, not as an alleged fulfillment of the individual freedom but converting it into absolute moral freedom ending with self-adulation. See: P. Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud*, New York 1966; idem, *The Feeling Intellect: Select Writings*, ed. J. Imber, Chicago 1990, p. 223. Rieff argued that modern psychoanalysis and the culture of psychotherapy forms a substitute religion, the way to anti-culture. This psychotherapeutic culture attempts to eliminate all limitations, with the counterculture of the 60s completing the anarchy of moral freedom. A source of egalitarian emotivism stems from it. This culture of psychotherapy ubiquitously institutionalised, aided by all kinds of “spirituality”, New Age philosophy, has become a religion of a mind gazing intently at itself, a cultural narcissism supported by a paternalistic state and business corporations. Such a culture liquidates moral hierarchy, bans judgement and eliminates repression which would have to follow, since “the essence of repression lies in an inescapable abandonment of immediate and conscious expression of everything, which precedes approval and rebuke. Any culture deprived of repression, if

The modern project was to create a moral universal narrative by autonomous reason, but instead it required a recognition of disjointed moral narratives of individuals or groups led by autonomous imperial selves with rights defined increasingly as “demands” administered by a state. Freedom and human dignity have a precarious ontological status, a precondition for full humanity. Freedom ceases to be a gift imposed from outside of absolute autonomous reason, by a universal narrator who distinguishes humans by His will from the material world. It is obvious that a dominant, monistic liberal post-Christian narrative clashes with religious perspectives putting an issue of religious freedom, the first freedom, at the very centre of the culture war. Once the post-Christian narrative has been declared irrelevant, nothing is left but the imperial mind turning political as a means of adjusting this world in the image of the liberated, thus enlightened reason. Reason becomes in such a situation inexorably a province of politics, of naked power. This is the essence of secularism, when a rootless and memoryless radical individualism of a particular point in time and place claims to know how to shape history and claims power for doing it, today essentially the power of the state. Secularisation becoming an explicit political and cultural project throughout the world uses this progressive vision to transform it without, at the same time, any new moral concepts. The way to secular morality, a substitute for an allegedly obsolete Christian narrative, turns out to be a way to omnipotent power.⁸⁰

The concept of classical politics has been overturned, and politics ceased to be a province of moral life and deliberation, as Aristotle said, over a political order within which people were to organise their common life together. In modernity, politics ceased to be a moral enterprise, turning into an enterprise of power operated by the most efficient reason of the most cunning and sophisticated with technical means to control it. Liberalism has become its natural ally, making an individual a carrier of rights, the essence of modern liberty directed against the feudal structures, then, rejecting metaphysical dimension turning rights to the province of human desire.⁸¹ The chief aim of liberal modernity was to unburden humans, to release them from tyranny, not only political tyranny, but also tyranny of any orthodoxy, mainly religious, and finally of nature, denying that it existed at all as a structure setting the limits of human predicament.

A human being without nature and orthodoxy has become an individual with “self-consciousness” of its freedom and technical mastery by means of reason. But reason, next to nature, has also been subverted. It has to operate on categories created

it could ever exist, would commit suicide by eliminating the distance which separates desire from its object; whatever conceived of or felt would be acted upon immediately. Culture constitutes a heritage of such unconscious instruments, which helps create and sustain such a distance, and which are conscious and reveal themselves, even if not directly, in the entirety of visual, auditory and artistic artifacts. Thus, culture is a repression”. P. Rieff, quoted after L. Kołakowski, *Jeśli Boga nie ma...*, p. 131; Ch. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, New York 1978.

⁸⁰ D. Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions...*, p. 222.

⁸¹ L. Straus, *Natural Right in History*, Chicago 1950.

by itself becoming essentially a self-explicating machine decoupled from its Creator imposing a coherent narrative on its sphere of operation. This makes a human being a master of just the present moment, the modern experience epitomised in such notions as liberty, rights, commerce escaping from any metaphysical or cultural orthodoxy of the past, even if living off it. This new Age of Enlightenment, is treated as a liberation of unburdened reason and nature. But in fact this liberation constitutes

a decisive deathblow to both. Its active principle, its sovereign notion, is neither Reason nor Nature, but 'the present moment. The authority of the New is still too recent to have found an appropriate and commonly accepted conceptual expression, and so it enlists in its service the remarkable words Reason and Nature easily appropriated since they have lost their place as principles in the world of the emerging new authority. They no longer guarantee the synthesis of the human world since they are incapable of giving an account of both the ancient world and the new authority; the authority of the New Reason itself cannot give an account of the New since, in the Enlightenment's polemic against prejudice, it puts itself on an equal plane with the New and merges with it. Nature, Reason, and the New together constitute an essentially flimsy world that has never before appeared in human history, that is neither anchored in the one nor attracted to it. Hence the eighteenth century's incomparable charm, in our eyes as in its own. This state of grace [could] not last. The French Revolution sought to reinstate the unifying principle with arrogance and a cruelty honed by the displacement that preceded it. Thinkers both before the revolution and urgency after it, sensed this fundamental weakness of the Enlightenment and undertook to overcome it in the realm of speculation. [But] reason cannot bring together under any unifying principle this agglomeration of events and effects [of the New]. Without being able to give a rational account of what satisfied it, Enlightenment reason believes more things than it actually understands. One has to ask whether modern reason has ever overcome this contradiction. [As as consequence] we do not know what man is.⁸²

The conceptual and moral world began to be disjointed as a consequence of this "unburdening", desire crept in as a basis of action and autonomous thinking. The modern project tried to ridicule any, orthodoxy including religious, as not immanent in human history, but its successful refutation would require proof that human life and the world were intelligible without an assumption of natural law, God, or some philosophical system, as Kant understood it, a *sine qua non* condition of forming any moral system at all.⁸³ Modern rejection of orthodoxy required that

man has to show himself theoretically and practically as the master of the world and the master of his life; the merely given world must be replaced by a world created by man theoretically and practically [but] as a consequence, its cognitive status is not different from that of the orthodox account [which means to reject revelation]. [Thus, modernity] cannot legitimately deny the possibility of revelation. But to grant that revelation is possible means to grant that the philosophic account and the philosophic way of life are not necessarily, not evidently, the true account and the right way of life. Philosophy, the quest for evident and necessary knowledge, rests itself on an unevident decision, on an act of will. Liberated from the religious delusion, awakened to the sober awareness of his real situation, taught by bad experience that he is threatened by a stingy, hostile nature, man recognises his sole salvation and duty not so much "to cultivate his garden" as in the first place to plant a garden by making himself the master and owner of nature. But this whole enterprise requires, above all, political action, revolution,

⁸² P. Manent, *The City of Man*, Princeton 1998, p. 16–17, 124, VII.

⁸³ L. Kołakowski, *Kant i zagrożenie cywilizacji...*, p. 187–193.

a life and death struggle. But in proportion to the systematic effort to liberate man completely from all non-human bonds seems to succeed, the doubt increases whether the goal is not fantastic – whether man has not become smaller and more miserable in proportion as the systematic civilisation progresses. Eventually, the belief that by pushing ever farther back the “natural limits” man will advance to ever greater freedom, that he can subjugate nature and prescribe to it his laws, begins to wither.⁸⁴

Life becomes not only disjointed but senseless, since any true metaphysical sense can only come from causes not immanent in human history.⁸⁵ Modernity rejected such an option. It answered a question *what is*, of *why is* man and what his ends are, his sense of existence and happiness at the level of the human private world, of human desire as expressed by the autonomous, liberated imperial self, the process which was the final humanisation, that is the final disenchantment of his existence, both at the consciousness or community, of social action, level. This meant

the active removal by politics of what was not derived from an exclusively human source. The description of what was being “formed” in the modern project could be aptly called “Gnostic” because it implied a conception of man presupposed to nothing normative except man himself, such “alternative” descriptions of man could be thought as with the ancient Gnostics. Such was the reality of modern power put into physical and political existence as a living statement of what man is in his individual and corporate existence. The sort of [such] “freedom” envisioned in the modern project was a freedom which presupposed no ends in man or substitute intelligence in nature, which persuaded the human intellect by its discovered truth. It turned out in practice to be an effort to remove any “limits” or “moderation” associated with the classical endeavour to keep politics as politics, or the Judeo-Christian effort not to locate the Kingdom of God in this world. No metaphysical or Revelation input could limit what could be “imagined” or finally put into experimental reality as possible and as theoretically good. The truth of politics was, consequently, to be like truth in art, something whose validity depended solely on the polity’s conformity with what the maker of the political order – one, few, or many – wanted to be. Political existence came to refer only to the truth of the mind presupposed to no being, but still creative of the civil order by its own calculations [of will]. The Gnostic project, in this sense, was a claim to formulate an entirely man-made kingdom. It remove[d] from politics the hope that it might be remade into an instrument for transcendent goals.⁸⁶

Existentially and politically, man thus lowered the sight, and released his will, justifying it by rights, basing on them citizens’ decisions and the pursuit of commercial interests. Sophisticated means were devised to tame desires, but in fact they elevated them. Modern liberalism is the political form this philosophy took. But the modern liberal world has consciously, out of default, become disjointed, unable to form any theory of morality and moral coherence accepted by all.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ L. Strauss, *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, Chicago 1997, p. 29–30.

⁸⁵ L. Kołakowski, *Odwet sacrum w kulturze świeckiej*, [in:] idem, *Czy diabeł może być zbawiony...*, p. 245.

⁸⁶ J. V. Schall, *Reason, Revelation and the Foundations of Political Philosophy*, Baton Rouge 1987, p. 189–192.

⁸⁷ M. Diamond, *Ethics and Politics: the American Way*, [in:] R. R. Horwitz, *The Moral Foundations of the American Republic*, Charlottesville 1986, p. 75–108; L. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*; C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: From Hobbes to Locke*, Oxford 1962.

Contemporary liberalism seems inherently saddled with wrong assumptions about human nature and because of this the liberal project has shown signs of utter exhaustion. The culture war is one symptom of it. As an attempt to develop accounts of morality in the name of standards derived from reason in response to the loss of shared practices necessary for the discovery of moral goods in common liberalism, it has failed. Morality searched for by an autonomous moral subject to create any common moral bond cannot sustain itself. The rational rules of the social contract coming from Hobbes through John Rawls cannot create morally sustainable obligations, especially obligations of justice. They merely constitute a particular form of utilitarian self-rationality of an autonomous subject. This self-rationality is incapable of overcoming the problem of why such a state should be obeyed in the first place and not be treated as an object of constant demands for goods fulfilling a desire of the moment, a modern definition of the pursuit of happiness. Such a society has constantly to face a dilemma of why it is more reasonable to fulfill a contract, than to pretend that one does it.⁸⁸

Liberalism of the modern welfare state based on a social contract cannot create non-egotistical social motives. Human emotions are often more wise than reason, superstitions express human moral predispositions better than rational constructions of justice created by social planners which tend to corrupt souls, rather than induce them to it. The mills of justice, as William Blackstone observed, are fuelled by emotions; in fact, strictly speaking by love, the inculcated disposition to do good, that is to be virtuous. The elimination of social processes which create moral passions from the bottom up in autonomous institutions, the only place where one can teach people how to love, can never be substituted by rational plans of elites.⁸⁹ To think that people can be induced to behave justly on a basis of a rational, general plan of social behaviour is the fallacy. People cannot be convinced why they should think first of all about others. The need for sentiments, caritas, magnanimity, sympathy and other virtues can only be explained on a basis of unreflexive moral impulses. It was for this reason that William Shakespeare in *King Lear* understood well that love and sympathy precede justice, otherwise reason will find ways to justify injustice.

Because the liberal project lowers the sight and disregards the perennial question how to explain the conditionality of humanity, the drama which Kant recognised in a modern predicament, it cannot solve the problem of the common good because it is incapable of providing a compelling justification of it. No common standards can be sustained when abstracted from the practices and justifications that render our lives meaningful. Modern liberalism stressing autonomy with ethics derived from utilitarian history creates people incapable of living lives which have any narrative coherence.⁹⁰ They become essentially a response to constant impulses wor-

⁸⁸ R. Scruton, *Modern Philosophy*, New York 1996, p. 39.

⁸⁹ For more see: H. C. Mansfield, *Pride and Justice in Affirmative Action in America's Constitutional Soul*, Baltimore 1991, p. 95–97.

⁹⁰ For the most sophisticated approach to Kant in this context see: G. Kruger, *Philosophie und Moral in der Kantischen Kritik*, Tübingen 1931, p. 236; T. L. Pangle, *The Ennobling of Democracy: The Challenge of the Postmodern Age*, Baltimore 1992, p. 13.

ked out by autonomous consciousnesses, a string of events which cannot be tied to any overreaching meaning, making individual life understandable to itself. At the beginning of liberal moral philosophy the traditional moral agent disappeared. The character of the moral subject, the question of virtue, the content and structure of his desires and dispositions became peripheral. All moral philosophers, from Socrates on considered the question of character formation the most important educational postulate. The modern liberal mind replaced it by choice.⁹¹ In the 20th century, choice was defined as a condition of sheer authenticity, self-realisation. Choice began to replace character formation in public education and an ideology of the new “tolerance” became a substitute with a corresponding blurring of the contours of human rights, the new “religion” of liberal modernity increasingly tantamount to individual choice.⁹²

This replacement of character in moral formation by moral choice, to put it bluntly, moral freedom, has turned out to be the end station of modern liberalism. Liberalism’s descriptions of reality have become totally inadequate for individuals unable to act in a manner which would be intelligible to others as well as to them.⁹³ Human life can be lived meaningfully only when those, who are engaged in community formation are focused on goods without which such an endeavour is futile. Modern liberalism has rejected the view that there is an ultimate human good towards which humans should strive, a project devised already by Machiavelli, Hobbes or Locke. What is new, is a growing disillusion that this methodological, epistemological and ontological stance might form a community of mutual obligations sustained by other means than the minute rules of an administrative state, a situation which creates conditions for incessant culture war.

Liberalism persists in claiming that such rules are the right foundational assumption and course of action visible in public policy measures; for instance, a rigid separation of religion from public life, the New Tolerance as an ideology of censorship, or public education turning itself into a tool of accommodation to the liberal public policy measures, which must mean a subversion of autonomous institutions such as churches or families by, for instance, gender feminism and gay movements, so they conform to the liberal state’s image of the monistic good.⁹⁴ Government in such a case „attempt[s] perfection by overriding prejudice, but when it does so it can develop a self-serving tyrannical – or bureaucratic – definition of perfection.”⁹⁵

This liberal harbours an inherently totalitarian impulse since it gives rise to a psychological and educational industry to guard the recalcitrant minds from committing a mistake of being not modern, not progressive enough, and especially not to-

⁹¹ S. Hauerwas, *The Virtues of Alisdair MacIntyre*, “First Things”, October 2007, p. 36–37.

⁹² This was already intimated by some conservative Enlightenment thinkers, such as Burke or John Adams. See: A. Bryk, *Liberalism, Constitutionalism and Judicial Review*, [in:] *Historia Integra*, eds. D. Janicka, B. Łoszewski, Toruń 2001, p. 318–325.

⁹³ This was shown by Alisdair MacIntyre in his seminal books: *A Short History of Ethics*, the most important *After Virtue* and *Against the Self-Images of the Age*. See also S. Hauerwas, *op. cit.*

⁹⁴ H. C. Mansfield, *Manliness*, New Haven 2006.

⁹⁵ H. C. Mansfield, *Pride and Justice in Affirmative Action...*, p. 97.

lerant enough. To be non-tolerant is the highest crime, meaning that one is judgemental, thus making moral distinctions and creating hierarchy of norms, without which morality is impossible to be attained. Such a process is branded as “discriminatory”. Contemporary culture war raging inside liberal societies is a phenomenon signifying a failure of such liberal monistic pretences.

Modern liberal moral theory has no end towards which people want to be moral, which makes them morality incapable of justifying a human good beyond the sheer desire of moral freedom, the utilitarian morality of pleasure and the war of all against all, guarded by the administrative, psychotherapeutic state as a kind of modern exorcism technique. Thus, liberalism produces shallow people unable to create moral obligations, thus solidarity. This requires virtues requiring a certain level of community which makes the ordering of goods possible. Moral communities, in turn, must order goods of various practices so an individual can find a narrative story connecting them. Liberalism has great problems with creating such communities.⁹⁶

The 1960s revolution constituted liberalism’s logical conclusion, by accepting the New Left idea of “emancipation” radicalising the autonomous self. It waged war on culture and any authority as oppression to create an authentic society of equal citizens. But as with every utopia, we only know a project of destruction, the positive project is a dream thwarted by the sheer resistance of the matter, battled by laws and administrative rules. This destructive anti-authority drive has subverted culture as a structure of language, meaning and morality as a hierarchical category introducing moral differentiations, for which substitutes of new tolerance, multiculturalism and a primacy of moral auto-creation, also subverting intermediary social institutions. Politics ceases to be an argument about a good community, and gets converted to a smooth administration of utilitarian adjustments.

Such a policy causes resistance against the better-knowing liberal-left elites which aim at unburdening citizens from all kinds of allegiances so to liberate them from any natural ties, a conflict between populism and the liberal meritocracy of knowledge, money and influence in the service of a monistic thinking. If, as Marx once said, religion is the opiate of the people, utopia is a pseudo-religion of the intellectual, his amphetamine. It offers a perfect world of the future and guarantees such a world in a present in which intellectuals are omniscient and omnipotent, advisers to the Prince, to whom they want to sell their world without poverty, suffering, guilt and forgiveness. No wonder that at the very centre of such a utopian vision there is a liberal-left intellectuals obsession with education, called sometimes a deficit of education, to implement their programme at the earliest stages of life. One of the most important culture war fronts is the fight over a child’s upbringing by parents. But this obsession to educate into proper knowledge, attitudes, values, subconscious impulses of moral indignation and acceptance shows not so much a concern for education but proper indoctrination.

⁹⁶ S. Hauerwas, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

The general consensus of the knowledgeable elites is not necessarily the proof that they think wisely and morally. It may be proof that they had been programmed this way, increasingly the aim of modern education. Modern educational debates today constitute one of the fronts of the culture war. They are debates over human will, human freedom with liberal educational monism's conviction that truth does not exist and that a connection between morality and truth is nonsensical. The anthropology of the autonomous imperial self, and moral auto-creation forms morality and thus there is no reason not to let people realise their desires.⁹⁷

Modern populism does not openly question the meritocratic principle, but it's conversion into a moral superiority, a desire to control people's lives so to realise political aims, with education as a means of indoctrination. One may consider such populist revolts to be just blind uprisings against modernity, where this threat to liberty comes more from the impersonal forces operating beyond a control of any individual or group. Meritocracy provided modern competence also bringing civilisation's comfort, but the new meritocracy turned to the ruling elite convinced that advancements in sciences, as well as social sciences, created the conditions for a comprehensive ordering of a society for the first time. This elite treats people clinging to their ways of life, values and traditions as obstacles. Defenders of the modern meritocratic elite misjudge populist revolts. Convinced that this elite has an insight into history it does not realise that such revolts are also directed against the growth of government, connected with the growth of this meritocracy.⁹⁸ This revolt is not against modern civilisation, but against elites who make things complicated so they can be trusted with solving them while leaving a toll for solving them, which they at the same time exacerbate. Meritocracy can thus be considered not as a class of specialists, but of ideologues treating people as tools of their utopia. If so, this culture war is not a conflict between competence and ignorance, but a conflict of visions of what kind of civilisation we want to live in. The new meritocratic elite operates on an idea that it is in possession of reason realising progress. But this reason is of its own making, with progress not related to any outward moral point of reference, whether God or natural law, except this point in time and history.⁹⁹

This meritocratic reason creates its sense in a process of a gigantic auto-mythification. Such progress is against culture as a repository of irrational sense, or saving Great Myths. Progressive reason is blind in its choices not relating to anything morally bigger and universal outside of itself; it's an instance of hubristic auto-creation, against which the Great Myths defend us. Culture, even nature are defined as obstacles to a perfect moral order coming out of progressive reason. Great Myths and

⁹⁷ K. Minogue, *Polityka...*

⁹⁸ For instance, in today's America, the government disposes directly of nearly 40% of the GDP, and compels or directs 20–30% more via regulatory activity. The meritocrats are more "nest featherers rather than defenders of civilization". In: J. DeLong, *Culture Clash*, "National Review", August 2, 2010, p. 43.

⁹⁹ P. A. Lawler, *End of History 2000*, [in:] *Faith, Reason and Political Life Today*, eds. P. A. Lawler, D. McConkey, New York 2001, p. 102.

Memory, the very essence of culture, do not represent the melancholic story about what has been irrevocably lost, but constitute powerful and meaningful means of reading the present and the future through a prism of time as a depository of wisdom, a safety valve against the hubris of self-explaining reason.¹⁰⁰

The culture war, or culture wars in America definitely reflect this general modern transformation of consciousness. But the American culture war conflict has its specific features and has had many historical transformation points which, again, reflected specific American encounters with modernity, first among the elites, creators of many different currents of the American Humanism movement beginning with the turn of the 20th century, and then exploding into mass culture since the 1960s. Since then Americans have divided themselves on many moral and cultural issues touching the meaning and purpose of life determining American politics in equally important ways as their traditional economic interests.

The 1960s countercultural revolution began massive bitter conflicts over the meaning of common culture. One may say that the causes of this culture war go deep into history and are connected with two distinctive sources of American identity which have generated bitter conflicts. One was connected with the biblical covenantal tradition. Attempts at transformations, because of this tradition, have thus been marred by radicalism and messianistic overtones beginning with the religious revival in 1750s and ending with today's war with all forms of discrimination. Their language has often been prophetic, millenarist coming out of the American Protestant biblical mentality of a "betrayed Covenant of America with God."¹⁰¹

Another source of American identity is modern, ideological, a nation arguing over interpretations of their intellectual, contractual experiment formulated in the "Declaration of Independence in 1776, reading the American future in the light of its founding principles."¹⁰² For some such conflicts have signified instances of culture war. But this is a simplification. These reforms at transformation, whether coming from the covenantal tradition or from the contractual tradition of the Declaration of Independence, wild and messianic on many occasion, have been conducted, with a possible exception of the Civil War, within the contours of one common cultural and religious anthropological paradigm, even if differently interpreted and sometimes leading to violent police and military clashes.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ W. McClay, *The Founding of Nations*, "First Things", March 2006.

¹⁰¹ For more on this messianistic character of Americans' interpretation of themselves see: E. Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role*, Chicago 1980; S. Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*, New Haven 1975, p. 136–186; A. Bryk, *Covenant, the Fear of Failure and Revivals as the Contemporary Sources of American Identity*, [in:] *Amerykomania*, eds. W. Bernacki, A. Walaszek, Kraków 2012, p. 51–110.

¹⁰² D. S. Lutz, *The Origins of American Constitutionalism*, Baton Rouge 1988, p. 13–34.

¹⁰³ Such was, for instance, the initial feud between the "liberals" and "republicans", the Federalists and the Anti-federalists. G. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776–1787*, Chap-

A destruction of this common paradigm in the twentieth century created conditions for the contemporary cultural divisions in America, the one which Europe, in different degrees of intensity, have experienced since the French Revolution and which still rages in the European Union.¹⁰⁴ It can be treated as an instance of an acceptance of the European, post-1789 type ideological politics divided into a conflict of two cultures, a “revolutionary and “reactionary one. The destruction of this common American paradigm was long in the making. The first step was prepared by the destruction of the Protestant unity and a corresponding rise of several interrelated intellectual developments which transformed America. The first, apart from the rise of Progressive Christianity, was an incorporation into a corpus of American liberalism of the Hegelian version of it worked out by the Oxford Hegelians in England, which transformed classical liberalism from a negative into a positive force of change executed by government, the beginning of the welfare state justification in Europe.¹⁰⁵

The American welfare state was inspired by Oxford Hegelians, but its shape took the form of a progressive liberalism and its myth of the unrealised potential of the American dream, a manifesto of Progressivism put forth by Herbert Croly in his 1909 book *The Promise of American Life*, a programme of the federal government’s involvement in all aspects of American life.¹⁰⁶ The second development destroying the traditional American cultural paradigm was connected with the rise of progressive education associated with a name of John Dewey, who considered democracy as a secular religion with education as a means of attaining it, and secular humanism as its sacrament, with a stress on human reason to create a self-compelling ethical universal standard. Dewey’s public schools educational programme, which was based on spiritual individualism as contrasted to religion, in fact a solipsistic spiritual auto-creation, constituted a preparation for a development of the anthropology of the imperial self and moral auto-creation.

The third development destroying the unity of American culture was modern anthropology with its idea of culture as relativist and accidental to a place and time construct, with the corresponding recognition of sexual revolution as a useful tool of destroying the traditional society.¹⁰⁷ This development had its great works as well

el Hill 1969, p. 46–90; J. Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination*, Cambridge Mass. 1992, p. 1–33. But even the Civil War could be considered to be just an argument, finally irreconcilable and settled by war, over the meaning of the Declaration of independence. See, for instance, G. Annastaplo, *American Constitutionalism and the Virtue of Prudence: Philadelphia, Paris, Washington, Gettysburg*, [in:] *Abraham Lincoln, the Gettysburg Address and American Constitutionalism*, ed. L. P. S. de Alvarez, Texas 1976, p. 112–126.

¹⁰⁴ A. Bryk, *The United States, the European Union, Eastern Europe: Different Approaches to Modernity*, “Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe” 2008, No. 1, p. 179–194.

¹⁰⁵ R. Hudelson, *Modern Political Philosophy*, New York 1999, p. 59–70; K. Windschuttle, *Liberalism and Imperialism*, [in:] *The Betrayal of Liberalism...*, p. 71–92.

¹⁰⁶ S. M. Milkis, *Theodore Roosevelt, the Progressive Party, and the Transformation of American Democracy*, Lawrence KA 2010; R. M. Gamble, *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation*, Wilmington 2003, p. 76.

¹⁰⁷ For a good introduction to Dewey’s thought as a countercultural education against religion implemented by the public education see: H. T. Edmondson, *John Dewey and the Decline of Ameri-*

as the works of ideological charlatans of which Margaret Mead was unfortunately one. A final development subverting the traditional American cultural paradigm, the religious one especially, was modern psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, the answer to the crisis of the industrial society and an alternative to Christianity, especially Protestantism. Psychoanalysis was to be a great modern exorcism dispelling religious superstitions. Coming from Europe, in Freud's version it rejected Christianity as a form of false consciousness. Its popular street wise American optimistic version went back to Rousseau's assumption that man was good and society bad, and that it was possible to create a better, possibly perfect world by human means.

Culture alone, not Christian anthropology, was a means of human self-understanding, including a psychological one with a psychotherapeutic culture disenchanting religious language and imagination. Psychotherapy also constituted a subtle transformation of both the Christian and the Enlightenment rational narrative. An individual narrative of salvation, so prominent in Protestantism, was not any more a road to truth and salvation, but was turned into a limited and impossible to cross individual experience, just rooted in subjectivity. Liberal civilisation was finally creating its prominent cultural tool with its battle cry, which in the 1960s was given the form of the narcissistic adage "let's talk about me". Psychotherapy began to be treated as a "liberation science" from ossified mental structures, one of the tools of individual, self-applied salvation. All these developments represented the rise of so called American humanism in contradistinction to a religious paradigm.¹⁰⁸

Such cultural changes coinciding with the Great Crisis and the New Deal gave the federal government a chance to enter economy on a massive scale. Liberalism became synonymous with the ideology of progressive reforms guaranteed by government and the new economic, educational, religious and psychotherapeutic professionals. The second world war and then the Cold War made this massive federal entrance into all walks of life inevitable. The 1960s made culture war in America open, divisive and affecting not only the elites. Many long-term social and cultural currents merged with immediate events, causing a massive change of consciousness, splitting society and establishing a new dominant anthropology recognised as the only legitimate by the government apparatus, with the media, the universities, and law schools, all slowly being staffed by a generation mesmerised with it. In the 1960s, America was torn apart with such transformative events as the civil rights revolution and the Vietnam War waged not so much in the rice paddy fields, but on the university campuses and home TV screens.¹⁰⁹

can Education: How the Patron Saint of Schools Has Corrupted Teaching and Learning, Wilmington 2006; the best known critic of Dewey's education was A. Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, New York 1987.

¹⁰⁸ See: P. Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud*, New York 1966; idem, *My Life Among the Deathworks: Illustrations of the Aesthetics of Authority*, Charlottesville 2005.

¹⁰⁹ The rebellion is large part justified. The civil rights revolution was one of the most morally crystal clear experiences in American history, even if later corrupted by the civil rights establishment. The Vietnam War was ill-executed, with an unjust draft system, even if fighting communism was a noble cause. Deadening consumerism and dislocations of the capitalist and industrial society were also real.

Another transformative event was the massive public entrance of the well-educated and affluent youth generation not troubled by the traumas of the Great Crisis and the war, convinced that history had given them a chance, intellectual tools, and moral insight to execute a comprehensive economic, social and cultural revolution in the name of a just, not imperialistic America.¹¹⁰ The 1960s revolution was truly anthropologically countercultural even if observed only at the level of the anarchical clash of the young generation with traditional institutions, morality and conformity of the post-war generation of their parents allegedly blind to the scandal of injustice around them and the moral corruption inside them.

But this youth rebellion turned into a hubristic, gnostic conviction that the end of the unjust history in America and the West was just at hand, and it searched for a philosophical formula to justify this rebellion. This was provided by the New Left idea of “liberation from all “oppressions of the bourgeois society. But this idea of “liberation” from any “oppressions” whether family, churches, traditional sexual morality, “patriarchal” relations between men and women, children and parents had been gestating and circulating in the humanistic secular elites for a long time, the great rebellion of disenchantment against bourgeois society in need of a final fix, with a long list of „secular demonisations” and „secular canonisations”. This mentality dovetailed with the modern concept of a sovereign state eliminating all competitors from its jealous reach and a progressive ideology treated as a duty of the state.

American liberalism, transformed intellectually by Hegelian European liberalism and the Progressive movement of the beginning of the twentieth century, in the 1960s changed again, due to the tumultuous social changes accepting the New Left slogan of “liberation” to deepen its progressive bent. It abandoned limitations, also of federalism, and prudence, becoming an ideology of the new educated class treating society and culture as a problem to be rectified. An imprecise name given to it was the liberal-left.¹¹¹ This caused a resistance of people whose freedom was threatened, with their morals and way of life defined as in need of “liberation from “oppressions in which they unconsciously lived with a “false consciousness, and with a large section of the intellectual elite declaring war on traditional America.

This split of American society into warring camps was not necessarily clear cut, many different coalitions, many not lasting, were being formed. But it gave rise to the modern American conserva-

¹¹⁰ For more on this see the combination of a belief in social science as an objective tool of deciphering the social matrix with the unrealised promise of America as expressed by the Declaration of Independence: W. A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and American Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism 1938–1987*, Chapel Hill 1990.

¹¹¹ The labels liberal-left, or progressive liberalism seemed to be the most appropriate, so as to distinguish it from traditional liberalism even if it can be treated as a logical intellectual and anthropological extension of it. It also could not be termed socialist, since this term was reserved for traditional socialist doctrine focusing on economic matters and which was used as a shortcut for statism, that is a mass intervention by the federal government in the economy. Liberal-left ideology was also statist and interventionist, but this time it wanted to transform the entire society and culture by means of public policy programmes executed by the government.

tive movement which coalesced around the Republican Party, bringing Ronald Reagan to power in the 80's; American politics became culturally polarised, also due to the massive rise to positions of power of a highly-educated cohort of the new intellectual elite. It defined America as a problem in need of "liberation" from war, racism, poverty, religious bigotry, that is from everything which did not fit their image of a good society.¹¹²

It began to implement public policies often beyond democratic control with the courts adjudicating increasingly in the name of "justice."¹¹³ The conservative coalition coalesced around a fight with communism, economic decline, and social and cultural issues, an alliance resisting the countercultural rebellion with parties abandoning their pragmatic traditions and a breakdown of the common cultural paradigm of American society.¹¹⁴ The progressive liberal-left ideology had its mantra words of "tolerance", "non-discrimination", "non-judgmentalism", "multiculturalism", "equality", and "diversity", but in fact it masked an onslaught on Western culture, traditional morality, autonomous institutions defined as harbouring "oppressions and essentially suspect, with a new solipsistic anthropology, non-metaphysical and in part irrational, which was inimical to the traditional Judeo-Christian anthropology. Its end station was the morality of the imperial self with choices as desires to be met for a lack of reasons, except utilitarian ones of social peace, of why this should not be so. Thus, the culture war situation reflects a profound change of a cultural paradigm, its anthropological and ontological assumptions with liberalism understood not as a technique of practical governance, but as a closed existential system, a consequence already inherent in classical liberalism. The 1960s breakthrough was just a completion of liberalism's assumptions, its radical individualism.¹¹⁵

¹¹² This intellectual elite professing liberal-left ideology was convinced that a "liberal government cannot give the self-directed individual the absolutely safety, financial security and freedom to which he was entitled. It cannot even maintain public order because individuals do not believe it legitimately can direct them to curb their appetites and desires. The dissatisfied, ambitious individual remains the center of concern but cannot be controlled. So public life breaks down into a chaos of 'competing rights' asserted by competing interests groups in the legislative process, competing legal pressure groups in the judiciary process, and competing lawyers in the 'process' of private life. Local culture – the institutions, beliefs, and practices that make up a community's way of life – no longer serves as the spontaneous, self-perpetuating source of virtuous citizens. Instead the moral vacuum of liberal politics invades our communities, replacing the moral and institutional ties that bind a people together with a destructive glorification of selfishness." B. Frohnen, *The New Communitarians and the Crisis of Modern Liberalism*, Lawrence Ka 1996, p. 36.

¹¹³ This elite is also egalitarian convinced of possessing a moral insight "to re-educate all of society". B. Frohnen, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

¹¹⁴ R. Collins, *Transforming America: Politics and Culture in the Reagan Years*, New York 2007, p. 171–191; H. Hecla, *Christianity and American Democracy*, Cambridge Mass. 2007, p. 1–145; D. Frum, *How We Got Here: The 70's...*; M. Decter, *The Liberated Woman and Other Americans...*, p. 244–245.

¹¹⁵ For the best short introduction of liberalism's evolution see: P. Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, New Jersey 1994; for a more radical exposition of the internal logic of liberalism's assumptions see: J. Kalb, *The Tyranny of Liberalism*, Wilmington 2008.

This is a society which lives, to use the words of Alisdair MacIntyre “After Virtue, that is after a breakdown of the common language of describing reality. In a contemporary liberal society, all moral judgments become nothing more than just preferences, an expression of an opinion or a feeling.¹¹⁶ Since everyone has some feelings and opinions and since they usually differ, such a society is characterised by extreme arguments, exactly a culture war situation. Arguments about the proper and improper way of living become endless. There is no rational way to reconcile them on issues such as abortion, religious presence in public life, the content of sexual education, understanding of patriotism or a necessity of taking up military action.¹¹⁷

Breaking up a Judeo-Christian paradigm has given rise to moral auto-creation and subjective judgements without any criteria of differentiation. Liberalism once coped with this great disenchantment of the Western mind and gradual cultural dissolution honouring a division between the public and the private sphere. Accepting the New Left postulate of “liberation” from all “oppressions”, with “private becoming political”, it grounded moral judgements in the imperial “liberated” autonomous self, with a massive onslaught on all private institutions like families or churches, the essence of the culture war and the post-modern, monistic liberalism.¹¹⁸

The 1960s breakthrough had millenarian hopes, but this time they were to be realised not by God’s grace, but social science and economics and wealth generated by it, sufficient to liquidate poverty.¹¹⁹ Social sciences were to be substituted for religion in explaining the complexities of life in conjunction with the allegedly efficient liberal government implementing public policy. America has waged modern cultural battles since the 1960s. They define nearly every political conflict. The question is whether there is enough common culture capable of sustaining self-governing institutions not subject to a monistic onslaught of the post-modern liberalism with its monistic anthropology of the imperial self, and politics decoupled from a morality rooted in justifications capable of giving compelling reasons why tolerance, civilised life and persuasion are more important and elevated in public life than naked power.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ This situation is best described as far as students’ way of articulating their ideas in: A. Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, New York 1987. The words “After Virtue” are, of course, of A. MacIntyre from his book *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Notre Dame Press 1984.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 6, 12.

¹¹⁸ Liberalism tried to formulate in vain a moral minimum on a basis of a just economic distribution of goods as a unifying system of morality. One of such attempts is John Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge Mass. 1971; for criticism of such attempts see: J. Kekes, *The Illusions of Egalitarianism*, New York 2003, p. 168–186.

¹¹⁹ In economics, it was a Keynesian orthodoxy according to which Keynes did not solve all the problems of growth, wealth and crises only because he did not have enough time. To finish his plan it was necessary to apply proper economic techniques. One has yet to remember that the civil rights revolution originated in the South out of Christian inspiration.

¹²⁰ G. Weigel, *The Sixties Again and Again...*, p. 32, 39.

The articles contained in this volume deal with many aspects of this phenomenon of culture war, or culture wars in America. They treat this problem from different perspectives and also from different methodological as well as philosophical and moral points of view. In this sense they are truly ecumenical, which might be another way of saying that they themselves are written by authors who are warriors in this culture war. This war does not seem to abate, to the contrary, it seems to be a permanent feature of Western society for the foreseeable future, which short of a massive use of power and indoctrination cannot be eliminated. On the other hand this phenomenon might also be interpreted as an instance of this wonderful value of freedom on which the West is still based, and its enormous flexibility to adopt to different challenges and absorb them.

Stephen Barr

GOD, TIME, THE "FIRST CAUSE", AND NATURAL CAUSES

The culture wars in the United States are driven by profound disagreements about the nature of society, of morality, of the human person, of the family, of sexuality, and of many other aspects of human life. These disagreements have more than one cause, but to some extent they reflect a divergence of outlook on the most basic metaphysical and religious questions, even though atheists and religious people can be found on both sides of the various battles of the culture wars. The recent debates over the origin of the human race and the origin of the universe can therefore be seen as part of those wars. This is obviously the case in the long-running disputes over the teaching of evolution in public schools and the "Intelligent Design" movement. But it is also true of the increasing media attention given to critiques of religion based on scientific theories of the origin of the universe. Striking examples of this are the publicity surrounding Hawking and Mlodinow's recent book *The Grand Design*, and the appearance on popular TV shows of scientists making similar arguments.

Unfortunately, most of the discussion surrounding questions of "origins" in the media and in popular books reflects a lack of understanding of traditional Christian ideas, not only on the part of atheists, but also on the part of many religious people. This has led to great confusion, with many atheists wrongly believing that science has shown traditional ideas of "creation" to be superfluous, and many religious believers wrongly thinking that certain scientific ideas are in conflict with Christian faith. In this article I will attempt to clear up some of this confusion and show that neither the triumphalism of those atheists nor the fears of those religious people are at all warranted.

The perception that religion and science are at odds comes from a variety of misconceptions. One of the most basic of these, and one that does enormous damage, is the notion that God as an explanation is in competition with the kinds of explanations given by science. That mistake, in turn, can be traced to a faulty understanding of what it means to say that God is the “First Cause” of everything that exists. Many people think of God as the first in a temporal chain of causes. Just as one billiard ball sets another in motion, which in turn sets another in motion, and so on, some people think of God as being like the first ball in that chain, which starts the process going. They have, perhaps, heard that God was called the “First Mover” by Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, and they imagine that this is what St. Thomas meant.

Actually, St. Thomas did not mean a temporal sequence of causes at all. He was talking, rather, about what he called “simultaneously acting causes,” i.e. causes that all act at the same time; and he was not talking about a temporal chain, but an explanatory chain. What he was really saying is that explanations have to start somewhere. They cannot go around in circles (so-called “circular reasoning”), nor can they go in an “infinite regress,” with each thing explained by something else, but with no ultimate explanation. (Think of a mathematical proof, where each conclusion followed from some previous conclusion, but where the whole chain of reasoning didn’t start anywhere. In such a proof, nothing would really be proven.) Better than the term “First Mover,” which confuses modern readers unfamiliar with the jargon of Aristotelian philosophy, it would be closer to St. Thomas’s meaning to speak of “ultimate explanation” or “first cause,” as long as we understand that he didn’t mean “first” in a sequence in time.

In order to grasp what Christian tradition really means by God being the “first” cause, it is helpful to start with the nature of time and how God relates to it. In the early centuries of the Church, pagans would sometimes mock the Christian belief that the universe had a beginning, by asking, “What was your God doing for that infinite time before he got around to creating the world?” To this, the great Church father St. Augustine gave a profound answer. He started with the insight that time is a feature of the created world, which means that time too is something created. The beginning of created things, therefore, was also the beginning of time. In other words, time does not stretch in an unbroken line back into an infinite past, as the pagan philosophers of antiquity assumed; rather, it stretches back only to the Beginning of the created world. Therefore, it makes no sense to speak about a time “before” that Beginning. This is the answer St. Augustine gave to the pagans’ taunt: “There was no time before heaven and earth, [so] why do they ask what [God] did ‘then’? There was no ‘then,’ where there was no time.” The brilliance of this insight is staggering. It was sixteen centuries ahead of its time. Not until Einstein’s theory of General Relativity, which was proposed in 1916, did science catch up with it.

St. Augustine started with the fact that time is something created; modern physics starts with the fact that time is something physical. This fact was not apparent before General Relativity. Up to that point, space and time tended to be thought of

by scientists as a kind of mathematical backdrop to physical events. Physical events and processes unfolded in space and time, but space and time themselves took no part in events and underwent no processes. With General Relativity, however, it became clear that space-time is a fabric that bends, flexes, stretches, and ripples in response to the energy and momentum of the matter that fills it. Indeed, these movements of the space-time manifold themselves carry energy and momentum. Space-time, in short, is no less physical than atoms, or magnetic fields, or rocks, or trees. It necessarily follows that *if there was a beginning to the physical universe*, it would also have been the beginning of space and time. That is why modern physics says that it would make no sense to speak of time or space existing "before" the universe began. St. Augustine's great insight has triumphed.

This insight has far-reaching implications. For Jews and Christians, there is a radical distinction between Creator and created, between God and the world. God is not part of the created world, and in particular is not part of the physical universe; and this basic truth necessarily implies that God is outside of time itself. As the Scriptures teach us, in God "there is no shadow of change." He exists eternally, not in the sense of persisting for an infinite stretch of time, but in the sense of existing timelessly. Here's an analogy: In mathematics, we don't say "2 times 2 *was* equal to 4," or "2 times 2 *will* be equal to 4"; we say simply "2 times 2 *is* equal to 4." This is, as the saying goes, a "timeless truth." God is timeless in a similar sense. God, who is Truth itself, just is. Being timeless, tenses don't apply to him. God instructed Moses, "Say unto the people of Israel, 'I AM' hath sent me unto you"; and Jesus in John's gospel declares, "before Abraham was, I AM."

A helpful, and very traditional analogy, compares God as creator of the universe to the author of a play. Many early Christian documents call God the "Author" of the universe. The plot of a play has its own internal ordering or time. The playwright cannot be located in that plot-time, because he is completely outside the play. It makes no sense, for example, to ask whether Shakespeare had his dinner before the character Hamlet had his. Shakespeare is not within the time of his play.

The analogy also allows us to see that there are two kinds of causality. Within a play, one plot event is the cause of another and happens before it in plot-time, as, for example, the character Hamlet stabbing Polonius is the cause of Polonius's death. Call this "horizontal" causality. But in a quite different sense, the playwright is the cause of the play, as Shakespeare is the cause of the play *Hamlet*. Call this vertical causality. These two kinds of causality are not in competition. It would be ridiculous to ask, "Did Polonius die because Hamlet stabbed him, or because Shakespeare wrote the play that way?" Obviously, the answer to that question would be *both*! Vertical and horizontal causes or explanations are not *alternatives* to each other. The playwright causes the entire play: every character, plot event, scene, and word. And he causes the characters and events within the play to have whatever relationships to each other within the play that they do have. The stabbing of Polonius caused his death, only *because* Shakespeare wrote the play that way. Vertical causality does not

compete with but is the cause of horizontal causality. Note, by the way, that the horizontal causes within the play do have a sequence in the plot-time of the play, but the author of the play does not. So the vertical cause of the play is not “prior” to events in the play or “first” in the plot-time of the play.

The vertical causality whereby God is the author of the created world is traditionally called “primary causality,” while the horizontal causality within the world is called “secondary causality.” The term primary causality comes from the Latin term *Prima Causa* or First Cause, and refers not to God being first in the plot time of this physical universe, but first in the sense of the ultimate reason for things.

One immediately sees from this perspective how inane it really is to ask a question such as “does this insect exist because it evolved, or because God created it?” *Both!* The process of biological evolution – and for that matter the processes of biological reproduction – are causes *within* nature. God is the cause *of* nature.

In the traditional Christian understanding, God creates in a radically different sense than we humans can be said to create. God creates by giving the world reality. The world is not a fictitious, or hypothetical, or merely possible world, but an actual world that exists in reality. And every part of the world, every event in it, every being, every moment of its history from beginning to end, *is equally real*, and thus equally *made real* – created – by God; just as the playwright is equally and directly the author of every word of his play. Creation is not just something that happened a long time ago. This present moment of your life is just as much created as the first moment of the universe or the last moment.

According to traditional theology, God can have things happen in two ways. Some things he has happen as the result of natural secondary causes, such as water flowing downhill. Other things he has happen without any natural secondary causes being involved, such as water turning into wine at the wedding feast in Cana. But whether they happen naturally or miraculously, God is the primary cause, the author of the script. While God can will things to happen in a natural way, as a result of secondary causes, or will them to happen miraculously, the traditional view is that God *ordinarily* acts in and through nature. In the words of the eminent Scholastic theologian Francisco Suarez who lived from 1548 to 1617, “God does not interfere directly with the natural order where secondary causes suffice to produce the intended effect.” His was also the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas and other medieval theologians. This principle was important for the birth of science. It meant that when confronted by some puzzling event or new phenomenon, we should look first for natural explanations. Of course, it is not uncommon for superstitious people to see the supernatural in every unusual or strange event. But this tendency was rightly criticized by the great 14th century scientist, theologian and bishop, Nicole Oresme. In explaining marvels of nature, he said, “there is no reason to take recourse to the heavens ..., or to demons, or to our glorious God, as if he would produce these effects directly, any more than [he directly produces] those effects whose [natural] causes we believe are well known to us.” Another great scientist-theologian, Jean Buridan,

who was in fact Oresme's teacher, said that when confronted by new phenomena we should seek "appropriate natural causes."

Unfortunately, many people, both believers in God and atheists, have difficulty conceiving of God as above time and nature. Time-bound creatures that we are, it is impossible for us to imagine God's eternity, and very difficult to think clearly about it. Almost inevitably we tend to imagine God as a temporal being. But in thinking of him this way, we unwittingly drag him down to the level of a creature, and not just a creature but a physical creature. He becomes in our thought just one thing among things in our universe, one physical cause among other physical causes.

One symptom of this is the tendency of people to think of God's role in Creation as that of some physical force that acted 13.7 billion years ago (or for some people a few thousand years ago). Many times I have been asked by religious people, "What caused the universe to start expanding in the first place?" I think that in many cases they expect to hear, or hope to hear, that it is beyond the possibility of scientific explanation, because they think this would create a job opening for God to act as the "force" that started things off, as though he were the explosive that produced the Big Bang or the match that lit it. Atheists too think this way, including Stephen Hawking, who has recently suggested that certain speculative ideas in cosmology show that "[I]t is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going."

Once we drag God down to the level of a creature dwelling in time, then God is forced into an absurd competition with his own creatures. Some people imagine that the more that can be explained by natural causes, the less there is for God to do. Several years ago, in a magazine article, I asked why the evolution of species should be a disturbing thought to Christians, since, "If one is happy with natural explanations of the formation of stars and planetary systems, why not of plants and animals?" This provoked an indignant letter from a well-known person who asked,

"Is it possible that a man of Barr's education really wonders *why* some of us would not accept a natural explanation for the formation of stars and planets...? A Big Bang presupposes a *force* that brought all this into being (that is, God). People who believe there is a natural explanation for the formation of stars, the planetary system, plants, and animals are, by any definition, naturalists. Neo-Darwinists have made it clear that they presuppose a natural beginning of the universe (that is, no God)."

This eminent Christian, just like the eminent atheist Hawking, thinks that God is supposed to be a "force" setting off the Big Bang. Notice also that he says that "natural explanations" imply "no God." It may seem strange that someone who sees in natural explanations a threat to God's role in the world would use such naturalistic language of God ("a force"), but actually the two ideas are logically linked. It is precisely to the extent that God is seen as being like a natural force himself that he is seen as competing with other, ordinary natural forces – they have been put on the same playing field.

For Christians, God is indeed a cause, but not on the same level as natural causes. If we look for him on the same level, as though he were just another part of

nature, we will fail to find him. It is this that leads atheists to think that Christians believe “without evidence.” For them evidence means either directly observing something with our five senses or deducing that something exists as a natural cause of what we observe (the way we observe smoke and deduce that there must be a fire). But God cannot be seen in these ways, for he is neither a part of the universe that could be directly sensed, nor a natural cause within the universe. Nevertheless, God is a cause: as I said before, God is not a cause *within* nature, but the cause *of* nature. As with any cause, his existence can be inferred from the effects that he produces. The very fact that there is a universe at all – that there is *anything at all* rather than blank non-existence – calls for an explanation. And so do the magnificent harmony, order, and lawfulness that we see in the natural world, which testify to the mind of a rational Lawgiver.

God is not to be found in nature as a part of nature any more than Shakespeare is found in his plays as part of the scenery. But nature gives “evidence” of its Creator in the same way a play gives evidence of its author. As the Book of Wisdom put it, “from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.” St. Paul echoes this in his Epistle to the Romans, where he says about those who do not believe in God, “what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.”

Let me return now to a question raised by the indignant letter I quoted a moment ago. Is it atheistic to say that the Big Bang might have a natural explanation? In the first place it should be noted that the Big Bang that occurred 13.7 billion years ago may not have been the absolute beginning of the universe, but only the beginning of one phase of its history. Nevertheless, there are strong theoretical reasons (having to do with the Second Law of Thermodynamics, and the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem in General Relativity) for thinking that the universe probably did have an absolute temporal beginning at some point, which might indeed have been the Big Bang or might have been some earlier event. So let us rephrase the question. Could the beginning of the universe, *whenever* it was, have been a “natural event”? For a Christian there is no theological reason to say that it could not have been, if we mean by a “natural event” an event that happens in accordance with the laws of nature.

The point is that there is a difference between the temporal *beginning* of the universe and the *origin* of the universe in the sense of the ultimate cause of its existence. If someone were to ask why the novel *A Tale of Two Cities* exists as a work of art, would one point to the opening words of the novel: “It was the best of times; it was the worst of times”? No, that would be absurd. That is just the beginning of the novel. The cause of the novel is Charles Dickens. To confuse the temporal beginning with the ultimate cause is again to confuse horizontal relationships for vertical ones.

The *beginning* of the universe was simply the physical situation that existed in its first moments; the *origin* of the universe is the power of God, who conceived of –

and gave being to – the whole history of the universe, not just its first moments. There is no reason why the circumstances and events that existed in the first moments of the universe should not have obeyed the laws of physics, any more than the opening words of *A Tale of Two Cities* should not have obeyed the rules of English grammar. Indeed, one could go further. It is quite possible that the laws of physics might explain why the universe had a beginning. That is, the laws of physics may be such that any universe described by them must have a temporal beginning rather than stretching infinitely into the past. That does not answer the question of why those laws describe an actually existing universe, rather than a merely possible or hypothetical one. The answer to *that*, of course, is God’s act of creation, his act of conferring reality.

God, the Creator of the universe, timeless in himself, brought forth by one timeless act the whole universe with all its times and events. What he supplied to it was not some “blue touch paper” or spark, not some energy or force, but *reality* – *reality* – *reality*. Creation is not an event that happened within the history of the universe, at its temporal beginning; rather, it is the vertical cause, outside of time, that sustains and makes real the whole of that history.

I have distinguished the beginning of the universe from its creation. This may sound a little unscriptural, because the Book of Genesis itself says that God created the world “in the beginning.” But early Jewish and Christian writers had a profound way of interpreting the word “beginning” in the first verse of Genesis. Of course, it does refer to a temporal beginning. But it also meant something deeper. It also meant the origin of the world, which the Jews understood to be the divine Wisdom, and which they identified with the *Torah* or Law, which they conceived of as existing eternally in the mind of God. So the rabbis in commenting on the first verse of Genesis said, “And the word for ‘beginning’ refers only to the *Torah*, as scripture says, ‘The Lord made me [Wisdom] as the *beginning* of his way.’” The scriptural quote is from Proverbs 8:22.

The divine Wisdom was often personified in the Hebrew Bible, as in the passage just quoted from Proverbs. In the later Jewish books that form the link between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, which Catholics and Orthodox regard as part of the canon of Scripture, but which Protestants regard as non-canonical, though of theological value, the divine Wisdom is portrayed as being “spoken” by God and being “with God” at the Creation.

In the Book of Wisdom 9:9-11, one reads, “With you [O Lord] is Wisdom, she who knows all your works, she who was present when you made the world ... she knows and understands everything.” In Sirach 24:3, one reads: “I [Wisdom] came forth from the mouth of the Most High.”

The early Church saw this Wisdom from the mouth of God who was present at the creation, and indeed through whom the world was made, as being truly, not just metaphorically, a divine Person, namely the Word (or in Greek *Logos*) of God, whose “speaking” brought the universe into being. And so we have the famous opening of John’s Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the

Word was God. The same was with God in the beginning. By him all things were made.” Logos also means Reason. And so this creation account can be read also as, “In the beginning was Reason, and Reason was with God, and Reason was God. The same was with God in the beginning. By him all things were made.”

And so we find St. Augustine writing in his Confessions, “In the beginning, O God, you made heaven and earth in your Word, in your Son, in your Power, in your Wisdom, in your Truth... ‘How great are your works, O Lord; you have made all things in wisdom!’ (Ps 104:24) That Wisdom *is* the beginning, and in that beginning you have made heaven and earth.”

What Augustine is saying here is that the “beginning” of which both Genesis and St. John’s Gospel speak refers not simply to an event that happened in time, but also to the timeless *origin* of things, the ultimate *reason* for the world’s having existence, and he identifies that origin with the eternal Wisdom, or Word, or Reason of God, which is God himself. In Latin, the words “In the Beginning” are “*In principio*”. *Principium* can mean either beginning in a temporal sense, or in the sense of an originating principle, just as the word ‘origin’ can in English.

The first words of Genesis teach us two things, therefore. They teach us that God is the ultimate source of the world’s being, its origin or principle; and they teach us that the world actually had a beginning in time.

I now turn to another issue where a proper understanding of God’s relation to time can avoid false conflicts between science and religion. Christians are often bothered by the claim that random mutations drove the evolutionary process that led up to our existence. How can we be both the product of chance and yet be intended by God from all eternity, as each of us surely is? I am a physicist, so I prefer to talk about physics rather than biology. But the very same question arises in physics. If you ask why our galaxy exists, it is because of random events in the early universe. It is known from direct observation, that around 300,000 years after the Big Bang, matter was distributed very uniformly throughout the known universe, but not perfectly so. There were very slight non-uniformities – regions that were slightly denser than average; and these served as the seeds from which galaxies grew. These density perturbations, as they are called, were random as far as statistical analysis can tell, and the leading theory is that they came from quantum fluctuations that occurred soon after the Big Bang. (Quantum fluctuations, all physicists agree, are random.) In other words, whether one is willing to admit that this or that species arose as a result of random processes, almost certainly our very galaxy did, our sun did, and our planet did.

But leave aside physics as well as biology. You know that many chance events played a role in your coming to exist. Many people’s parents first met by chance. Not only their parents, but their grandparents, great grandparents, and so on. Every particular person exists because of a countless series of highly improbable events. Does that contradict God’s intending you from all eternity? That would only be so if God were a temporal being, one cause among many causes acting within the universe. We who are temporal creatures do not know the future. We can only use what

we have observed in the past and present as an indicator of what may come to be. Chance events take us by surprise and upset our calculations. The more that chance and accident play a role, the more uncertain the future is to us and the more difficult it is to plan, the more things come out other than as we intended.

But if God is outside of time, then nothing takes him by surprise or eludes his control. The eminent geneticist Francis S. Collins expressed it well in his book *The Language of God*:

But how could God take such chances? If evolution is random, how could He really be in charge, and how could He be certain of an outcome that included intelligent beings at all? The solution is actually readily at hand, once one ceases to apply human limitations to God. If God is outside of nature, then He is outside of space and time. In that context, God could in the moment of the creation of the universe also know every detail of the future. That could include the formation of the stars, planets, and galaxies, all of the chemistry, physics, geology, and biology that led to the formation of life on earth, and the evolution of humans, right to the moment of your reading this book – and beyond. In that context, evolution could appear to us to be driven by chance, but from God's perspective the outcome would be entirely specified.

Many of the supposed conflicts between science and religion are based on crude misconceptions. Many of them could be avoided if we return to the profound insight of St. Augustine that God is outside of time, and think through its full implications.

Bóg, czas, „pierwsza przyczyna” i przyczyny naturalne

W artykule poruszono problem ideologizacji doktryny ewolucjonizmu. Pokazuje słabość neodarwinizmu i jego pułapki intelektualne, wyraża sprzeciw wobec czynienia z doktryny ewolucji narzędzia dowodowego, mającego uzasadnić materialistyczną koncepcję świata.

Andrzej Bryk

**LIBERAL MONISM AND THE CULTURE WAR:
RICHARD J. NEUHAUS AND THE IMPERIAL MORAL SELF**

*The public life is mainly about culture and at the heart of culture
is morality, and at the heart of morality is religion.*

Richard J. Neuhaus

The late Richard J. Neuhaus, one of the most important voices in the discussion about the public significance of religion in modern democracies, stood at the very centre of the culture war in America, which has been raging since the sixties. Neuhaus was one of the most prominent public intellectuals – not to be confused with public quasi-intellectual celebrities – of his time, and not only in the United States. A public intellectual in his case meant a rare ability to distil and synthesize many disjointed, often academically intricate, currents of thoughts into a public discourse.

Neuhaus was a civil rights Lutheran pastor activist in the 1960s working within the circle of Martin Luther King for the equality of Black Americans, at a time when the word “civil right activist” did not yet mean a professional lobbying for various groups’ rights. One of the great public intellectuals of the 20th century, alongside such figures as Gilbert Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, C.S. Lewis, Reinhold Niebuhr and Vittorio Messori, he was more a publicist and an essayist than a systematic writer and thinker, but as an editor of the very influential “First Things” magazine he truly “moved the culture”. A socially and politically radical Christian in the

60s, later in life he became associated with the neoconservative movement and was described as a “theoconservative” – a label he adamantly refused to accept.¹

A critic of the most repugnant features of the new post-60s liberalism, Neuhaus showed no bitterness towards life or people of even the most opposite views. He knew that modernity was a station in human history in which God placed himself, realizing also the truth expressed by the protagonist of Robert Musil’s novel, *The Man Without Qualities*, that one could not be angry with one’s own times, without doing damage to oneself. But as a Christian he was Augustinian, conscious of the provisionality of every mundane order, considering it his duty “to subject every mundane political or cultural order to the final judgment of the Kingdom of God”.² Neuhaus was above all a religious persona, aware that

[...] there was nothing ‘ordinary’ about the times of our lives, for those lives were all being lived in the time after the Resurrection. We were living, he insisted, at a time when the horizon of our hope has been made secure: for God made clear his answer to the worst that human beings could do by raising Christ from the dead.³

Christianity was for him not just one of many diverse world opinions, but a state of mind which transformed the world. Faith was not a private, but a personal affair and thus public as well. And the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jesus was for him not an idea – it was always a personality. Neuhaus was a public intellectual and celebrity, but he refused to be defined by this phony status. His life was consistently informed by a desire not to be successful, but in fact to be faithful. Ordained

¹ He once remarked that: “I don’t think I’ll go along with being called a theocon, not even accepting it with ‘a wing and a grin’. To too many, the term inevitably implies theocracy, which is the very opposite of what my friends and I have been contending for all these years. I will never tire of insisting that the alternative to the naked public square is not the sacred public square but the civil public square. The purpose is to renew the liberal democratic tradition by, among other things, opening the public square to the full and civil engagement of the convictions of all citizens, including their religiously informed moral convictions. I am guilty as charged by some conservatives. I am a liberal democrat. For instance, I have argued over decades that the pro-life position is the position of a liberalism that has an inclusive definition of the community, including unborn children, for which we accept common responsibility. Similarly, it is the liberal position to support the right of parents to decide how their children should be educated through vouchers or other instruments of parental choice. On these and many other questions, liberalism was radically redefined beginning in the 1960’s, with the ironic result that I and others of like convictions are called conservatives. Our cause is the restoration and renewal of the liberal democratic tradition, which is the greatest political achievement of our civilization. There is yet another and more important reason to decline the ‘theocon’ label. No political cause and no political order deserves to bear the name of God. That honor is reserved to the Church of Jesus Christ, which its faith and Eucharistic liturgy enacts and anticipates the authentically new politics of the promised kingdom of God. America is a nation under God, but not even at its very best is it God’s nation.” R. J. Neuhaus, *De-Christianizing America*, “First Things”, June–July 2006.

² Idem, *Katolicy nie potrafią udowodnić swych racji* [Catholics cannot prove they are right], “Europa”, 14, June 2006, p. 11.

³ G. Weigel, *Multiplying Himself*; and R. L. Wilken, *Evening Prayer*, Raymond J. de Sousa in the homily at the funeral mass for Richard John Neuhaus, printed as *The Great Convivium*, both in “First Things”, April 2009, p. 62, 70.

as a Lutheran pastor, he converted to the Catholic Church in 1990, or, as he liked to say, this was not a conversion since he had never left it. Neuhaus was then ordained a Catholic priest in 1991. His impact on the American public theology was considerable, through his incessant public activity and writings and as an editor of an ecumenical and influential journal of religion, culture and public life, "First Things", founded in 1990. Neuhaus was one of the intellectual nerve centres of the – rising in power – network of evangelical and ecumenical Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish orthodox scholars, one of the first to realize that traditional religious divisions in the contemporary United States and in the Western world in general were not so much between religious denominations, not even between religious and non-religious people, but between people of moral gravity and nihilistic persons. Neuhaus was a merciless destroyer of false intellectual pretensions, ideologically motivated public arguments posing as truths and morally dubious pronouncements declared as final moral law. This made him one of the major culture war warriors, even if not by his own choice – both in American society at large, where he battled liberal-left pieties and within Christianity itself, when he challenged the reigning liberal theology.

Neuhaus was aware that he was a warrior in the culture wars or culture war, knowing that the major religious issue of today's world is idolatry. Building bridges between all people of good faith, he reaffirmed his faith in God as an important reminder in the public sphere that nothing could become an idolatrous god, whether it was the modern sovereign state, ideology, or "Gaia", the self-serving ideology of "spirituality". Neuhaus, from his young years in the civil rights movement to opposition to abortion, multiculturalism or affirmative action, was on the barricades of the culture wars. But among the issues which gave him a prominent place at the crossroads of the US public debate was his thesis in the book *The Naked Public Square* published in 1984 that modern liberalism had taken on the form of ideological monism, that it tried to exclude religiously grounded arguments from the public sphere and that this situation threatened the very idea of a free, democratic society. In this context, Neuhaus was critical of the constitutional interpretation by the US Supreme Court and its judicially imposed secularism in America.

Such issues put Neuhaus right in the middle of the culture wars. This was, as he wrote, "our 'culture war', a term I had been using since the late 1970's".⁴ It concerned the phenomenon that the major discussions in society were focused not so much on economic problems – however important they may be – but on fundamental and potentially disturbing questions of

What kind of people are [Americans]? And what kind of people are [Americans] going to be? [For instance] 'culture war's' most visible conflict is abortion, a divide, a conflict of morality in our public life, much more intense than anything we have seen since the nineteenth century conflict over slavery. It's a frightening prospect.⁵

⁴ R. J. Neuhaus, *Bill Clinton and the American Character*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square*, Michigan 2001, p. 130.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

And religion was, pointed out Neuhaus, right in the middle of the culture wars, since “the public life is mainly about culture and at the heart of culture is morality, and at the heart of morality is religion”.⁶ There was also another aspect of the American culture war increasingly felt during the Vietnam War in the 60s, and visible since then. By the turn of the 21st century

[...] a crucial dividing line [as well] in the culture war is between those who do and those who do not agree with the proposition that ‘On balance, and considering the alternatives, America is a force for good in the world’ [with also] the elements of the left and right coming together in opposition to what is widely recognized as a kind of American imperium in maintaining world order.⁷

Already in 1984, after finally parting with his radical civil rights years, Neuhaus predicted the voices wishing the end of America and thus the end of liberal democracy, in his judgment, tied to the Judeo-Christian anthropology. A decade later he remarked that there were those who said then that the day of liberal democracy is past and there are still some who say it today. Most of those who said it then – in the churches, the universities, and the media held the view that America was ‘on the wrong side of history’. But America will continue to be an experiment, and it will continue to be an experiment that is sustained by an intelligent anxiety about what it would mean were it to fail.

Neuhaus ridiculed the idea that the American way of functioning in the world was fighting for an empire. The idea that people would die for the State or for the Fatherland or Motherland is thoroughly alien to the American spirit. The nation is a “thin” community whose chief function is to protect the “denser” communities of deeper allegiance.⁸ For Neuhaus, the use of the term “culture wars” was “dangerously inflammatory”, but he thought it was a

[...] useable and useful term. It should not [yet] be used in a way that precludes the conversation and persuasion that should be, but is not, the ordinary mode of public discourse. The prestige media are generally blind to their belligerency in the culture war; they champion as courageous the exercise of free speech that is vituperative and slanderous while simultaneously calling for civility, and condemning as uncivil even the measured responses of those who are slandered.⁹

Fundamentally, the culture war was for Neuhaus a war

[...] over the moral definition of American culture. It is the kind of contest with which most politicians are profoundly uncomfortable. The conflict will continue and intensify. America is today engaged in a relentless *Kulturkampf*. We did not start it. It started. We had no choice. It is a war between different ideas about who we are and who we ought to be. In conflict are different story lines for the telling of the American democratic experiment and our place in it. Depending who is telling the story, it seems that there are different Americas at war with one another. Religion plays a prominent part in [this] conflict. The contest is by no means simply one of secularists vs religionists, although both secularists

⁶ R. J. Neuhaus, *Introduction*, *ibidem*, p. VII.

⁷ *Idem*, *1984 Then and Now*, *ibidem*, p. 235–236.

⁸ *Idem*, *America Against Itself: Moral Vision and the Public Order*, Notre Dame 1992, p. 186.

⁹ *Idem*, *The Impertinence of Protesting Aggression*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square...*, p. 183.

and religionists frequently portray it that way. In cultural warfare, the ideas that are most important for all sides are religious in nature, whether or not they are labeled 'religious' ideas. Religion is from Latin *religio*, which means to fasten or tie together. Religion bespeaks that which has the moral force of obligation. The *Kulturkampf* is not, for the most part, one of moralists vs amoralists, a contest relatively clear-cut compared with the [current] situation. Our situation is one of moralities in conflict [thus] it sometimes takes on the character of the 'wars of religion'. Surprising to many is the fact that the conflict now brings Jews and Christians into alliance on many fronts. That is one of the most important developments coming out of the dialogue between Jews and Christians of the [recent decades].¹⁰

A proper definition of what we call religion is important to the understanding of the culture wars in the Western world today. Culture warfare was sometimes described, Neuhaus observed, as a conflict concerning religion between the bourgeoisie and the new knowledge class, or between "the silent majority and the voluble elites", or – last but not least – between "the moral majority and secular humanists". There was a grain of truth in these descriptions of such confrontations, but even more truth in the statement that it was a war between people.

[...] who are convinced that religion and religiously grounded morality should be publicly normative and those who claim that we are long past the time when any truth, never mind moral truth, can be meaningfully deliberated in public.¹¹

The *Kulturkampf* which America had experienced was common to all advanced societies. Nevertheless America was also in this regard different and the religious issue was crucial here, Neuhaus claimed. This religious factor cut across society and was and still is one of the main front lines in the culture wars. There might be a possibility, claimed Neuhaus, "of turning a *Kulturkampf* into a civil conversation". Religion and religious people – Neuhaus meant transcendental, biblical ones here – have a special task to play in this cultural warfare and point towards a dimension beyond it. It was a crucial activity, wrote Neuhaus in key passages guiding his entire public life,

[...] to challenge the imperiousness of the political, along with all its pretensions and divisive labels. [They] should also challenge the imperiousness of the political. Biblical religion opens us to the worlds beyond everyday reality that we call the world. In this awakened consciousness, all worldly contests of power are sharply relativized, their inflated pretensions to importance debunked. What we in our conspiring and plotting and taking counsel together think is happening, is not what is happening at all. [The problem] today is [that] the great political and ideological divides in our society are not challenged by the churches but run right through the churches. [The] war over the meaning of

¹⁰ Idem, *America Against Itself*..., p. 165–170, IX–X. Neuhaus was aware that the culture war between the religious America and the non-religious one, had been going on at least since the "Scopes Trial" of 1925, which slowly pushed the "fundamentalists of the early twentieth century [from which] came, in the 1940's, the 'neo-Evangelicals' who were determined to move from isolation to engagement, winning the culture for Christ. [But] a half century later, the result is an amorphous coalition of 'parachurch' movements kept in a state of spiritually adolescent excitements that are exploited by skilled entrepreneurs bent on building their own religious kingdoms". Idem, *While We 're at It*, "First Things", May 2004, p. 70. But that culture war has been on the margins and although still very robust and growing has been incapable on its own of moving culture.

¹¹ Idem, *America Against Itself*..., p. X.

American culture [is] maddeningly confused, the battle lines sometimes follow the distinctions between liberal and conservative, right and left. Most of [Americans] locate themselves on the battle map. But we are [torn]. We want a place where we can stand with integrity, instead of parceling ourselves out in pieces to one side or another. Communities of religious faith ought to provide such a place. 'Christian' ought to have definitional priority in describing who we are and not intend to be. The same is true of Jews who are Jews not by accidents of Jewishness but by adherence to the truth of Judaism. Religious communities should strive to be a zone of truth in a world of politicized mendacity. In saying that the church should challenge and relativize the imperiousness of the political, the point is not that the church has no interest in the political. On the contrary it is precisely and critically a political contribution of the church to liberate us from the pretensions of the political. A robust skepticism toward the political, an insistence that politics stay in its place, can actually elevate the dignity of politics. What is politics after all? It [is] at its heart, Aristotle said, the activity of free persons deliberating the question of how they ought to order their life together in relation to the good. Politics is [thus] a moral enterprise, not a moral enterprise in the sense that those who practice it always behave morally, [but] that it engages the questions of right and wrong, of good and evil. Politics as a moral enterprise participates in it, but can never be permitted to subsume, our understanding of the moral. Neither, for that matter, can the moral be permitted to subsume the entirety of our lives. Politics should be elevated by being reduced. In the light of Augustine's amendment of Aristotle, the only *polis* deserving of our ultimate devotion is the City of God. Our devotion to the right ordering of the earthly polis is penultimate and, in most of its aspects, prepelultimate. Christians consider that the church is the community in which the right ordering of that coming Kingdom is proclaimed, celebrated and anticipated in faith sustained by the Living Word. Christians understand themselves to be engaged in the politics of the right ordering of human life together. Any politics that refuses to be humbled by that politics is to be recognized and named as the politics of the Evil One. When it has been duly humbled and has abandoned its overwhelming pretensions to supreme importance, politics can be elevated by admission to the life of the community of faith. It can be admitted on the same basis as any other legitimate concern that some believers are called to pursue. The vocation of the community is to sustain many vocations, and the political vocation is one among the many. It is by no means the most important.¹²

Neuhaus, in delineating "the connections between faith and the public order", was aware that human beings were engaged in

[...] the right ordering of our life together in this provisional period prior to the right ordering of our life together. The beginning of political wisdom is to recognize both the importance and the limits of the political. That, in turn, requires that we recognize the importance and the limits of humanity. Ways of thinking that abandon the reference to what is superior to humanity reduce humanity. When human beings on their own think they are the best thing in the world, they become the most pitiable thing in the world, for they alone of all things in the world are conscious of the threat of meaninglessness. To be sure, those of an existentialist bent take this to be the dignity of humanity, making possible the heroic assertion of meaning in the face of meaninglessness. But clearly this is a case of making a virtue out of desperation. In the classical and biblical traditions, meaning is not of our own contrivance, nor is it our own defiant casting of our meanings into the dark of nothingness. Meaning is bestowed, it is the created ordering of reality, it is there to be recognized and acted upon.¹³

For Neuhaus, thus, the abandonment of the religious perspective made humanity unable to recognize what, above all, were the limits of human reason. The issue was whether theological language was telling us something fundamentally important

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 14–23.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 23–32.

about the essence of the human condition or whether such language had been overcome by the secular rational Enlightenment narrative. For Neuhaus, biblical theology not only told us something significant about our predicament, but formed a barrier against the hubris of political power as well. He looked at the situation in America from that position.

Neuhaus understood that “the great contest is over culture”, engaging all in a reasoned moral conversation about how all should live together. But this conflict over religious presence in public life cast doubt on the very unity of common culture, the very language which makes public discourse possible. He thought that

[...] it is not true – as some champions of deviant subcultures contend – there is no longer such a thing as an American culture and that there is only a smorgasbord of subcultures. But it is true that deviancy has been defined down, and in some cases out of existence, making the common culture much thinner. There was a time when the center seemed to hold. Everyone was expected to be aware of what [the common life of a political community]. All of that was a very long time ago. The common culture is now much thinner and, it seems, becoming thinner every day. It has in large part been displaced by what are aptly called the culture wars.¹⁴

Neuhaus noted that there are religious, or non-religious, thinkers who think they are not captive to the culture wars, but this is difficult since they are pressured by friends or enemies to have a “definite place on the battlefield of the culture wars”. This is not

[...] the happiest of circumstances for the public square, or for religion in the public square. Nobody should want culture wars. I am keenly aware that I am viewed as a belligerent, by both friends and enemies. But my allies and I did not initiate hostilities. We did not, to cite but a few obvious examples, declare an unlimited abortion license, or advocate the deconstruction of western culture, or champion the replacement of marriage with state certified friendships. We are playing an aggressive defense, in a reasoned hope of prevailing for the wise to know that, short of the coming of the Kingdom, history is continuing contention. Much better [of course] than culture wars is the idea of democratic engagement that John Courtney Murray described as a people ‘locked in civil argument’. While accepting our part in battles not of our choosing, we must never sacrifice hope for genuine argument within the bond of civility.¹⁵

Neuhaus knew that some Christian intellectuals thought that America had already become a post-Christian society, that engaging in the culture wars was futile and what was necessary in such a situation was to focus on one’s ghetto of faith – the idea, for instance, of one of the Methodist theologians, Stanley Hauerwas. But Neuhaus cautioned against

[...] the propensity of some conservatives, especially Evangelicals, to claim that ours is a post-Christian society. That is an easy out from engaging the tasks that are ours in an incorrigibly, confusedly and conflictedly Christian America. It is reasonable to believe that a more churchly and culture-forming shape of Christianity may be in process through efforts such as Evangelicals and Catholics together and new Christian initiatives in philosophy, literature, and the arts. There are, to be sure,

¹⁴ Idem, *From Common Culture to Culture Wars*, „First Things”, May 2004, p. 67.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

formidable obstacles, but, if we resist the temptation to resign ourselves to ours being a post-Christian society, such initiatives could bear impressive fruit in the short term of the next hundred years or so. And in the long term, who knows what might happen?¹⁶

Neuhaus opposed liberal Christianity as more or less consciously contributing to the *acedia* of the modern mind and its amnesia and radical individualism. Neuhaus, while still a Lutheran pastor, increasingly began to feel that liberal Catholicism, Protestantism or Judaism, apart from professing just social gospel causes of poverty, war, or environment, would soon turn the doctrinal, metaphysical component into some kind of spiritual comfort, a psychology of a communion with the healing, all-embracing God. Its aim was to strengthen, not guide, the inner self-esteem, merging with psychology, a substitute religion. Neuhaus knew that psychology was valuable only when it was based on sound metaphysics, but when it relied on a false philosophy, it was to become not only nonsense but disastrous as well. By being one of the most vocal defenders of Christian orthodoxy, Neuhaus positioned himself at the very centre of a feud within Christian churches, including post Vatican II Catholicism, contributing to a major realignment of the American religious landscape and forming a new religious alliance between orthodox Catholics, Protestants and Jews confronting liberal Christians and Jews. This re-alliance, which resulted in the important manifesto of 1990, "Catholics and Evangelicals Together", a statement of principles which created a Protestant and Catholic Conservative Alliance and ended a long-standing religious, social, cultural and political rift in the United States between Catholics and Protestants, profoundly rearranged religious life in America and itself was a part of one of the major fronts of the culture war.

Apart from a youthful stint with radicalism, Neuhaus remained all his life a liberal democrat in politics, in the traditional sense of the word. He flirted with the idea of liberal democracy as the best regime. But his liberalism was a pre-60s one, when liberalism had not yet turned into a kind of monistic "religion" with definite new anthropology and morality from public life. This new liberalism accepted as its premise the New Left idea of "liberation" from all oppressions. This meant

¹⁶ Idem, *While We're At It...*, p. 76. Neuhaus quotes an observation of an orthodox theologian, David B. Hart, who wrote that "if we succumb to post-Christian modernity, and the limits of its vision, what then? Most of us will surrender to a passive decay of will and aspiration, perhaps, find fewer reasons to resist as government insinuates itself into the little liberties of the family, continue to seek out hitherto unsuspected insensitivities to denounce and prejudices to extirpate, allow morality to give way to sentimentality; the impetuous among us will attempt to enjoy Balzac, or take up herb gardening, or discover 'issues'; a few dilettantish amorality will ascertain that everything is permitted and dabble in bestiality or cannibalism; the rest of us will mostly watch television; crime rates will rise more steeply and birthrates fall more precipitously; being the 'last men', we shall think ourselves at the end of history; an occasional sense of the pointlessness of it will induce in us a certain morose feeling of impotence (but what can one do?), and, in short, we [Americans] shall become Europeans, but without the vestiges of the old civilization ranged about us to soothe our despondency, the vestigial Christianity of the old world presents one with the pathetic spectacle of shape without energy, while the quite robust Christianity of the new world often presents one with the disturbing spectacle of energy without shape".

a war on an entire culture to achieve an ideal of equality with a new anthropology of the autonomous imperial self as a source of morality. It is not entirely clear whether Neuhaus accepted liberal-democracy as the “ideal” system of government or simply accepted it as the best for that time.¹⁷ But he had no doubt that the “liberation” of the 60’s and radical secular modernity began to threaten the moral order, and “a free exercise of religion”.

For Neuhaus, the culture war meant the end of civilized public deliberations. That is why he didn’t mince his words against those who removed themselves from the civilizational circle of moral conversation, branding them “new barbarians”, acting on the premise of their imperial self having the legitimacy of law, and refusing a priori to be limited by what we know, the wisdom we have received, and traditional notions of good and evil, right and wrong. Neuhaus was one of those who realized that if we reject universal moral standards independent of the human will and accept the autonomous imperial self as a basis of moral judgment, then the arbitrariness of power is unavoidable. Universal morality grounded in an objective Augustinian standard of divided sovereignty was for Neuhaus a precondition of human freedom. To sustain such a situation one needed a civilized community of moral conversation. Rejecting it and grounding one’s actions in the imperial autonomous self would amount to giving power to the strongest. For Neuhaus, there were several conditions necessary for such a conversation in liberal democracy: 1) truth exists as a basis of human reference and is an object of human striving in the public sphere; 2) reason is a tool of such a conversation, and moral reasoning is neither an illusion nor does it deceive us. Thus public philosophy has to ensure: 3) diversity and pluralistic conversation. This approach stemmed for Neuhaus from the essence of American liberalism: the idea expressed in the “Declaration of Independence”. Thus the idea of the community in the American tradition was free of any romanticized entities, *a la* Hegel, such as “the State”, “the Fatherland” or “the Motherland”, and in this situation should also be free of modern day images of one nation under liberal monism grounded in an anthropology of the imperial self, excluding universal morality, freedom and plurality.¹⁸

¹⁷ He was here following the Catholic Church’s path. The Church wasted a lot of energy trying desperately to resist liberal democracy throughout the 19th century. It was also partially engaged in building an alternative to liberal democracy systems, in Portugal, Spain or Italy. All such attempts ended with authoritarianism. Here the Church failed in Augustinian terms; liberal democracy turned out to be victorious. Leo XIII made timid efforts to accommodate the Church to liberal democracy, but it was Pius XII who in the Christmas proclamation of 1944 finally accepted liberal democracy with which the pope could cooperate well, even if realizing the dangers of such a move. Liberal democracy as a relativized system was anthropologically inimical to Christianity, having a proclivity to reduce any religious system to a Roman cult, but the Church realized it could survive the liberal epoch. It realized it could live with liberal democracy without converting to it, the latter move being made by the majority of the liberal Protestant churches, as well as the liberal wing of Catholicism. Liberal humanitarianism, with Christian *caritas* taken over by the liberal welfare state with a rejection of any serious theological problems could reduce churches to a spiritual department of the liberal state. But the Church was aware of that, despite the fact that the liberal state claimed to be doing the work the Church has been doing inefficiently, that is humanitarian aid.

¹⁸ R. J. Neuhaus, *America Against Itself*..., p. 186. In other words, the American idea of a nation is akin to the Chestertonian remark that “a true soldier fights not for what is in front of him but for what is behind him, not for empire, but for home”.

Americans live in diverse communities with diverse “ways of dreaming their dreams” and engaging one another in the civil public square. The public philosophy necessary for that, wrote Neuhaus, was exactly the type which “sustains that diversity”. It is a way of people of diverse faiths to “build on what they have in common”. The goal is not “a moral Esperanto”, a kind of “liberal universalism” with exclusion of other languages. The essence of the contemporary culture war, the totally uncivil moral argument, is that

[...] the proponents of liberal universalism deride other moral languages as ‘sectarian’. But there is nothing more sectarian than Esperanto. Nobody speaks universal language. People speak languages. In a pluralistic society we need to be multilingual if we care about the public order. If we know who we are, however, we will know one language to be more our own than any other. The primary language of the Christian, for instance, will be that of scripture, creed, and gospel teaching. It is spoken most fluently and richly in the communities where Christians gather. It can be spoken freely in the public square, where it engages and challenges, and is engaged and challenged by other languages.¹⁹

The idea of “liberal universalism” is alluring since people fear the “curse of Babel”, the consequence of an incessant war of attrition of language against language, faith against faith, one version of good against another. For Neuhaus, allegedly neutral liberal discourse wants to push the ultimate issues beyond the pale of public conversation, imposing only the liberal monistic criteria of discourse. At the same time it brandishes a flag of pluralism, multiculturalism, diversity and tolerance. True democratic pluralism in the case of liberal monism is a formula for anarchy; thus the real discussion is pushed outside the legitimate public square. Robust public conversation should not fear this. Those who would like to impose their own values under “the guise of value-neutrality” evade the question of good and destroy democracy. A political community

[...] is worthy of moral actors only as it engages the question of the good. Against those who fear civil war, the account of human nature offered in the language of some communities assures that, since we are all human, we will have a great deal in common. [There is such a thing as ‘human nature’ and people who reject such an assumption] fear a conversation based on unhindered communication rooted in the idea of human nature, but if so then all their assumptions about their lives are senseless, they simply slide into the senseless, nihilistic belief in the dictates of the autonomous imperial Self, with dire consequences to their own lives and well being in such an environment. Such people are extremely rare, the rest who do not believe in ‘human nature’ are simply confused, the more reason to engage them in a meaningful conversation. Human commonalities and a shared experience of living together assure that there will be, at least for public purposes, a significant “overlap” between different moral traditions and languages which express them.²⁰

The spheres of such an “overlap” should be encouraged and cultivated, but at the same time, warns Neuhaus, the scope of public purposes “should be limited because the overlap will always be limited”. But community and its languages are chiefly about

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 186.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 186–187.

[...] the enforceable, and it is the duty of public life to protect them from the rule of public law. Civilization depends upon obedience to the unenforceable. Public life deals with the enforceable because the unenforceable – virtue, honor, discernment, decency, compassion and hope – is ever so much more important, the sphere of law must be limited as much as possible. [For different] reasons that sphere is today expanding. In such a situation, love in the form of justice must attend to those who are most vulnerable to the law when the law is not accountable, and the task requires the engagement of those who have been formed by communities that know a justice better than the justice of which the earthly *polis* is capable.²¹

The threat of anarchy and the expansion of the public law at the expense of the “unenforceable” could be contained, claimed Neuhaus, within properly designed constitutional order. This was so since there was also the

[...] commonality of human reason – the ability to perceive, comprehend, argue, infer, deduce, persuade. The nature of reason is a huge subject on which there would seem to be little agreement. In fact, however, there is a clear distinction between those who do and who do not think there are good reasons to believe in reason. For those who do not believe in reason – the post-Nietzschian nihilists and cultural deconstructionists – public discourse, including dispute over laws and the law, can only be understood in terms of ‘the will to power’. [Maybe] such people can be persuaded to reexamine their belief system. Absent that, however, their will to power must be checked by the vibrant and unhindered exercise of democratic pluralism. The threat of anarchy and civil war in such vibrant interaction is reduced by commonalities of human nature, of overlapping languages, of shared experience, of tested institutions, of constitutional order, and of capacity for reason.²²

For Neuhaus there were two alternatives to a “vibrantly pluralistic public rendering of accounts of the good”. The first is the domination of a putatively universal account of the good, which is imposed by the allegedly enlightened and disinterested few. This is, as Neuhaus referred to it, the “sectarianism of Esperanto”, a kind of intellectual sleight of hand which has warped political and legal discourse, and which is termed liberal monism, or political correctness in contemporary times. Political correctness, born out of a noble impulse to eliminate offensive and disdainful language, turned quickly into a distinctive ideology of the liberal-left aiming at redefinition of reality, by delegitimization of traditionally used concepts in order to shape human consciousness in the direction of the properly defined aims of the new revolutionaries in search of utopia.²³ Neuhaus described the ideology of political correctness as a

[...] spirit of anti-intellectualism. Public discourse is increasingly [today] aimed not at exploring the truth of a matter but at terminating the discussion. Conversation is displaced by propaganda. Self-described thought police patrol the conceptual borders against ideas and facts they find inconvenient. To be sure, this is hardly new, but the patrol seems to be increasingly aggressive these days. Some arguments are rightly declared to be over. But there are subjects, for example, whether we are facing catastrophic climate change caused by human behavior, whether reason and spirit emerge from mindless

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 188.

²³ On the concept of political correctness, see an excellent analytical collection of essays by A. Kołakowska, *Wojny kultur i inne wojny*, Warszawa 2010, p. 11–44, 89–98.

matter, whether sexual desire is identity and destiny – that are eminently deserving of intelligent discussion. John Courtney Murray wrote that democracy is made possible by people who accept the open-ended discipline of being ‘locked in a civil argument’. This is possible and we must work at it: ‘this belief and hope is strengthened when one considers that this dynamic order of reason in man, that clamors for expression with all the imperiousness of law, has its origin and sanction in an eternal order of reason whose fulfillment is the object of God’s majestic will’. That is a claim worth arguing about. It is a claim to be confronted by anti-intellectuals who are, with a presumptuousness that would be amusing were it not so deadening, increasingly prone to declaring that the argument is over and that they won. One detects a growing pattern of refusing to engage in argument by declaring that the argument is over. It is not only about global warming [but, for instance] questions about the adequacy of Darwinian theory, whether scientifically or philosophically, [when one must] be prepared to be informed that the argument is over. Offer the evidence that many who once coped with the same-sex desires have turned out, not without difficulty, to be happily married to persons of the opposite sex and you will be told politely – or, more likely, impolitely – that the argument is over. When and where, one might ask, did the argument take place? Who was invited to take part in the argument?²⁴

The second alternative to a “vibrantly pluralistic public rendering of accounts of the good” is sheer nihilism, a denial that an account of the good is possible. Neuhaus thought that the liberal, universalist monists seemed to be on the defensive, but that nihilists were full of confidence. There is, of course, no guarantee that “a publicly potent account of the good” is possible. Some think that it might be too late for such a search. Neuhaus pointed out that ours is

[...] a moment of nihilism without the abyss, or at least of only partial descent into the abyss. Perhaps the further descent is inevitable. History is filled with the rise and fall of civilizations, and we have no reason to think that we are immune to the turnings of time. [Thus] we may hope that the abyss is not infinite and we might one day find our way to the other side. But still on this side of the last descent there are laws, institutions, traditions, habits of heart, and capacities of the mind that can hold us back. It

²⁴ R. J. Neuhaus, *While We're At It...*, p. 60. Part of this political correctness was the phenomenon of defining certain types of speech as “hate crimes”. Neuhaus noticed that crimes motivated by hate have come to be seen as a category of their own in some academic circles as well as by different lobbying groups and media circles. He quips that “it apparently took [them] some time to recognize that few crimes are motivated by love. [But hate crimes have a clear ideological aim]. The admitted purpose of gay agitation for hate crime laws is to have homosexual acts, which in the real world define ‘sexual orientation’, put on par with religion, race, gender, and age as a legally protected category. There are many good reasons for thinking that a bad idea. But the very idea of ‘hate crimes’ is highly dubious. Hate is a sin for which people may go to Hell. It is quite another thing to make it a crime for which people should go to jail. The law rightly takes motivation into account but it is not [intent] that makes the killing a crime. A murderer may have nothing personal against someone whom he kills for money. It is generally wrong to disapprove of people because of their religion, race, or gender. But it is not a crime. An exception may be disapproval of someone whose religion includes committing terrorist acts. The purpose of the gay movement and its advocates is to criminalize disapproval of homosexual acts, or at least to establish in law that such disapproval is disapproved. Most Americans, it may safely be assumed, disapprove of homosexual acts. It is not within the competence of the state to declare that they are, for that reason, legally suspect. In a sinful world, sundry hatreds, irrational prejudices, and unjust discriminations abound. The homosexual movement is notable for its venting of hatred against millions of Americans whom it accuses of being ‘homophobic’. In whatever form it takes, hatred toward other people must be deplored and condemned. But it is utterly wrongheaded to make hatred illegal”. *Idem*, *Why Hate Crimes Are Wrong*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square...*, p. 172–173.

may be possible to stop the descent and even to gain higher ground. Whether that is possible depends on no other factor so critically as the free and unhindered engagement in public of alternative accounts of a transcendent good by which we should order our life together. Civil discussion of the enforceable might yet be renewed by respect for the unenforceable, upon which the continued existence of the civitas depends. Then again, it really may be too late. There is no sure answer to that, except to say with Eliot, 'For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business'.²⁵

The Revolt of the Elites against Liberal Democratic Citizenship

For Neuhaus, the culture war had become a consequence of a phenomenon connected with the cultural left's "long march through the institutions", decided on when the hopes of the worker's revolution failed. This cultural revolution constituted a reversal of the classical Marxist relation between the economic basis and the superstructure. The idea, formulated by Antonio Gramsci in the 1920's, was accepted by the 1968 generation and its gradual influence made the culture war a reality of public life.²⁶ The first tool of the battle became language itself and a demonization of opponents as people who should be delegitimized in the public sphere, who thwart "progress". Much of the left, as Neuhaus wrote

[...] does believe that conservatives are but the cat's paw of the Gestapo waiting in the wings. Liberals generally speaking hate conservatives. Liberal [left] hatred is directed towards millions of fellow American non-liberals, especially religious ones. It is almost impossible to debate important issues with many liberal spokesmen because opposing the liberal position opens a person to charges of evil: opposition to race- and sex-based affirmative action means one is racist and sexist; opposition to abortion renders one a misogynist; opposition to same-sex marriage means a person is homophobic; and on and on. The loudest shouters belong to the left that has largely succeeded in its 'long march through the institutions'. They have nothing but contempt for the 'process of public deliberation'. How could you trust a public that includes millions upon millions, perhaps even a majority, of conservatives? They elected Reagan, didn't they? There's no telling what they would do next time, if given half a chance.²⁷

Neuhaus pointed out that Americans had, since the 60s, experienced a bitter conflict over the public definition of culture and particular social issues and groups that are part of it.²⁸ But the conflict is much deeper. The culture war touches fundamentally on the very essence of democratic governance and republican thought, because the conflict is connected with a growing oligarchy subverting democracy, the rise of a new, highly educated class of people who consider themselves to be in

²⁵ Idem, *America Against Itself*..., p. 188.

²⁶ On the concept of "the long march" as well as its application in the American context, see R. Kimball, *The Long March: How the Cultural Revolution of the 1960's Changed America*, San Francisco 2000.

²⁷ R. J. Neuhaus, *Bill Clinton and the American Character*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square*..., p. 152.

²⁸ Idem, *Ralph Reed's Real Agenda*, "First Things", October 1996, p. 45.

charge of leading a society towards an “emancipated”, just future. In the 60s, specific American circumstances created an atmosphere that the country was fundamentally unjust: the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, the rise of the college educated intelligentsia, brought up in conditions of affluence and conformism by their parents. This highly educated class of people began to usurp (for themselves) the right to define the terms of a just society, because they were educated and thus considered themselves to be morally superior; they acted on a conviction that it was their duty to order a society by means of bureaucratic actions against the majority.²⁹ A rebellion against this class had to come sooner or later. It was, Neuhaus pointed out, a rebellion of the people against “those with a vested interest in the way things are, and especially for the overclass that has long governed without the consent of the governed”. In other words, the culture war could also be described as a reaction against

[...] the revolt of the elites against their own societies, a reaction against a corruption of liberal democracy by the new oligarchy Neuhaus defined as an “overclass”. This rebellion of societies against the overclass is going to hurt [them] a great deal, and that is why they use that rebellion as a confirmation of their inner conviction that they battle the forces of evil – defined as populism, reactionary forces etc. – battling the forces of progressive good.³⁰

Part of that danger posed by the overclass was their subtle redefinition of liberal democratic discourse, by means of a new language, soon termed political correctness, in order to prevent open public discussion and ensure a monopoly of the language imposed by it. Political correctness turned out to be a complex mixture of a new language (the only legitimate one), “correct” and “incorrect” attitudes and public statements, “hate speech” and “tolerant speech”. It has become the language of political overseers who have taken over “the commanding heights of culture”, constituting a moral instrument of governance, aimed at elimination of alternative thinking and action, combined with a hubris that moral right is solely on the side of the politically correct. Essentially a witchcraft-like practice, it attempts to disregard the human condition, the reality of things, propelled by a burning desire for a just, non-oppressive world. The changed language is also aimed at delegitimization of all intermediary institutions creating barriers between the individual and a world which was soon to come, such as family, religion, memory, tradition, nation-state and community at large. This delegitimization of all allegedly oppressive institutions was to leave an individual at the mercy of the new rulers. The latter, on the path to the new society, wanted to redefine reality and push an individual towards an allegedly true source of morality and meaning, i.e. the imperial autonomous self, detached from any previous allegiances. Then the politically correct social causes provided by the overclass would have no competition from previous attachments, allegiances and memory.³¹

²⁹ E. J. Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics*, New York 2004.

³⁰ R. J. Neuhaus, *Ralph Reed's Real Agenda...*, p. 45.

³¹ The fight for the independence of the mediating structures is thus one of the major fronts of the culture war. The battle against their dissolution as a precondition of a non-oppressive life is a fight

The new class social engineering was to be achieved not only by a politically correct language, but also by the “long march through the institutions”, creating a new progressive utopia by the new intelligentsia, the liberators from all kinds of social ills defined by the new elite. This new class is defined by Neuhaus as a class of educated people, the media, university professors, professions, those who transformed themselves into a self-proclaimed and self-serving “overclass”. They have become convinced of their high moral probity and act on their alleged sense of moral superiority, reacting with

[...] angry astonishment that anyone should challenge what they declare to be the consensus of the enlightened. [This is, they say] our world, in which [everyone] must become like us. It is the new world of secularism’s [which in fact is a world of an] oppressive tolerance of the petty intolerance of its infatuation with tolerance.³²

Neuhaus distinguishes between the American ruling class and the overclass. The ruling class is a continuation of the old ruling class, which discreetly managed to disguise its role in deference to democratic sensibilities. Since the defeat of the Federalists in 1800, the ruling class has never tried overtly to pretend that it has a “sacred” right to govern America, as the ruling class in Europe has always thought, due to its innate capabilities – intellectual or moral – which might be different from those of the people at large. It has always existed, and

[...] egalitarians’ protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, every functional society has a class composed of those who wield concentrated political and economic power and who set its manners, or lack thereof. Within that class, different people do different things, and the most important thing that is done is the minting and marketing of the ideas by which people try to make sense of their lives.³³

But Americans thought this ruling class to be bearable, for two reasons. First, the privileges of the ruling class were thought to be derived from breeding “natural aristocracy” types; second, such privileges were derived from achievement, through hard work. Since in America class envy has never been a potent factor in public life, such a ruling class has been thought justifiable, while at the very same time testifying to the greatness of America in which everybody can play a game of “equal opportunity”. The only condition of such an acceptance was, however, clear: deference to “the people” and ruling in their interests.

to defend the freedom of the individual and his/her ability not to be at the mercy of anomic economic and social forces. In other words it is a fight to prevent the elevation of that which is possible over that which is real.

³² R. J. Neuhaus, *The Best of the Public Square...*, p. 127, 113, 111; for a good exposition of the term “new class” being used by neoconservatives, amongst whom Neuhaus is counted, see G. Dorian, *The Neoconservative Revolution: Politics, Culture, and the War of Ideology*, Philadelphia 1993, p. 96–101, 282–295, 310–311. Dorian shows that the neoconservatives “never settled on a definition of the New Class but [this] did not diminish the concept’s polemical force”.

³³ R. J. Neuhaus, *Farewell to the Overclass*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square...*, p. 78–79.

For Neuhaus, the “overclass” is an entirely different, new phenomenon in United States history. It exists as a radically isolated sector of the population, at the same time forming an intellectual alliance with the underclass, termed by it as in need of “liberation” from the clutches of the oppressive majority.³⁴ The latter contains not only the truly economically excluded and those too inept to join society, but also all minorities in general which consider themselves to be excluded by the culturally dominating majority, demanding a realization of their postulates in all spheres against the majority’s wishes. This alliance between the overclass and the underclass employs a language of minority rights, increasingly defined as human rights, in order to delegitimize any claims of the community (the majority) to uphold their concept of life.

The concept of human rights thus becomes corrupted in the name of gaining “rights” which in fact means power, money and influence, especially for the self-imposed leaders of the minorities using them for their power game.³⁵ The overclass is adversarial towards the majority of society, as Neuhaus pointed out, by virtue of ambition, boundless self-esteem and self-importance, as well as a conviction that they represent a true insight into what is just and unjust by the sheer force of their intellect. They also realized that for the first time in human history they were en masse employed by the “prince”, the state, as all kinds of “experts” and as such had a stake in power.

The underclass, on the other hand, is adversarial by virtue of social inaptitude and anomie. It is an extremely diversified group, bound by a belief of being outside society. Some are in this class by choice, others by history, and others still due to conditions they want to escape: these people are excluded not due to their desire to get out of a society which they consider corrupted (as in the case of religious people), but excluded by their historical situation, like blacks, or because they have defined themselves as a minority, as in the case of women or some other minorities. Between the overclass and the underclass there is

[...] a fearful symmetry on many scores, but their service to each other is far from equal. Although it goes back before the 60s, the pattern then became more overt by which the overclass exploited the disadvantage of the underclass to greatly expand their own rule. To be fair, they did not think they were exploiting the poor. And, in fact the civil rights movement from the Montgomery bus boycott of 1956 through the rise of the black power movement in the early sixties was a rare instance in which elite advocacy on behalf of the disenfranchised and against entrenched custom enhanced the measure of justice in American life. The civil rights movement was, with considerable right, portrayed as a moment of moral luminosity, and the overclass has been basking in its afterglow for almost forty years. The principle seemed established for a time that the elites possessed their power, and were

³⁴ On this alliance between the overclass and the minorities against the majority, as one of the causes of the conservative revolution of the 70s and 80s, see E. J. Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics*, New York 1994.

³⁵ S. Steel, *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era*, New York 2006; about the feminist establishment: Ch. Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism: How Women Have Betrayed Women*, New York 1994, p. 118–136.

justly ambitious for more power, by virtue of their moral status as champions of the oppressed. The luminosity of that moment, however, was not sufficient to cast the light of moral legitimacy on all the causes that subsequently would be included in the great cause of all causes called Social Justice.³⁶

The overclass nominated itself to be a champion of social justice, defined as the end station of a destruction of all forms of life arbitrarily defined as “oppressive” and in need of “liberation” in the name of equality. In time, social justice began to constitute an onslaught on the institutions and practices of American society, encompassing causes which have become major culture war battlefronts. Most Americans rejected a proposal that they were living in an oppressive world, as they had once rejected a proposal that they were to make permanent peace with communism, which they considered evil. They turned out to be resistant to the efforts of the new overclass, claimed Neuhaus, and thus they became, for instance,

[...] decidedly cool to the idea that marriage and motherhood are forms of slavery, deemed the drug culture a pathetic addiction, did not agree that religion in the classroom violated sacred rights, and persisted in viewing homosexuality as a perversion both pitiable and repugnant. They were unattracted by a cultural liberation that brought us crack houses, glory holes, and needle parks; and found themselves unable to follow the logic of replacing, by means of quotas, racial and sexual discrimination with racial and sexual discrimination. Most important, and despite the sustained barrage of decades of propaganda, Americans stubbornly refused to believe that the unlimited license to kill unborn children constituted a great leap forward in [their] understanding of human dignity. As if that were not enough, it had become evident by the 1970s that the social programs issuing from the civil rights movement had turned in very nasty ways upon the very people they were intended to help, resulting in the urban and chiefly black underclass of pathologies unbounded. Clearly, the moral mandate claimed from that now distant moment of luminosity had run out.³⁷

Ronald Reagan’s election in 1980 was a political signal that that moment of moral luminosity was over. There arose in America, and in fact in all the Western world, two distinct classes that were alienated from the majority of the population and preyed on each other’s existence: the overclass and the underclass. The overclass, the cultural hegemonic class, despises the underclass and uses it as a stepping stone for their legitimizing ideology to take up the “just cause” of all “oppressed”. In this way, the overclass justifies its moral “highbrow” and its right to be the philosophers of the “prince”, the state bureaucracy. The traditional ruling class was not only officially deferential to the people, but its claim to superiority had at least a semblance of paying lip service to meritocratic advancement. But the new overclass has no such basis, while overtly declaring war on their own societies, not even paying lip service to democratic sentiment. What we have experienced is, Neuhaus pointed out, a kind of a “revolt of the elites” against their own societies, with the overclass using the underclass to change the values of the majority and set its cultural patterns.³⁸ Neuhaus observed that the word “overclass” suggested that the class had an overbearing

³⁶ R. J. Neuhaus, *Farewell to the Overclass...*, p. 79.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

³⁸ Neuhaus uses the term “the revolt of the elites” after Christopher Lasch’s book bearing the same title. Lasch took Ortega de Gasset’s observation about the revolt of the masses and noticed that the relationship had now been reversed.

quality, and that is why it could not bear a situation of resistance on the part of the people, the essence of the culture war. The overclass ascribed this challenge to its superiority to a populist revolt by traditionalists, including the so-called “religious right”. The overclass

[...] presents itself as being over and against the American people but is quite unable to give any good reasons for its pretensions to superiority. An overclass cannot sustain itself as a ruling class because it offers no argument for its right to rule. Assumed superiority is not an argument. The overclass that emerged from the 1960’s deconstructed the moral foundations of its current privilege by its relentless attack on all traditional justifications of privilege. Proponents of permanent revolution are hard put to call for a pause in the revolution in order to allow them to savor their triumph. They cannot recall from the political culture the passions and prejudices which they employed in overthrowing the establishment, and by which they are now being overthrown. Today’s movement of populist insurrection is commonly called traditionalist, but it is in large part a continuation of the revolution of the sixties, now directed against the revolutionaries of the overclass who seized the commanding heights of culture.³⁹

This revolt of secular elites was especially visible, observed Neuhaus, in their disdain towards religious America. Wanting to play the game of world-class intellectuals, and orienting themselves towards secularized Europe, American intellectuals ignored the fact that America remains an overwhelmingly Christian society. This disdain contributed to this huge gap between the intellectual elite and “the people”.⁴⁰ The intellectual overclass began to arbitrarily divide Christians into two groups, the progressive ones who were useful, even if deluded, fellow travellers accompanying the progressive “European type” intellectuals into the future, and the deluded ones, consigned to the backwaters of American society, like the fundamentalists. The cultural overclass began to show

[...] aloofness from the embarrassingly religious society [not noticing] that the community of faith [counted] two thirds of the population that is Protestant [or] Christians, which is 90 percent of the people. [Such a class of intellectuals have thought] that we need not bother our heads about matters of interest chiefly to those people. [They have also thought] that there are Christian intellectuals but they are afflicted by a ‘survivalist’ mentality. That is they seem to want Christianity to survive and flourish. [All in all] the Europeanized American intellectual is [has become] embarrassed by his stubbornly religious country. Thus do those intellectuals who style themselves ‘the intellectuals’ persist in trying to protect their superior selves from the embarrassment of America.⁴¹

The overclass disregarded a basic fact, claimed Neuhaus, that “the subject of America and the subject of religion in America are not two subjects but one”.⁴² This intellectual, secular, anti-religious overclass had no countervailing force on the other side of the culture war. With the demise of the mainline Protestant churches and the rise of liberal Protestantism, which had become, in fact, as Neuhaus observed, just a wishy-washy spiritual department of the liberal welfare state and its “progressive

³⁹ Idem, *Farewell to the Overclass...*, p. 81.

⁴⁰ Idem, *While We’re In*, “First Things”, October 2004, p. 91.

⁴¹ “First Things”, October 2004, p. 92.

⁴² R. J. Neuhaus, *From Common Culture to Culture Wars*, „First Things”, May 2004, p. 66.

causes”, there were no theologians or Christian intellectuals of real significant force who could influence and move liberal culture as such, “no theologians of great public consequence”.⁴³ For Neuhaus

[...] the absence of such figures is not so puzzling. Among many factors are these: the media-assisted suicide of the religious mainline/oldline; the establishment culture’s loss of its defining ‘other’ in Catholicism and fundamentalism; the emergence and astonishing success of Jewish thinkers in the academy and public culture; fundamentalism’s makeover into a perceived political enemy as ‘the religious right’; the balkanization of a common culture under the force of sundry multiculturalisms and radical pluralisms; the multiplication of information and entertainment sources such as internet and hundreds of cable channels.⁴⁴

Neuhaus observed, however, that the secular intellectual overclass had been challenged since the 1980’s. Americans were railing against such elites located in government, the media and universities, declaring that they “had enough and are not going to take it anymore”. That is why such elites had become, observed Neuhaus, entrenched in protective enclaves insulating themselves against an angry population. They formed their own circles, societies, foundations, financial and institutional support networks, and, for instance, think tanks producing papers which corroborated their theses. Such a class talks essentially to itself with shrill cries that “the barbarians are taking over”. Such an overclass believes itself to be rebelling against the entrenched elites, but it has itself become such an entrenched elite. Using Harvard as a symbolic figure of such an elite, Neuhaus wrote that it had always been a case of Harvard’s class hating America, since

[...] the best and the brightest have always been prone to indulging a measure of contempt for the generality of mankind. The new twist is that America hates Harvard because Harvard despises what Harvard is supposed to represent – scholarship, honesty, and manners worthy of emulation. America is in rebellion against the overclass that has systematically trashed the values by which a ruling class can justly claim the right to rule, which, of course, does not stop many young Americans from wanting to join the overclass, also by way of Harvard.⁴⁵

But the overclass, apart from its incoherent message of anti-elitism in the name of minorities, while at the same time pretending to be an elite in relation to society in general, attempted something new which could not work. Neuhaus recalled Edward Gibbon in this context, who looked at the glory of Rome and, applying his bigotry to his scholarship, blamed “the barbarians and religion” for its demise. The same combination of barbarians and religion, observed Neuhaus, was blamed today for the overclass’s decline and impending fall. But both history and common sense suggest that there is no sustainable rule without religious belief, that is any belief in a sense of *religare*, of ideas and traditions that

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ Idem, *Farewell to the Overclass...*, p. 82.

[...] bind people together, that evoke the communal adherence we call loyalty. Being itself loyal to nothing, the overclass cannot evoke loyalty. One cannot hold the commanding heights without commanding truths, and it was by the rejection of commanding truths that the overclass seized the heights in the first place. In the absence of truths, or even the possibility of truth, the overclass, led by such as Richard Rorty, wanly sings the praises of 'ironic liberalism', and tries not to notice that the choir gets smaller and smaller. They mint and try to market ideas that no sensible person would want to live by; their cultural coinage is rejected as being backed by nothing – literally nothing, as the debonair nihilists who issue it readily confess, as they incessantly boast. So this is the new thing about the overclass: it does not so much want to rule as to be admired for having exposed the fraudulence of rule. At the same time, of course, it does want to rule. At least, if somebody must rule – and in the nature of things, somebody must – the members of the overclass, while denying in principle anything that might be called the nature of things, has a decided preference for ruling rather than being ruled. Especially if the alternative is the rule of barbarians and religion, meaning the American people.⁴⁶

All rulers in the past used different warrants for their power: the divine rights of kings, the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the dialectic of history. In America, the ruling class, having some similarities to the current overclass, legitimized its rule by the claim that it had to re-educate the commoners in progressive thinking. John Dewey and his followers, who dominated public thinking for half a century, wanted to pull Americans from their religion by means of the allegedly more attractive religion of his "Common Faith of Democracy", presented as

[...] the religion of humanism, only to discover that Americans were incorrigibly attached to the antique truths of Sinai and Calvary. In bitter disillusionment the heirs of Dewey resolved that, if they could not impose their religion, they would expunge religion altogether from our public life, and especially from the schools.⁴⁷

Neuhaus concluded that the overclass, the knowledge class of the new post-modern humanities is riddled with self-doubt today, since "the campaign of liberation from the traditional meanings that give life meaning met with such popular hostility that some of the overclass had second thoughts".⁴⁸

The persistence of religiosity among Americans and the "revolt of the elites" against their own people constituted a new elitism challenging the fundamental constitutional arrangement of self-government. The "New Class" was busy dismantling the moral fabric of society, a new intellectual stance in America, both in relation to religion and in relation to self-government, secularization combined with a paternalistic attitude towards citizens. Neuhaus did not consider this fissure between elites and society as caused by conspiracy. Secularism was an outcome more of a cultural drift than design, a habit of mind, the unconscious inertia of late modernity. But it was also caused by hesitations on the part of religious believers, their failure of imagination, moral nerve, fear, and doubts when it came to professing their own faith as well as a lack of delineation of the boundaries of doctrinal orthodoxy by the

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 84–85.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 84.

church elites, succumbing to the vaguely expressed sentimentality of humanity at the expense of personal and theological discipline. Nevertheless, he criticized religious people who engaged in politics without articulating their concerns in a dialogical way and those who bemoaned the passing of Christianity, reverting to the “church of the catacombs”. This was a betrayal of the Christian mission. The attempt to escape from the world, a perennial Christian heresy, meant that the secular world would set the agenda for the Church and Christianity. His was a call not to let secularists define the signs of the times and convince the Christians, or all religious people, that it was their duty to define the signs of the times. But Christians who tried to ground religious values in the public square had a duty to subject their understanding of these values to public discourse, otherwise they could not build coalitions of people of good, making the public square more “naked”. Neuhaus was a consensus builder, while not compromising the fundamental tenets of his convictions. Many times he stated, both in relations to Christian ecumenism and in relation to non-believers, that “tribalism has no place in this discussion”.⁴⁹

This revolt of the elites was also caused, observed Neuhaus, by another dogma which the overclass wanted to impose on the populace: a conviction that human life has to be subjected to the rule of experts certified by the overclass – experts not in science, but in the ubiquitous science of life: an attempt to adjust human life by a constant psychotherapeutic overseeing of the incalcitrant population which might commit mistakes when choosing proper conduct of life. This constituted a usurpation of power justified by a quasi-Marxian idea that on the progressive road everything could be defined, predicted and known if only one had a proper understanding of the historical process of which human life is an inescapable part, and which constitutes all that there is to materialistic life. Living life according to experts, against the wisdom of culture, religion and tradition had become the language of the new overclass who, considering themselves to be “experts” in all matters of human existence, could not bear any challenge from the “barbarians”, rejecting any reasoned argument contrary to their pieties. A discussion with them was literally useless, a true “culture war” without taking prisoners, since “having given up on [arguing], many are now in revolt against the alleged experts”.⁵⁰

The Revolt of the Elites and the Dream of Just World Governance

The rise of this overclass against their own societies reflected another phenomenon, pointed out Neuhaus. The American intellectual elite in the twentieth century “con-

⁴⁹ Idem, *The Public Square*..., p. 90.

⁵⁰ Idem, *Farewell to the Overclass*..., p. 83. Neuhaus notes that such “experts” have also wrecked the theology and liturgy of the Catholic Church, recalling here an anecdote circulating among the clergy: “What’s the difference between a liturgist and a terrorist? Answer: You can negotiate with a terrorist”.

sciously identified itself with a larger arena”, meaning a more secularized Europe and the yearning for a universal international justice system established by the *congnoscenti*, according to their image of world governance. Neuhaus never changed his conviction about the future of liberal democracy and the connection between its fate, and that of America and religion as interconnected phenomena, generally civilizing the world. He wrote that

[...] it makes little difference whether the successor regime is of the right or of the left or unclassifiable. By whatever ideology the idea, this audacious democratic idea, would be declared discredited? By whom, where, under what circumstances, by what conception and what dedication could it ever be tried again? Yes, of course, life would go on and God’s purposes will not be defeated, not ultimately. But the world would be a darker and colder place. That it can happen is evident to all but the naïve and willfully blind. That it will happen seems probable, if we refuse to understand the newness, the fragility, the promise, and the demands of religion and democracy in America.⁵¹

Neuhaus understands liberal democracy in an Augustinian sense, as the best regime at this point in history, which allows the best development of moral conscience, in the absence of an alternative. It is not understood as an ideological regime of citizens who self-create their morality on the basis of the imperial self or as a regime liquidating by political means human earthly alienation – the utopian dream of some proponents of “democratic faith” or the “perfect dialogical regime”. One threat to liberal democracy, notes Neuhaus, is still visible at the turn of the 21st century and is itself an important front of the culture war in America and indeed the world. After the defeat of communism, new dangerous utopias were circulating, one of them the utopia of ending national sovereignty and a dream of world government and global democracy.

Neuhaus showed a real animus against this idea of world government and the dreams of the end of national sovereignty in the form of a “humanistic world community”. He realized that national sovereignty was not eternal despite the fact that “the sacralized nation state is one of the great idols of modern history”. Nevertheless, the legitimacy of contemporary politics is inconceivable outside of the nation state. Nation-states were founded on the premise of the political sovereignty of the people, as in government by consent of the governed. The guardians are guarded by their accountability to the sovereign people of the nation. These ideas of democratic legitimacy are gaining ascendancy in the world, but they do not go unchallenged. Such challenges come from conventional despotisms from the Islamist versions of a divine right to rule, but the challenge also comes from the United Nations, or more precisely, from the forces surrounding the UN known as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO’s). There are numerous organizations that explicitly contend that the nation state is the enemy, or at least obsolete and an obstacle to global progress. Proposals for transcending the nation state with a world government have been around for centuries, and gained many adherences

⁵¹ Idem, *The Naked Public Square*, Michigan 1984, p. 264.

following the catastrophic breakup of the world system in World War I. [This] stuff about a worldwide transcendence of differences and the establishment of universal and perpetual peace is fairly called globaloney. Perpetual peace and justice await the coming of the Kingdom, which I fully expect in God's good time, which is not yet. That being said, truth and human nature are ultimately universal, and there do need to be institutions for the accommodation of differences and containment of conflicts.⁵²

Neuhaus noticed the strong support the Catholic Church had given the UN from the start, but strategic as well as moral-theological reasons were involved here – an interest in “checking the absolutist claims of national sovereignty”. However, the Catholic Church often finds itself allied – notably on population, development, and family issues – with the UN's sharpest critics. Neuhaus considered this drive to replace nation-states with a legitimate world government as crazy, while subjecting the United States and other states to moral criticism for

[...] not providing the UN with the means to fulfill its role as global policeman, global doctor, global tutor, global everything else, [while] NGO's [and some] sovereign nations seek to enhance their importance by curtailing national sovereignty.⁵³

Proponents of world governance use Orwellian language, noticeable in many NGO's, in the name of being champions of “civil society”. This was bizarre, pointed out Neuhaus, since the whole idea of civil society was to divide the public sphere from the government, in order to make it more accountable to the institutions controlled more directly by the people. There was an obvious mendacity and irony in a view that, in the name of civil society, the NGO's were

[...] determined to expand the scope of government – under the auspices of the UN, its auxiliary organizations, and international law – in a manner that would make government accountable to nobody but the philanthropies that fund them and their own, typically very small membership. The combination of small and middling nations curtailing national sovereignty to enhance their own sense of importance and the NGO's using the idea of civil society to undermine political accountability makes for a fine muddle in trying to understand what is going on. Hundreds and hundreds of NGO's make no bones about their dedication to, well, world government. In the setting of organizational priorities documents, and public advocacy for ‘internationally approved’ policies, the NGO's have dramatically increased their role in recent years. ‘Global Governance and Democracy within the Global State’ means that small groups are able to make rules affecting the domestic affairs of countries that it would have been difficult or impossible to achieve democratically in those countries. Global Democracy is, in fact, an end run around democracy. In this respect, the UN-NGO nexus is becoming an instrument as useful to some activists in advancing their causes as are the courts in their own countries. Whether through the UN or through judicial lawmaking, the result is the usurpation of democratic politics. When the NGO's are challenged to who are ‘the people’ whom they represent, a conventional response is that their goals are the goals the people would choose for themselves if conservative governments and transnational corporations did not hide from them what is good for them, and good for the world. The intention is thoroughly democratic: the UN-NGO combine has such a high estimate of the wisdom of ‘the people’ that it anticipates the consent of the governed to being governed by those who know best. This is government by anticipatory consent. Admittedly, the people as presently constituted are slow to understand their own interests.⁵⁴

⁵² Idem, *Forget the Bilderbergers*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square...*, p. 222.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 223–224.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 225–227.

Such a proliferation of dubious international agreements, agencies and regulations aimed at overriding national sovereignty was for now ineffectual, pointed out Neuhaus, but people in the movement “have big plans and have gained a fair amount of momentum” given to them by another organization, which, having noble intentions, is trying to create itself as a utopian dream spreading outwards: the European Union. Neuhaus devoted a lot of his comments to the utopian consequences of structuring the European Union as a new, advanced form of governance, allegedly transcending the limitations of traditional politics of conflict within the nation state framework and, at least in Europe, attempting to transcend it. It forms a new type of ideology with human rights at its core, escaping history defined as the road to the calamities of the 20th century. The European Union took on the task of being, in the eyes of its elites from the 1968 dominated generation, disappointed by the collapse of the “progressive” Soviet Union, the most “progressive” civilization ever to be. Neuhaus pointed out that all this was being done while creating a federal state of Europe without “the people” controlling the bureaucratic “enlightened” rulers. They nominated themselves, in the tradition of the Enlightenment French intellectual revolutionary elite, as people who know best what real people – in fact in their eyes a despicable mass – want.⁵⁵

“Human rights” ideology is used for this project of world governance, claimed Neuhaus, to prevent any resistance to it. Since human rights as defined by liberal-left democrats are considered to be the only civilized and humanistic politics, the assumption is that people’s consent is implicit in letting the policy of human rights’ be left to human rights “professionals”: the NGO’s, international organizations and the European Union promoters of such a culture of rights. But, as Neuhaus wrote

[...] the human rights movement is in trouble because, by its manipulation [by the UN, other international organizations and the European Union] it has lost touch with any constituency that gives it democratic legitimacy. Human rights workers sometimes talk of their movement as an emblem of grassroots democracy. But it is possible to view it as an undemocratic pressure group, accountable to no one but its own members and donors, that wields enormous power and influence. I worry not only about the undemocratic factor but, even more about the way in which human rights are now being exploited as a justification for war [of human intervention]. Such a development reinforces the cynical view that human rights is little more than a slogan invoked to pursue naked interests, for instance, the U.S to justify whatever and whomever Americans can convince to go with them to do what they want.⁵⁶

The major problem thus is that human rights policy, when it takes over political and democratic accountability, may backfire for different reasons. The first is a failure of persuasion, an assumption that the people could „be won over to the globalist push for international courts of justice and other instruments designed to override national sovereignty. That is a very doubtful assumption.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ In the last years of his life, Neuhaus devoted a considerable amount of comment to Europe and its utopian element. See for instance R. J. Neuhaus, *The Exaggerated Death of Europe*, “First Things”, May 227, p. 32–38; see also an article of the very intellectually close G. Weigel, *Europe’s Problem – and Ours*, “First Things”, February 2004, p. 18–25.

⁵⁶ R. J. Neuhaus, *Forget the Bilderbergers...*, p. 228–229.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 229.

The second reason has to do with the aims of the polity, the sources of allegiance and the ultimate legitimacy of a liberal-democratic regime. Neuhaus always stressed the republican character of democracy as a moral community. Republican democracy can exist only when citizens have a sense of a community rooted in history, culture and solidarity of aims. This is not only a temporary solidarity of interest, but a transgenerational community of faith. Only then do people not treat their state as an instrument for realization of particular interests, but see them from the perspective of the community. Transnational world government without *demos* cannot form such a community and the human rights ideology cannot create it either. The third reason why the push for transnational government could backfire is that human rights as a basis of transnational government is wrongly treated as an embodiment of grassroots democracy. But such a policy can function as the ideology of different lobbying groups using human rights rhetoric, and also as an instrument for the perfection of society and human nature as such, an incessant work of ideological improvement, a never-ending story of an elusive utopia. Neuhaus had an acute sense of such a “progressive” potential of human rights doctrine and its use.

Culture Wars Issues

Neuhaus pointed out that at the very centre of culture war conflicts stands the imperial judiciary, which often defines important aspects of public life by fiat, beyond the democratic mandate. He defined this problem as

[...] the most flammable issue in our public life, the usurpation of power by the judiciary. From abortion to doctor assisted suicide to same-sex marriage, the courts have increasingly arrogated to themselves the big decisions about the ordering of our life together, leaving to the people and their elected representatives the relatively trivial questions of raising or lowering the gasoline tax and balancing the budget; the great task is to [again] de-legalize and re-politicize the great questions that are properly political. This will not happen without a very sharp challenge to business as usual – a challenge that some will no doubt condemn as an insurrectionary revolt against ‘the law of the land’, meaning the latest dumb decisions of the courts.⁵⁸

Abortion

The culture war issue most consistently taken up by Neuhaus was abortion. He looked at the issue from two perspectives: 1) the theology of the covenant, and 2) the liberal theory of the inclusion of the weak within the sphere of moral obligation. Neuhaus used the covenant tradition in an original way. A covenant is “a very troublesome thing”, wrote Neuhaus, because it is based on an idea of a promise made and promise keeping (and also promise breaking). But as such it is historical and thus

⁵⁸ Idem, *Ralph Reed's Real Agenda...*, p. 45; the best exposition of Neuhaus's position on the “imperial judiciary” was his “First Things” symposium “The End of Democracy” in 1996.

“vulnerable to the unexpected”, unlike, for instance, contract theories of social order which are based on “constants in the human condition rationally ordered and secured by law and habit”. Social ills are repaired by social contract logic by rational deals in accordance with enlightened self-interest, and depend on “fixing” the workings of social problems. A covenant is different. It “invokes the metaphors of adventure, pilgrimage and vulnerability to the unknown”. Contract theory, pointed out Neuhaus, had been the dominant political theory, associated with Locke’s liberal thought. But, for Neuhaus, the present need is “for an emphasis on covenant”.⁵⁹ The covenant theory was “a necessary corrective” to the secularly accepted contract theories dominating political discussions. During crises of American identity, many of the most persuasive metaphors and concepts useful for change have been “tied to the imagery of covenant”, such as experiment, forgiveness, judgment, redemption, atonement, renewal, and they are not abstract but historical categories. They

assume a transcendent point of reference to which we are corporately accountable, and they assume times in which judgement is rendered, forgiveness bestowed, renewal begun and the experiment either vindicated or repudiated. The alternatives to covenant imagery manifest an inherent addiction to the present or to seeking foundation in some past time. Contract theory often implies that human nature is *now* discoverable. Once we have discerned and catalogued its interests, conflict and commonalities, we can order society. [In] contract thinking [where] man as he is is sadly distorted by perverse, irrational social systems, one must reverse to some idealized or hypothetical past to discover man as he *really* is.⁶⁰

In political thought, this conceptual regression is visible both in radical and conservative forms. But whatever the form of this regression, continues Neuhaus, it excludes creative social change and is in fact delusory, meaning not reflecting the true nature of people in history. Neuhaus applies Christian eschatology here to a concrete historical context. The covenant theory is rooted in the Christian theory of original sin. The covenant of God with man saves the latter by providing him with everlasting hope on condition that he is faithful to the covenant, the guarantee of the faithfulness of God. This is, of course, the biblical Yahweh, not an abstract God of the human imagination. Thus if a covenant is seen from this perspective, man and society are

[...] profoundly distorted. [This] perspective [of] judgment is not from some rationally idealized past or present but from a hoped-for future. Man is man becoming. In the debate over abortion, the fetus is often referred to as only potential human beings. The point here is that we are all only potential human beings. God, who is the power of the future, has made a covenant with his creation that he will bring to completion that which he has started. Whatever might be said about the American covenant it must always be understood in the context of this larger covenant. The covenant relevant to America is but a specific instance of that covenant with the creation – just as whatever sense of covenantal accountability each of us may have about his or her own life is worked out, with greater or lesser awareness, within the social reality that is America.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Idem, *Time Towards Home...*, p. 46.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

The other Neuhaus perspective against abortion is from the liberal theory of inclusion of the weak within the sphere of moral obligation. His opposition to the abortion culture stemmed from his effort to create a public philosophy of common moral obligation. The question not only related to abortion, but a much more profound issue

[...] how we define the community for which we accept common responsibility and provide legal protection. In a society where the strong, the successful, and the healthy increasingly impose their idea of quality of life in order to exclude the marginal, we do not have even a shared vocabulary for discussing these questions of such great moral moment. In pondering the question: Who is my neighbor? We have in two hundred years descended from speaking of providence to speaking of privacy, from affirming the obligations of community to embracing the technologies of convenience. It may be too late to construct the kind of public philosophy that can restore a shared moral discourse about the meaning of the social experiment of which we are part. But we are not permitted to surrender hope. The church is the community of transcendent hope. Activists and theologians urge us to invest our hopes in temporal struggles, struggles which cannot bear and will inevitably betray those hopes. We are told that people will not give themselves religiously to the political task if that task is viewed as penultimate. And yet our duty is precisely the penultimate, to work in faithfulness to the moment that is ours and in love toward the neighbor whom God has given us. And if we are weary in that work, the answer is a renewal in transcendental faith and love, not the illusion that our work is coterminous with the working of God. The only religion that will help construct the public philosophy that we need is the religion that knows that all of our politics and all of our philosophies are, at best, faint intuitions of the City of God to which we are called. Only such a lively hope as this can prevent our just causes from turning into holy wars and our public philosophies from turning into civil religions.⁶²

In a democratic polity, claimed Neuhaus, it was best when conflicts could be resolved without total winners and total losers. To turn such an issue as abortion from the province of a vigorous argument to judicial fiat, as happened when the Supreme Court in “Roe vs Wade” of 1973 made abortion a constitutional right, was suicidal. The pro-choicers

[...] had lost the argument by their stubborn refusal to acknowledge the question of the moral significance and hence the proper legal status of life in its early stages. With that stubborn refusal they set themselves against clear reason and scientific fact – and against moral sensibilities and common sense of most Americans. [Some say that] the culture was moving in a proabortion direction, before the Court moved. This was true of the elite culture of the knowledge class. On abortion, the elite culture took the more democratic culture by surprise. It was a while before the democratic culture was able to organize its response to the attack, but the years following are the story of stunning effective response. That response is the more impressive when we again recall that the prolife cause had arrayed against it every institution of the Establishment in the media, academe, and religion. The only exception was the Roman Catholic Church which, then and now, is thought to be very questionably part of the establishment. [But] many in the elite culture who favored ‘abortion reform’ in the 1960s were later repulsed by the reality of 1.6 million abortions per year. That, they began to say, was not what they had in mind at all.⁶³

For Neuhaus, the powerful resistance to legal changes protecting the unborn was part of the establishment promoting the imperial self as a basis of morality, and

⁶² Idem, *From Civil Religion to Public Philosophy*, [in:] *Civil Religion and Political Theology*, ed. L. S. Rouner, Notre Dame IL 1986, p. 108–199.

⁶³ Idem, *America Against Itself: Moral Vision and the Public Order*, Notre Dame 1992, p. 165–167.

powerful economic forces had a stake in such a resistance. But the resistance came primarily from the elite culture, mainly because they turned out to be shocked and “bitterly disappointed” that the judicial fiat in the shape of the “Roe vs Wade” decision did not hold, and that a large section of American society showed no sign of giving up opposition to the decision. The result of the Supreme Court decision of 1973 was thus not social peace but, to the contrary,

[...] an intensification of the class-based *Kulturkampf* in which our public life is now embroiled. To call it *Kulturkampf* is no exaggeration: it is a war over the moral definition of American culture. It is the kind of contest with which most politicians are profoundly uncomfortable. The conflict will continue and intensify. Not fanatically, but quietly, calmly, reflectively, and self-critically, believing Christians and Jews remind one another of the nature of the conflict in which we are engaged, also in the public order. The Christian way of describing what we are up against is framed by Paul: ‘For we are not contending against flesh and blood but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’ (Ephesians 6). Some who overhear us speaking this way will call it fanaticism. We should not be surprised by that, for fanaticism is the only word some people have for faith. Every moment of history is equally present to God. Every moment is also equally present to great evil. But there are moments in which great evil bestirs itself with intentions that are discernible to those who have eyes to see. Ours is such a moment. Evil, as is its wont, employs the language of the good to disguise its purposes. In this case it is the great good of choice that hides the greater wrong of what is chosen. It is a tempting shrewdly contrived for a free society that has forgotten that freedom depends upon devotion to more than freedom. The tempting is always fit to the times. In all times, however, the response is pretty much the same among those who have eyes to see what is happening and ears to hear the call to resistance. Like those other rescuers, they say: “We did not start it. It started. We had no choice”.⁶⁴

Neuhaus feared that such a constitutional “right of abortion” entailed a radical redefinition of what it meant to be a human being. The premises accepted in the abortion debate had already moved into arguments supporting euthanasia, lethal stem-cell research, infanticide of inconvenient children and human cloning. This effort to redefine anthropology and human nature was about what kind of people, Americans and world, we want to be. Neuhaus showed that there was

[...] the profoundly religious conviction driving the great human rights cause of our time, the pro-life movement. As with the segregationists of a half century ago, the pro-abortionists’ foundations in American culture are mushy. In time, and given political opportunity to express itself, one reasonably hopes that opinion and convenience will once again be trumped by conviction.⁶⁵

Abortion had turned into a kind of eugenics device eliminating “burdensome” people. The liberal society was fast becoming a society, warned Neuhaus, which had no tolerance for such people, so abortion of defective children is a natural outcome. But there was a sinister twist to such a eugenic rationale for aborting a child. It was claimed that such a child

[...] would be an intolerable burden upon the parents, upon the family, and upon society. Many others simply refuse prenatal screening altogether, or only for the purpose of discovering a problem that

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 165–170.

⁶⁵ *Idem*, *While We’re at It...*, p. 93.

might be remedied in the womb. Their commitment is to accepting and loving the life entrusted to them. With the return of eugenics, such people are increasingly viewed as antisocial, if not 'outlaws'. The late Christopher Lasch wrote that we congratulate ourselves on our moral progress because we no longer tolerate 'freak shows' at the country fair. The real reason is that we are fast becoming a society that has no tolerance of, no place for 'freaks'. They should never have been allowed to be born. Moral discourse today, especially in the academy, is rife with talk about respecting the 'other'. So long as the other is not so other as to be a burden.⁶⁶

Homosexuality

Homosexuality, Neuhaus realized, had become the most contentious of contemporary issues in the culture war. The gay movement is one of the most powerful lobbying groups aiming at radical cultural and public policy transformation, sharply at odds with traditional morality. Since the Catholic Church has been essentially the only public voice upholding the inviolability of its moral teaching on homosexuality, it has been selected for violent criticism by the gay movement and the entire liberal-left establishment, accepting its anthropology of the imperial self as the only legitimate basis of its private and public morality. They consider homosexuality as just one of (many) "life choices", with the resistance of the Church to such an anthropology defined as an illegitimate subversion. Neuhaus observed that the discussion about homosexuality lacked any nuance, making it difficult to focus on intricate moral arguments. Moreover, the anthropology of the imperial self could not be a basis of any meaningful discussion, making absolute tolerance the only basis of moral theory, which in practice nullifies any moral theory. Neuhaus began with a Christian distinction between a moral person and sinful activity. It is not a rejection of a homosexual as a person, but a criticism of a particular sexual act which is at stake. Homosexuality, pointed out Neuhaus, was a "disorder" and an affliction for those who bear it; the causes of homosexuality are complex, the genetically or biologically determined causes cannot be established. The environmental and educational factors are equally important and the data show that homosexual orientation can be reversed. But even if homosexuality were an innate disposition, homosexual activity would not be the right answer to the experience of same sex attraction. Such an act is morally wrong because it is based on an illusion, the very essence of moral wrong, that homosexual acts will lead to human happiness. This is another way of saying that homosexuality does not enable human sexuality to show its full potential to develop a human personality necessary to lead a full and happy life. In other words, the anthropology of the imperial self is an erroneous anthropology, destroying not uplifting human moral capabilities, apart from the most momentary ones of fulfilling one's desires.

Having established such starting points, Neuhaus realized that homosexuality was the subject of a bitter cultural and political conflict. It thus required reasoned argument and public activity to prevent an aggressive minority from shaping the

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 76.

culture and morality of others according to their own image of moral life, with consequences for public education of children, and such institutions as marriage, family and sexuality. Any serious discussion about homosexuality was in fact a discussion about sexuality in general. Neuhaus agreed with Irving Kristol, who observed that discussing issues of homosexuality in the public sphere requires one to

[...] come to broader judgments about sexual mores and the sexual revolution. History may well record this revolution as the most fundamental social movement of the latter part of this century. The whole question of the relation of sex and procreation, of sexual desire and the ends of desire, of sex and children, of whether there is any natural teleology to sex – these are all deep questions. The question of homosexuality in American public life is going to force an explicit discussion of all those issues. But more directly than almost any of the other liberation movements of the last thirty years, more than the attempt to secure the unbridled right to abortion, more than feminism – the homosexual rights revolution forces a consideration of whether there is any ground in nature for saying that certain human activities are to be preferred to others. It forces us to decide if there is any guidance in nature for private or public behavior. We need to come to grips with the fundamental question of whether there is a natural standard for human happiness, whether there are natural ends for human desires, and whether public policy has, at least in certain ways, to take into account those natural ends or standards.⁶⁷

There is no definite solution to the public policy problems caused by homosexuality and the gay movement. Neuhaus agreed that the gay movement was here to stay because

[...] the unruly passions of human sexuality are a permanent feature of the human condition. Individually and in our several communities we can only try to cope with them better than we have in the past. Four cardinal virtues: prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice must inform where we go from here. Prudence is the wisdom to understand the nature of the homosexual impulse and its organized insurgency in our public life. Temperance is the refusal to panic, and the tempering of any illusion that either the impulse or the insurgency will disappear. Fortitude means we decline to be intimidated by opponents and brace ourselves for the duration, which will likely be a very long time.⁶⁸

For him, the point from which the whole discussion should start was “a concern for justice”, especially for young people who found themselves in a position of sexual perplexity, pressured from within and without “to consign themselves to a way of life marked by compulsion, loneliness, depression, and disease”. But justice should also be applied to a discussion about the integrity of public life, which requires, adds Neuhaus, that “truth be spoken with candor and disagreements be engaged with civility”. But justice here must above all be applied to families, mothers, fathers and children, who need all the support to “sustain in the present and transmit to the future the “little platoon” of love and fidelity”, which is crucial for the preservation of the family in the truest sense of the word. And it is the survival of the family which is ultimately at stake here, and for this very reason the homosexual revolution is the greatest challenge to the integrity of society as it has been so far and as it should

⁶⁷ I. Kristol, *Introduction*, [in:] *Homosexuality and American Public Life*, ed. Ch. Wolfe, Dallas 1999, p. XVII–XVIII.

⁶⁸ R. J. Neuhaus, *Love, No Matter What*, [in:] *ibidem*, p. 239.

be.⁶⁹ Neuhaus's preconditions for a discussion are crucial, since without them the understanding of the nature of the problem will end in frustration or never-ending polemics. What is important is not that opponents of the most radical aims of the gay movement may lose, since "the real losers would be the sexually perplexed whom we would help, the democracy that we cherish, and the families that claim our support". At stake is the future of the most civilizing force in human history, the family, as the only real transmitter of *caritas* as a feature of character, not intellectual sophistry. People who challenge the "homosexual insurgency" are not traditionalists clinging to the past. True

[...] we would respect those who came before us, as we hope to be respected by those who come after us. But our cause is for the future: the future of our children and children's children and the future of the human project itself. Next only to religious communities of ultimate promise, the ever-fragile community that we call family is the primary bearer of hope for the future. [This is so because] it is in the families that ordinary people participate as procreators in the continuing creation of life. It is in families that ordinary people make history, and do so much more palpably and believably than do the movers and shakers who presumably make the history of this or any other time. Family is a synonym for history, of continuity through time, and for most people family is their most audacious and sacrificial commitment to the communal hope that in the long run we will not all be dead. The history – limiting horizon of a sexual revolution that is captive to the immediacies of desire is in the service of 'the culture of death'. In the great contest that has now been joined, ours is the party of 'the culture of life'.⁷⁰

The homosexual movement applies drastic tactics to advance its agenda, changing in the course of it the language of public discourse and trying to intimidate opponents. What has been surprising, pointed out Neuhaus is

[...] the failure of the homosexual insurgency to silence its critics. Thoughtful people with a moderately healthy backbone are no longer intimidated by the charge of 'homophobia'. Along with the epithets of 'racism' and 'sexism', the charge has lost its force by promiscuous over-use. Not everywhere, to be sure [...] So there is no doubt that the insurgency has made advances. But we would be making a very big mistake if we measured cultural change by fashions in the academy. The academy today is in large part a reservation for the lost tribes of radicalisms past. The homosexual movement is usually dated from the *Stonewall Riot* of 1969. That is almost thirty years ago. As with the radicalism of an ossified civil rights establishment, and with the splintered leadership of the several feminisms, the direction of the homosexual movement has become uncertain. In the entertainment politics of contemporary America, thirty years is a long time to play the role of the avant garde. After a while people come to recognize that everything changes except the avant garde.⁷¹

He shows that despite the ubiquitous presence of homosexuality in mass culture and its endorsement by liberal-left politicians, "parents are [not] any more welcoming of the prospect that their children may be homosexual". Moreover, the

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 240–241.

⁷¹ Neuhaus adds that in most colleges and universities a generation ago a faculty member who "publicly announced that he thought homosexuality a good thing would have invited suspicion and censure. In the same schools today, he is likely in deep trouble if he offers less than unqualified approval of the homosexual movement". *Ibidem*, p. 241.

two main currents of the gay movement, the radicals calling for cultural change and those who would like to “mainstream” homosexuality into existing social patterns, are essentially aiming at the same goals as is “evident in their demand for same sex marriage”.⁷² For him the homosexual movement was “not the unstoppable counter-cultural juggernaut that its champions and many of its opponents once thought it to be”. The movement has suffered severe setbacks. It has not been stopped, but it is

[...] not in unchallenged ascendancy. We are dealing with a deviancy from the heterosexual norm that probably involves no more than two percent of the male population, and half of them do not want to make a public issue of it. Consider, too that after [a generation] of strenuous effort and high confidence of victory, the demand for the formal approval of homosexuality has been turned back again and again also in the liberal oldline protestant churches. Only the small and rapidly disappearing United Church of Christ has approved the ordination of homogenitally active. This might yet be changing.⁷³

For him the real strategy to face the challenge of the “homosexual insurgency”, should be

[...] to endure, that is the goal of tolerance. To pity, that is the goal of compassion. To embrace, that is the goal of affirmation. Those are the three strategic steps. Despite the overwhelming support of what presume to be the major culture-forming institutions of our society, and most particularly the support of the media, the American people have not been induced to take the fateful step of affirming homosexuality as a good thing.⁷⁴

The general attitude is of social tolerance, but not moral approval. The problem is that a phenomenon once called “the love that dare not speak its name”, has been analysed today by many as having become “the neurosis that doesn’t know when to shut up”. He stresses that the problem with homosexual behaviour is the inability to view the world by the movement from the point of view of them being persons who are incomparably greater and richer than their homosexuality, the inability to meet the world and others on terms not defined by them as the only acceptable ones – demanding unconditional acceptance. Neuhaus stresses the fact that there is a “gay world” and “a straight world”, but the terms of discussion

[...] are set mainly by the gay world. Within the subcultural world of its own making, the name of the desire was not only spoken but exuberantly celebrated. Then the borders were declared abolished and, gays, or at least some gays, set out to remake the world. Those who oppose the homosexualizing of the world – which means redefining sexuality as the servicing of desire – will be accused of saying that people should go back into the closet. They may call this world a closet if they choose. What we are saying is that a small minority that is at odds – whether by choice or circumstance or a combination of both – with the constituting institution of society and the right ordering of human sexuality have not the right to remake the world in the image of their dissent. So long as this is an approximately free and democratic society, they cannot push into the closet those who would defend the world we have received and pass it on to coming generations.⁷⁵

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 242.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 242–243.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 243.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 244.

Neuhaus realizes that the data show a higher “acceptance” of homosexuality and homosexuals, but acceptance is more in relation to “homosexual persons than homosexuality”. Such acceptance is not necessarily a bad thing, on the part of parents in particular, but it is often “acceptance with a broken heart despite shattered dreams of grandchildren that will not be”. Such acceptance is, or should be, combined with theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, keeping faith with children for whom we care, refusing to believe that the announcement of homosexual identity during youth is the final word on one’s child’s destiny. And above all

[...] charity, which simply means love. Love no matter what. If this is what is meant by a popular increase in ‘acceptance’ then we should be thankful for it. What has not happened is a broad public persuasion that homosexuality is a good or even a morally neutral thing. Many have been momentarily intimidated into not expressing their objections and misgivings, but they have not been persuaded, and I do not believe they will be persuaded. On the contrary, they were frontally assaulted by a proposition that most of them had never had occasion to think about, and did not want to think about. They had good reason not to think about it. The philosopher Sidney Hook, late in life, asked a friend, “But what do they actually do?” When told, he recoiled in disbelief and declared, “But that’s disgusting!” Sidney Hook’s response – reinforced by habit, moral teaching, and devotion to marriage and family – is the response of most people. It is a response that is largely intuitive and pre-articulate. People were told, and many came to believe, that they should be ashamed of themselves for their irrational prejudice. Many intellectuals – those who belong to what has aptly been described as the ‘herd of independent minds’ – readily believed it and eagerly performed the appropriate rituals of self-denigration to expiate their sin of homophobia. But for others, what was intuitive and prearticulate is increasingly being thought and articulated. They will no longer be silenced, as witness this conference.⁷⁶

The homosexual leaders and their advocates ask that seemingly innocent question: “Can’t we talk about it?” – which is a “mantra of the homosexual movement”. The assumption is that talking and thinking about homosexuality would cause people to be more affirmative. But if this happens, and it is beginning to happen, the homosexual leaders, as Neuhaus predicted, may regret such an invitation which essentially forces the American people to face reality as such. As a consequence

[...] examining the way of life that is captive to the immediacies of homoerotic desire – a way of dissolution, deception, despair, and early death – more and more people will find the reasons and the words for a response that was at first intuitive and pre-articulate.⁷⁷

Neuhaus also disagreed with the homosexual movement that the pathologies of the gay subculture, which are even acknowledged by some of the leaders of the movement, would be liquidated if homosexuality won general acceptance. Such acceptance would only guarantee the spread of pathologies: the general consequences of the sexual revolution, of which the gay movement is a beneficiary, amply attest to this. Whatever the pros and cons of such an acceptance as a remedy against pathologies, Neuhaus thought that the American people were not prepared

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 245.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

to gamble on who is right. Certainly there is nothing in historical experience or common sense to suggest that pathologies are remedied by integrating them into society, while there is abundant reason to believe that such pathologies will further debase a society that has lost its capacity to censure. Already in our society it is too often the case that moral judgment is the duty that dare not speak its name.⁷⁸

Democratic politics is very unsure ground on which the gay movement can realize its goals. Democratic deliberation has repeatedly led to decisions against radical demands. For this reason, the movement has tried to define its demands in the language of the individual, inalienable, constitutional rights of a minority, which, by definition, are to be accepted even against democratically structured deliberations, so the movement can challenge the mores of society

[...] in courts, government regulations, professional organizations, and the bureaucracies of the public school systems. In these areas their victories have been substantial, and they aspire to much more. In all these arenas, the movement must be challenged at every step – fearlessly, calmly, reasonably, relentlessly. The good of innumerable individuals, and the common good, depend on it. The outcome of that challenge is uncertain. We must do what we can. Elliot said ‘For us there is only trying; the rest is not our business.’⁷⁹

Another cultural change, claimed Neuhaus, which was also responsible for the victories in the public space of the gay movement, was the cultural erosion of spiritual sensibility, telling us that we are

[...] all flawed creatures living in a fragile world that cannot survive without forbearance and forgiveness. A young man to whom I was explaining the Church’s teaching about disordered sexual desire responded. ‘But the Church is still saying there is something wrong with me’. Well yes, and with me, and with all of us. But we must never define ourselves – not entirely, not most importantly – by what is wrong with us. Who we are, our identity, is more than that, much more than that. We are defined not by the disorder of our desires but by the right ordering of our loves and loyalties, and by the end of the day we must all ask forgiveness for loves and loyalties betrayed. Without forbearance and forgiveness, we are all hopelessly lost.⁸⁰

Disordered life can never be – Neuhaus was here as Catholic as it is possible to be – a source of proper pride and identity. Identity is gained not discovered. We are not, as humans, Rousseauian, but fallen Adams, who must try to be better than we ourselves really are. Defiance against being in a fallen state does not define our identity, but at the same time each of us is a person who is incomparably better than our disability or disorder. We must strive, pointed out Neuhaus

[...] humbly in painful awareness of our different but often severe disabilities. But we must also do so firmly, knowing that they are not helped and many lives are ruined by their effort to impose upon others their defiant denial of the troubling truth. ‘Can’t we talk about it?’, they ask. Well yes, we are talking about it, and we will continue to talk about it. Although some seem determined to view us as their enemies, we will refuse to view them as our enemies. We will talk about it with them, and with

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 246–247.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 246.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

whomever else is willing to talk. We will talk about it, God willing, in a manner that is informed by the classical virtues of prudence, temperance, courage, and justice. And we will talk about it in a manner that is graced by the virtues of faith, hope, and love. Love above all. Love, no matter what.⁸¹

Neuhaus suggested practical measures to accompany public policy. In order to force the gay movement to participate in a rational debate and to advance a traditional agenda in the area of sexuality and public life, the imperial judiciary had to be restrained, to prevent it from creating additional rights via judicial fiat in response to different lobbying groups. Another solution is to uphold federalism: the rule that citizens should have a right to have their mores, in this case sexual mores, shape public morality. Federalism enables an explosive issue to be tackled by means of a motley collection of compromises in which the agenda of the gay lobby will not be a state imposed norm. Finally, parents should be supported in being allowed to decide the upbringing of their children according to their own mores against the views of the self-imposed “enlightened” and politically correct elites and fellow travellers. Family values as the philosophy of American education should be pursued against the liberal left values of individual autonomy and self-expression. Parents instinctively defend their children against the homosexual agenda being presented as the norm, not because they will stop loving their homosexual children if they happen to be homosexual, but because this choice or disposition will prevent them from a fulfilled life that homosexuality denies them. The homosexual revolution is part of the sexual revolution and as such it has been promoted above all as a battering ram to destroy traditional values in support of the new values deemed by the liberal-left as fostering true community, equality and solidarity. But the real purpose here, Neuhaus points out, is the destruction of such a community by overseeing those, who by instinct, moral reasoning and common sense, see that the homosexual sexual revolution – and the sexual revolution in general – is a road to nowhere: the sexual revolution’s sinister smile of liberation has been shown to beckon along a progressive path to loneliness and despair.

Neuhaus also tried to battle the intimidation campaign promulgated by the supporters of new, alleged crimes such as “homophobia” or “hate speech”. This campaign aimed to prevent any argument or criticism, and to force everyone to accept without further ado the whole agenda of the homosexual movement as a basis for an equal and just society. But Neuhaus argued for an understanding of a differentiation between a person and their deed, between a person and their sin, and further pointed out that “contempt for what a person does is not intimidation”, nor is it a breach of tolerance.⁸² It is the right of moral judgment meted out in relation to the conduct of a person, criticism of this conduct, and the duty to warn about the danger of losing one’s moral compass with dire consequences for the criticized person themselves. A moral duty to make such a person realize the potential consequences

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 247.

⁸² *Idem*, *While We’re At It...*, p. 77.

[...] of life that turns on the identification of the self with the satisfaction of morally disordered desire, a way of life marked by a tragically high incidence of loneliness, alcoholism, drugs, disease, and early death. There is a more widespread tolerance, but it is not true that the battle for the acceptance of homosexuality has been won. One admires parents who continue to love their gay children, but in the faces of those who carry signs declaring that they are proud of their gay sons one detects the determination to hide the sadness of wishing it were not so. [...] This moral duty is based on an assumption that there might be a contradiction, a tension between love and truth. Speaking the truth, and inviting all of us to live in the truth, is love's duty.⁸³

Another reason for being against the "hate crimes" campaign is the widespread gay subculture practice of cruising in public places for sex with straight or semi straight persons. Neuhaus, quoting one of the homosexual activists, pointed out that Americans should think long and hard about making the feeling of repugnance at an unwanted sexual advance subject to additional penalties under the law. He recalled Martin Luther King who used to say that

the law cannot make you love, but it can prevent you from lynching me. And, if you don't lynch me, you may eventually come to love me [adding that]. We should certainly love our gay brothers, even as we disapprove of the acts that define them as gay. Loving them includes our saying, always lovingly, that they are wrong in trying to use the law to stigmatize those who disapprove of what they do, which is not the only or the most important thing that determines who they are.⁸⁴

The homosexuality issue was for Neuhaus also fundamental for reasons connected with affirmative action. If speaking "truth in the name of love" is considered to be defined as "hate speech", or as "intimidation" and discriminatory, then the homosexual community can be defined as a "suspect group" to which antidiscrimination laws will be extended, protecting sexual orientation. Affirmative action for professed homosexuals will follow suit. This resembles the logic of affirmative action for blacks or women. If it is wrong now to take homosexuality into account in hiring for jobs, or in renting places, than it must have been wrong throughout history. This means, as Neuhaus pointed out, that homosexuals might claim a history of unjust oppression, like other minorities, with affirmative action as one of the tried and allegedly just measures. This amounts to a social radical revolution by means of the state apparatus for a social cause. Neuhaus recognized the poisonous fruit of this idea, which originated in the civil rights revolution – the idea that social justice can be restored only if we promote and advance a certain way of life. But this is a declaration of war on autonomous institutions such as churches or families, which, by implication, perpetuate such an "injustice" defined arbitrarily by the state. Such autonomous institutions would then be pressured to change their teachings, upbringing and creedal beliefs and do what the state declares to be the only proper way of behaving under threat of punishment. If the logic of affirmative action could have a certain efficacy in the case of race relations, claimed Neuhaus, because it was con-

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 72; idem, *Homosexuality and Love's Duty*, "First Things", November 2007, p. 69.

⁸⁴ Idem, *Why Hate Crimes Are Bad?*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square...*, p. 174.

sonant with the reality of moral life, in the case of homosexuals it was raw social engineering. Homosexuals are excluded not because of the colour of their skin, but because of behaviour which is not acceptable according to the moral, and justified assessment of people willing to tolerate them but not willing to let views about reality and moral life be defined by an aggressive minority.⁸⁵

Neuhaus also opposed so-called “homosexual marriage”, long on the agenda of the gay movement. It tried to redefine marriage so it could be “disentangled from childbearing and child-rearing, while at the same time [be] connected to a growing number of legal entitlements”, that is to privileges paid by society to married couples.⁸⁶ The gay movement is aiming here to transform culture by changing language itself, since “the proponents of same-sex marriage know that something bigger is involved, namely the official recognition of love”.⁸⁷ This is the major difference between civil union and marriage. The former is a mere legal, private certificate; the latter, that is marriage, involves a public endorsement. This is the reason why the gay movement insists on the word and the institution of “marriage”. It wants homosexual marriage to be recognized, as a sign of public cultural equality. This change of language involves a radical change of anthropology. Much more than mere semantics is involved here. At stake is a radical redefinition of the underlying anthropological and ontological assumptions which have so far defined marriage in all cultures and religions because of the definite purpose for which it was devised. The new institution is demanded precisely because such a change and a procedure corroborating this change would assign people a “new identity based on gender”.⁸⁸

Marriage has, historically, been an institution, points out Neuhaus, that begins with a ceremony which changes males into husbands and females into wives. Until the gay movement began to question it, such a ceremony was meant to certify a lifetime commitment, which involved security as well as a particular social role which was defended by law and culture, so such commitments could not be discarded too easily and all considerations to the contrary – including getting out of such commitments – were to be tortuously tested, that is treated as not an easy option. A lifetime commitment was thus a character task for which people were trained by culture and law, including rigorous preparations for it. Whatever threatened it was considered a vice, a danger, a failure, a sin. Marriage has been treated, in all cultures and religions, as an arrangement of social and personal order to guarantee that a community has the best protected environment for bringing up children. Its purpose has also been to civilize unruly young men with promiscuous tendencies. They were to be civilized by women, whose role was recognized as being rooted in nature (gender) and not social construction. This civilizing role of women towards men was a trade-

⁸⁵ See an advanced argument on this issue: M. Pakaluk, *Homosexuality and the Common Good*, [in:] *Homosexuality in American Public Life...*, p. 170–191.

⁸⁶ R. J. Neuhaus, *While We're at It...*, p. 86.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

-off transaction, in which the unruly freedom of the latter was traded for a promise of a home provided by the former. This trade off transaction convinced men to work hard for their wives and children, in exchange for the equally hard work of providing the comforts of home, defined differently, but in a complementary way. The mutual commitments of women and men, as wives and husbands, focused on aims transcending their urges and autonomously defined goals, and it was exactly this social and cultural – but above all moral – value of the goods created by such mutual commitments which was protected by culture and the legal system.⁸⁹ Such an understanding of marriage is totally subverted by the new definition of it demanded by the gay movement. Neuhaus quotes one author who captured this dramatic change well:

[...] the symbolic danger that gay marriage poses to such an arrangement is obvious. It alters the public meaning of the word by further draining it of its power to reinforce traditional expectations of behavior. What does it mean to be a husband in a world where a man could have one of its own? This is up to each individual couple, one is tempted to say. Fair enough; but the words we use to describe our relationships are shared cultural property. There is no private language. In this sense, granting the word 'marriage' to gay couples will eventually affect everyone.⁹⁰

Same sex marriage is seen in such a case simply as

[...] a fulfilment of a goal of the women's movement, which, historically speaking, is radical: 'the decline of the patriarchal legal structure and rise of the goal of self-fulfilment'. Obligations [concludes Neuhaus] – patriarchal, matriarchal, or simply faithful – are out, Self-fulfilment is in. Get used to it. Or not.⁹¹

This self-fulfilment is declared as the sole anthropological perspective, but it was mandated by the Supreme Court decisions. In the "Planned Parenthood v. Casey" case of 1992, the Court, in the words of Justice Kennedy stated that: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of life."⁹² The passage was repeated by the Court in "Lawrence v. Texas" of 2003.⁹³ This statement meant, pointed out Neuhaus, that an imperial autonomous self seeking self-fulfilment trumps anything, including any democratically decided social interest, the end station of the logic of rights being the sole end of human life within the structures of the liberal state. The meaning of the "pursuit of happiness" of the "Declaration of Independence", the foundational document of America, is dependent on a particular anthropology to find its precise meaning. It

⁸⁹ I recall in this context an anecdote quoted by Neuhaus in a conversation with me about Moses descending from the Sinai Mountain and declaring to the sinning Jews: "I have two announcements for you: one is good, and one is bad. The good one is that Yahweh, after my long argument on your behalf, has decided to reduce the Commandments to ten. The bad one is that adultery is still on the list".

⁹⁰ The quote is from Adam Haslett in New Yorker, [in:] R. J. Neuhaus, *While We're at It...*, p. 86.

⁹¹ This idea originated in the civil rights revolution, *ibidem*, p. 86.

⁹² "Planned Parenthood v. Casey", 505 US 833, 1992; on the anthropological and social policy implications of the Kennedy decision see: H. Arkes, *Natural Rights and the Right to Choose*, Cambridge 2002, p. 42–43, 78–80, 239–240.

⁹³ Lawrence v. Texas, 539 US 558, 2003.

does not contain any “right” per se. Once this “pursuit of happiness” is decoupled from the Christian framework of “happiness” – which was an assumption that was taken for granted by the Framers – and given the post-1968 interpretation of “emancipation” from any oppression, including oppression by culture and religion as such, the imperial autonomous self as a basis of auto-created morality becomes the basis of law. This is what the Court stated in “Planned Parenthood v. Casey” and “Lawrence v. Texas”. It declared that the state’s sole interest in sexual matters taking place between consenting adults – in the first case abortion, in the second case homosexuality – is simply to protect the unrestrained expression of personal autonomy. As Neuhaus wrote, quoting George Weigel, “it puts faithful Christians and Jews on notice: ‘There is a new and jealous god in the land: the imperial autonomous Self’. Those who serve another God are disqualified”.⁹⁴ Such a position as stated by the Court in “Casey” and “Lawrence” decisions puts forth a radically liberationist view that the state has no authority to restrict any conduct which is related only to one’s self and one’s consenting partner – a logic which extends to all other areas of such conduct.

⁹⁴ R.J. Neuhaus, *No End of Debate About the End of Democracy*, “First Things”, December 2003, p. 72. Liberalism reached its full potential here as a doctrine maximizing freedom for everyone, a duty of equal access to any possible maximum of freedom. But such a demand, essentially a redefinition of fundamental aspects of human life in the name of the same amount of freedom for everyone, made the state into a sovereign reigning over the entire social life. The New Left concept of “liberation” or “emancipation” from oppression of any institution, public or private, is just a political program rooted in this anthropology demanding from the state a fulfillment of this aim. Liberalism rejects here all reasons which are transcendental to human being and their ends. It claims at the same time that it does this in a neutral way, excluding any metaphysical speculations, allegedly using only procedural means – that is, in fact, technical means. This aim of maximization of liberty for everyone, at the same time making the human being the very measure of everything, has increasingly demanded a definition of this over-reaching aim as a right to fulfill any individual desire. Once inexorably defined this way, since no truth about man external to him exists, the fulfillment of such an aim would simply be a technical matter, involving implementation of proper methods of managing society so desires could be met. As a technical problem, they could then be handed over to “experts”, people with proper competences. Liberalism, in considering the imperial autonomous self as the sole measure of the verity of human existence, contains a totalitarian potential, even if its tyranny is mild: a persecution by political correctness, psychotherapy or ridicule supported by a veiled threat of elimination from legitimate public life. Institutions not conforming to such an anthropology are put under pressure to conform and “experts” work on them incessantly in the arena of public opinion. Social order then becomes subjected to technical rationality, a purely abstract ‘objective’. As such it should not be subjected to any limitations imposed by culture, religion, history or memory. The technical rationality of organizing the desires of the autonomous self by “experts” thus nullifies all ties as redundant or as obstacles to true fulfillment. Freedom is treated as a liberation from all ties considered oppressions and hindrances to a full liberation of the autonomous self. On such an understanding of modern liberalism, see J. Kalb, *The Tyranny of Liberalism: Understanding and Overcoming Administered Freedom, Inquisitorial Tolerance and Equality by Command*, Wilmington 2008, p. 45–82, 133–152.

Affirmative action

Neuhaus became convinced that the civil rights issue, with which he had been connected since the 60s, had been taken over and corrupted by ideologues and interests groups. One such issue was affirmative action. Race was the American “original sin”, and “counting by race” was a fact of life which Martin Luther King, Neuhaus and civil rights activists wanted to destroy. Equality was to mean that people were to be judged not by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character and abilities. Whatever affirmative action was intending to do it was a curious return to the issue of “counting by race” in American public policy, with many unintended and sinister consequences. “Counting by race” in order to benefit blacks was an invitation for those, as Neuhaus remarked, who “do not have the interest of blacks at heart so to do a complete count of the black reality, including much that in the recent past was not mentioned in polite company”.⁹⁵ There was a cacophony of voices arguing that colour-blindness was a naïve ideal, that the “race issue” mattered if we wanted to understand public policy.

Neuhaus was aware that “sometimes taking race into account is necessary and appropriate [but] the government must be colour-blind as in ‘equality under the law’”.⁹⁶ In the post 60s regulations the government could not be “colour-blind”. It was obliged to do race counting. Also, the US census did not provide any criteria relating to how to count by race while differentiating by race. For Neuhaus this was being done by the person themselves – a sheer declaration of will indicated in the census documents. This was a stupid policy, since

[...] great interests are at stake in race counting. Government grants, voting districts, school transfers, and much else are determined by the race count. If your claim is contested, the ‘one drop rule’ of any blood other than Caucasian gets you counted as a minority, with attendant entitlements. [...] The census divides Americans into White, Hispanic, Black and Asians, with a proposition to add other categories to such arbitrary ones, including ‘multiracial’. But obviously and “not surprisingly, minority activists strongly oppose this, fearing any dilution of their numbers and their consequent claim on benefits aimed at compensating them for their ‘disadvantage’”. This state of affairs, more and more Americans are realizing, is simply crazy; and dangerously crazy because it inevitably exacerbates the race consciousness that has so plagued [American] history. The civil rights movement under Dr. King was largely successful in fighting malign race consciousness. The great mistake since then was to institutionalize a supposedly benign race consciousness that has generated new and potentially greater racial suspicion and hostility than we had before [the civil rights revolution].⁹⁷

Neuhaus realized that racial discrimination in America might be permanent, and hopes of intermarriage had not materialized. But the real “most basic discrimination, despite laws against it, is in housing – in the dynamics that determine where

⁹⁵ R. J. Neuhaus, *Counting by Race*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square...*, p. 51.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 51–52. Neuhaus quotes Jorge Amselle of the Center for Equal Opportunity, a Washington think tank: “You don’t cure the problem of people treating each other differently because of race. If you want a color-blind society, you have to have color-blind public policy”.

people live. And it may not be accurate to call this discrimination.”⁹⁸ The overwhelming majority of blacks, both poor and affluent, live in overwhelmingly black neighbourhoods, despite the fact that large majorities of blacks and whites say they would like to live in an integrated neighbourhood, but with a different conception of what “integrated” means.⁹⁹ The proclivity to live in neighbourhoods segregated into black and white ones mixes questions of prejudice and preference – with difficulties separating the two. If blacks move in (to a white neighbourhood) in great numbers, the fact of life is that crime will increase, schools will decline and house values will drop, and both whites and blacks understand this. Moving out may be an issue of life quality – and not necessarily of prejudice. If so, the starting point is not governmental policy in housing matters or in fighting racial attitudes (allegedly manifesting themselves in flight from such neighbourhoods) but, pointed out Neuhaus, to upgrade the black community in all its aspects, an issue which the black community has to take on itself.¹⁰⁰

Neuhaus, noting disappointments linked to the civil rights movement and its taking over by people who turned it into a self-perpetuating business of “fighting for civil rights”, commented on the change of the “civil rights” mood. For those at the “cutting edge of the movement” like himself

[...] it was a joy of being part of something grand and indubitably good. ‘Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very Heaven’. With Dr. King, I believed that what Gunnar Myrdal had called ‘the American dilemma’ was turning out to be something like the redemption of the American experiment... It was a long, long time ago.... The rubble of broken dreams, the stark terror of broken

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*. As Neuhaus shows, for blacks it means: 50/50, for whites: 20/80. In the case of blacks in white neighbourhoods, if the number goes up to 25%, then the neighbourhoods re-segregate as black. N. Glazer, *The Public Interest*, Fall 1995.

¹⁰⁰ R. J. Neuhaus, *Counting by Race...*, p. 53. Neuhaus quotes Glazer here to the effect that “government action can never match, in scale and impact, the crecive effect of individual, voluntary decision. This is what has raised group after group, this is what has broken down the boundaries of ethnicity and race (yes, race, when it comes to some races) in the past. But these effects have operated excruciatingly slowly when it comes to American blacks. They have operated to some extent, as we see by the greatly expanded number of blacks making middle-class incomes, by the creation of integrated middle-class neighborhoods. It is the scale that has been so disappointing. Why our expectations were so disappointed is still obscure to me, and all the research does not make it clearer. We have to go to the disaster that encompasses the black family, the failure to close educational achievement gaps, the rise of worklessness among black males, the increase in crime, and, behind all these, there are other factors in infinite regress. This failure leads many to propose large scale government action, unlikely as the prospects for such are in the present and foreseeable political climate. But even if that climate were better, it is hard to see what government programs could achieve. They would be opposed by the strongest motives that move men and women: their concern for family, children, and property. However wrong I was in expecting more rapid change to result from civil rights revolution, a greater measure of government effort to promote residential integration directly was not the answer, and is still not the answer. The forces that will produce it are still individual and voluntaristic, rather than governmental and authoritative. To adapt the title of Glenn Loury’s book, it will have to be ‘one by one’, individual by individual, family by family, neighborhood by neighborhood. Slowly as these work, there is really no alternative”.

lives in the urban underclass. It is [now] a very different time... It is a time of candor when thoughtful people who do not have a racist bone in their body are exposing the lies of a civil rights establishment and its liberal claque that have no legitimate claim on the luminous moment that was the civil rights movement of Dr. King. It is also a dangerous time when permission slips are being issued to say things heretofore forbidden. The haters, white and black, are taking heart. But for most Americans it is probably a time of disappointment mixed with relief. They feel that over these thirty years they have done what they were supposed to do, and it did not work out at all the way they hoped. So now they have decided that, unless they or their families are threatened by it, they are going to stop worrying about race relations in America. They have decided to stop even thinking about it. One feels one should argue against that decision, but it is hard to know just how.¹⁰¹

The greatest hopes of his youth gone sour, Neuhaus set out to make the discussion about race meaningful. Speaking about black America, one had to speak with "respect for the humanity of others". He realized that all the ugly faces of the modern black underclass: the dope-pusher, the absolutely morally unformed teenager who is "father of five and father to none", the criminal who kills a grocer to get a candy bar – they were all, nonetheless, created in God's image. For him that was "not liberal sentimentality", but the very essence of Christian doctrine, the first step of an honest return to the basics of the issue, which is also a moral issue. Social problems in America are general American social problems, not just black problems. For this reason there really was

[...] no choice but to condemn and stigmatize as effectively as we can separatisms and racisms in whatever form. Pusillanimous academics who have been intimidated by radical shuffles must find the courage to challenge the racial separatism now so deeply entrenched at most major universities. People who say they are speaking "as a white man" or as an "African American female" are to be told in no uncertain terms that they have nothing interesting to say unless they are prepared to speak as themselves. They should know that, if they are to claim serious attention, they cannot demean themselves by reducing their identity to a contingency over which they have no control. If we understand what is at stake, in every forum on every subject there will be zero tolerance of the abdication of personal responsibility. Nothing will do but a frankly moral condemnation of crime and vice, whether the vice be drug addiction or everyday sloth. The old excuses are out. Victim politics is finished. The American people have simply turned a deaf ear to all that. They've had enough, more than enough. That seems harsh, and it is, unless joined to the hope that there is still a will to overcome the American dilemma, as in "We shall overcome".¹⁰²

Neuhaus was wary of such concepts as "self-esteem" and resisted treating people as being morally not responsible for their actions. He opposed the "victim" mentality and a division of the populace into "victims" belonging to the lower classes: criminals, or addicts. He refused to accept the idea of "defining deviancy down" and obliterating a hierarchy of acceptable and unacceptable moral behaviour. This was a wrong moral approach, a "self-indulging mentality of adolescent boys". Referring to a ban on using terms such as "lowbrow", he observed that this was

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*, p. 56.

[...] a reality that cannot be denied. Here it means not the economically poor but the morally impoverished. In the past we were more candid about the fact that a large number of people in any society are moral slobs. This recognition is key to Edward C. Banfield's brilliant 1968 analysis of social policy *The Unheavenly City*. Once Upon a Time there were 'our kind of people' and other kind of people. The better kinds of people felt an obligation to help uplift the lesser breeds. Today the lesser breeds are victims and the better kind are victimizers – or at least so our academic and media elites would convince us with [victims] pitifully grateful for the assurance that Masters feels their pain.¹⁰³

To overcome black-white hostilities, a return to the old liberal and classical American and Christian solutions had to be tried again. For Neuhaus, this meant that blacks should befriend whites and vice versa as individual people, learning to trust one another and working together. This is, as Neuhaus says

[...] a different kind of affirmative action that can make a difference for the better. Thirty years of mostly well-intended policies have turned upon us with a vengeance. It's not what we had in mind back then; it's not what we had in mind at all. But now we know where it started going wrong. It started going wrong when we tried to remedy malign race-consciousness with benign race consciousness, when we started counting by race.¹⁰⁴

The race problem brought Neuhaus to the issue of welfare reform, of which he was a great champion. Welfare reform was for him both a fiscal and a moral imperative and those "who claim to speak for the poor but don't know any poor people stand exposed as the frauds that they are".¹⁰⁵ School choice and adoption especially concerned Neuhaus. He considered school choice a basic parental right,

[...] a matter of simple justice, and for many poor parents it is a matter of survival. Governmental monopoly school systems [in major cities] are an unmitigated disaster. They cannot be fixed, they must be replaced. The monopoly is defended by what is probably the most powerful political lobby in America, the teacher's union. These unions are the enemy of the children of the poor. Nobody in these major cities who can afford an alternative sends their children to the public school. In opposing vouchers and other remedies, the government school system establishment invokes the separation of church and state. What we need, what the poor particularly need, is the separation of school and state.¹⁰⁶

Another public policy which concerned Neuhaus was the racial policy of adoption; he showed that all kinds of policies and procedures had in fact made interracial adoption impossible. Such policies

¹⁰³ Idem, *Bill Clinton and the American Character...*, p. 168, 170.

¹⁰⁴ Idem, *Counting by Race...*, p. 58. Neuhaus places a special responsibility on local churches, which could form partnerships, even if the more affluent white churches tended to be condescending sometimes. To which Neuhaus responds "May be so, but so what? The temptation can be resisted, and the important thing is that what is done is done together as equals in Christ".

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 57.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 58. "In New York it is estimated that one out of ten poor children beginning first grade will graduate from high school prepared for real college education, 'real' meaning not majoring in 'black studies' or some other pseudo-discipline, and not dropping out in the first year. Ninety percent of the students in the parochial [Catholic] schools of the city – drawn from the same population – go on to college or technical training for a real job spend[ing] half [of public schools] money."

[...] must be called what they are. They are racist. Hundreds of thousands of children have their lives blighted in foster care while millions of American couples yearn to adopt them while ideologically driven social workers and psychologists tell us it is better for a child to die in a drive-by shooting than to have his 'black identity' confused because he is adopted by white people. This is madness, and cruelty of a high order.¹⁰⁷

But the greatest case of corruption of the black "civil rights establishment" for Neuhaus was its stance on abortion. Abortion had become "probably the greatest crime prevention measure ever invented", and predominantly so in the black community. People who were poor and black were a "drag on society. We would all be better off if there were fewer of them". Americans had spent, with little success, trillions of dollars since the 60s trying to eliminate black poverty but abortion turned out to be a "more efficient means of eliminating the drag". The extermination of anti-social elements has a sordid history and the Holocaust, the German Nazi euthanasia or the United States and Sweden eugenics programs testify to that. But

[...] abortion is probably the greatest crime prevention measure ever invented. [Studies show that] the biggest factor [in crime prevention] is that the millions of young men most likely to commit crimes were killed early on. A refreshing note of candor in the current discussion is that nobody is denying that all those fetuses killed in the womb were really human beings. So it seems the question of when human life begins has been settled once and for all. The dramatic decline in crime began eighteen years after *Roe vs Wade*, and a few years earlier in those states that liberalized their abortion law. Of course commentaries steer away from a too-explicit reference to race, although everybody is aware of the astonishingly inordinate incidence of crimes by young male blacks and the equally inordinate incidence of abortions procured by black women.¹⁰⁸

For many such a discussion is not about the rightness or wrongness of abortion – it just so happens that the desired outcome (reducing crime) is related to killing black babies. If a particular group is overwhelmingly responsible for crime and related social problems, the logical conclusion might follow that the elimination of large numbers of people belonging to that group "will reduce the problem". The argument is sound but what is

[...] morally odious is the cool and disinterested way in which the commentariat is discussing what might fairly be described as racial cleansing. It's too bad about all those dead babies, but it is a kind of solution to the crime problem, if not a final solution. Meanwhile, those who style themselves black leaders, especially political leaders, are overwhelmingly in support of the unlimited abortion licence, thus maintaining their distinction of being the only ethnic or racial leadership in history to actively collaborate in dramatically reducing the number of people they claim to lead. If they had been allowed to live, there would be about twenty million more blacks in America. White racists have reason to be grateful for what is sometimes still called the civil rights leadership. Today's black leaders are more compliant, much to the satisfaction of those who think we would all be better off with fewer black people.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 57.

¹⁰⁸ *Idem*, *The Public Square...*, p. 73. Neuhaus refers to research on the topic summed up by S. Lewistt, S. Dubner, *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explains the Hidden Side of Everything*.

¹⁰⁹ "[As Jessie Jackson once said] the war on poverty had been replaced by a war on the poor." R. J. Neuhaus, *The Public Square...*, p. 73.

Affirmative action and quotas, a.k.a. diversity, had become especially suspicious for Neuhaus. He understood that rights worth fighting for may easily be converted into positive laws which enter the complex social and economic world, becoming part of ordinary power politics. Moral discourse is then translated into public policy language and a discussion about what works and what does not, what is helpful and what is corrupting, becomes difficult. Equal rights and equal opportunity for people as unique moral individuals may then easily turn into programs of affirmative action, quotas and racial preferences which cannot be discussed on their merits due to the moral high ground from which they were being driven. Individual merit, moral right and duty can, at the same time, turn into a free, corrupting ride for such individuals within the context of group entitlements. This was the reason Neuhaus parted ways with the civil rights establishment. Once concrete public policy measures were coupled with the high moral ground, they became the ideological tools of a political, social and economic power play, a kind of illusion of mastery over the incredibly complicated problem of race – or any other issue for that matter. A clear cut moral problem was being converted, pointed out Neuhaus, into a political issue – with this transformation being seen as a “solution”. People of good faith who engaged in a discussion on the basis of the merits and demerits of particular policies were excluded, accused of “racism”, “misogyny” or “homophobia”. Such people – while voicing doubts, reservations and caution – respond with a shrug and walk away.¹¹⁰

The affirmative action crisis, part of the civil rights movement gone sour, constituted a part of a larger crisis, a dependency-welfare crisis.¹¹¹ This dependency-welfare crisis had become pervasive, claimed Neuhaus, because all of society’s other sources of support and personal security, apart from state services and money, had been corrupted. The welfare state’s ambition was to decouple individuals from any source of mutual dependence and *caritas* stemming from other sources of solidarity – for instance, families. Dependence was a subconscious consequence of the welfare-state’s weakening of all other sources of support, eliminating self-sufficiency. The welfare state policies ignored and subverted human capacities stemming from non-material dimensions of personhood. Such social policies assumed that human beings were either passive subjects or instrumental rationalists, who operate according to the economic calculus of the welfare state, then convert it into social capital, thus influencing behaviour accordingly. But human beings act as agents in the social sphere not only on the basis of self-interest but on the basis of even more important and strongly held values. The welfare state was in crisis, implied Neuhaus, because it destroyed social bonds which it thought it was going to strengthen. Its notion of what

¹¹⁰ For more on that issue, which was so much on Neuhaus’s mind, see a kind of elegiac article by a close collaborator of his, J. Nuechterlein, *Race Matters*, “First Things”, February 2011, p. 3–5.

¹¹¹ This crisis was already identified by Neuhaus in the pamphlet *To Empower People* from 1976, co-authored by Peter Berger, and based on his experiences in the slums of Brooklyn. P. Berger, R. J. Neuhaus, *To Empower People: From State to Civil Society*, Washington DC 1996, p. 157–164, 202–208.

society was – a collection of rational and self-interested individuals – simply ignored this crucial dimension of relationships (rooted in strongly held values about those relationships) being as important as material calculations, for instance, for families on social welfare. Human beings, Neuhaus stressed this especially, were not free, self-determining individuals, but dependent social beings. The solidarity and character necessary for social advancement as well as general welfare have little to do with the social policies of the modern welfare state, which are counterproductive, detrimental and outwardly inimical to social welfare as such.

Multiculturalism

An important aspect of the culture war was so-called “multiculturalism”, which is another name today, observed Neuhaus, for battling the culture of the West in the name of battling an “oppressive” system of thought. In the name of multiculturalism, “the entirety of the progressive academy, [this] herd of independent minds has for some years now been earnestly engaged in discrediting such outdated notions”.¹¹²

Such an approach has its source, of course, in ideologies of the “post” mentality, such as post-colonialism, post-modernism and post-structuralism. Multicultural ideology claims that, instead of globalizing its values, the West should stay in its own cultural sphere and relativize its force on its own turf so as to atone for past oppressions as well in order not to offend the sensibilities of other cultures increasingly present within Western societies. Multiculturalism treats all cultures and all systems of thought as essentially incomparable. The aim of such a multicultural idea was originally to foster respect for other cultures, but radicals pushed it to the point of inconsistency, whereby it became a rigid ideology suppressing Western heritage. For this respect did not extend to Western culture itself, regarded as a shameful crime against humanity, and thus forbidden to pass judgment on other cultures. Multiculturalism is thus a support of all cultures except one’s own, but it is characterized more by what it is against than by what it is for. Negation of Christianity is a natural consequence of such a stance, with actions to remove all displays of Christian symbolic presence in public, which many times provoked bitter commentary from Neuhaus. Anti-Western multiculturalism is rooted in “white guilt”, an ideology of “victimhood” and a ubiquitous relativization of truth. Culture ceased to be “the best that has been thought and said”, according to the classical definition of it by Matthew Arnold, and became a statement that all cultures and religions are immeasurable, equal and thus relative, a kind of anthropological outgrowth of human adjustment to particular conditions.

Such relativism has consequences. One is linked to the rule of law and, indeed, the very definition of rights and human rights. Eternal rights and self-evident truths reflecting common humanity – even if expressed in different words which humanity tries to discern – are abandoned. A more amorphous concept of social justice takes its

¹¹² R. J. Neuhaus, *Against Christian Politics*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square...*, p. 69.

place, which is subject to unlimited political manipulation. If all cultures are relative then what we have is moral nihilism overseen by the commissars of ensuring that no culture can win against another. If morals become values, then they are expressions of culture, which leads to a situation where there are no universal moral principles. In such a case, no culture can be subjected to any values, since there are no transcultural values to stand in judgment over any particular culture.¹¹³ Neuhaus considers multiculturalism as an ideology that prevents any strong sense of identification with Western tradition. This is a name

[...] for another assault on a cherished particularity in the name of vaulting universalisms [an ideology] usually unsafe for ideas and practices that have nothing to recommend them other than tradition, common sense, and popular devotion.¹¹⁴

The ostensible aim of such a multicultural idea – in cases of eliminating Christianity from the public square – is an ethical anti-Western urge to not “offend” other faiths, which leads in practice to the prohibition of Christianity by regulations and public condemnations. For Neuhaus, true multiculturalism is something Americans have known from the beginning. It means simply

[...] an interest in and eagerness to engage other cultures. [This] depends upon the affirming of our culture which, alone of world cultures, thinks multiculturalism a very good thing. It is not, one notes, just a question of who got here *first*. It's a question of *who* got here first. Call contemporary America pluralistic or call it a melting pot or call it a gorgeous mosaic, it didn't just happen. It happened because a people formed by biblical religion believed that hospitality to other cultures is a virtue. Today's multiculturalists who insist that all cultures are equal except our own are, by repressing the public expression of the religious grounds of that belief, inviting a resurgence of the nasty nativism that reduces cultural differences and tensions to the bullying question of who got here first. Genuine multiculturalism is the product of a particular culture and will not survive its public demise.¹¹⁵

There was a more sinister side to multicultural ideology, which Neuhaus analysed in the context of Bill Clinton's sexual scandal of 1997 and the president's appeal to groups which defended him, mainly feminists and multiculturalists. Multicultural policy was at the centre of Clinton's administration.¹¹⁶ This ideology of multiculturalism was expressed by Clinton best when he stated that in the future “there will be no majority race in America”. It contained, pointed out Neuhaus, several troubling assumptions of which the most visible was a supposition that there would be inevitable, uncontrolled mass immigration to America involving mainly non-white populations, with the birth rate of the immigrants far exceeding that of the native born. But another and

¹¹³ On such a distinction between culture and civilization see K. Windschuttle, *The Cultural War on Western Civilization*, [in:] *The Survival of the West*, eds. H. Kramer, R. Kimball, p. 120.

¹¹⁴ R. J. Neuhaus, *While We're at It...*, p. 69.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 69.

¹¹⁶ This was, probably inadvertently, expressed best by the Freudian slip of vice-president Al Gore when he translated the United States official seal's motto *E Pluribus Unum* [“Out of the many, one”], as “Out of the one, many”.

[...] most troubling [was] that the current majority consists of a race called white people. The polite term for this is racialism. The more common term is racism. Apart from Aryan militia circles, few nonblack, non-Asian, non-Hispanic Americans think of themselves as belonging to the white race. The alarming thing was the resurrection of the idea of a white race, an idea from the era most of us hoped was definitely past. Pitting the 'majority race' against nonwhite claimants to justice is a sure formula for exacerbating the tensions [politicians say they] want to heal. It necessarily involves, among other things, the discredited and profoundly unjust policies of affirmative action and quotas [I] have agreed [that] we must regain control over immigration policies that are manifestly out of control. [I] disagreed [that] race should be a factor in shaping immigration policies. No good can come from asking the American people whether they think it is a good idea that fifty years from now a majority should be nonwhite. This is a racist, if not racist, way of posing the question. Multiculturalists and the champions of a white majority have in common the aim of raising race-consciousness, and in this they powerfully reinforce one another. To tell the majority of Americans that they should 'celebrate' the prospect that in fifty years most Americans will not be like them is politically stupid and morally wrong. It is politically stupid because most people think that being like them is a pretty good thing. It is morally wrong because it invites the majority of people to identify themselves by race. The most long-standing and divisive struggle in American history has been to overcome the racial mindset. Good arguments can be made for continuing to welcome a large number of immigrants to this country. [But] to frame the public debate in terms of the proposal that half a century from now there will be no majority race in America is politically stupid and morally wrong.¹¹⁷

Multicultural ideology strengthened race consciousness and caused a "balkanization" of America, which was one of the most visible aspects of the culture war alongside identity politics, another feature of post 1968 politics. Identity politics, as Neuhaus noted, had been a part of the hallowed trinity of the cultural left. These are race, class and gender. They originally constituted a response to culture defined as an "oppressive" structure in need of "emancipation", giving rise to diverse "liberationist" movements. They were defined around a single issue of a particular identity, which was allegedly thwarted in developing its full potential because of "oppressive" social relations. Such social relations rooted in class differentiation, sexual identity, social status and gender roles have been oppressive (i.e. unequal). Until they become equal, claims the oppressed group, defining itself around such a category of identity, it cannot be truly free and on equal terms with others. Neuhaus was against such a view of reality. Part of the problem of such cultural politics was the old ideological yearning for a definition of reality according to a single overwhelming principle of organization, and then a demand to transform this reality according to it – in order to set the ruptured reality of social and cultural life straight – and hence fulfil the old myth of overcoming alienation, the Gnostic fantasy of ultimate liberation from the limitations of human existence. Such a human yearning for self-understanding and self-protection stems from a need for ontological safety, this time achieved by one's reasoning from within the fallen human condition in order to master it. In the case of identity politics, this effort should take us outside our existing condition and then recreate it again according to one principle of one's identity, allegedly a proper tool of a just interpretation of human existence. This singular

¹¹⁷ R. J. Neuhaus, *President Clinton and the White Race...*, p. 89–90.

dynamic of explanation gives such identity politics and the causes it supports a sense of belonging to and understanding everything and is nearly impossible to dispel by reasoned argument, a truly total *idée fixe*, the essence of ideology.

The charm of such an ideological explanation is an identification with an idea, a theory promising an overcoming of alienation, enabling one to dispense with all efforts at understanding, focusing on the responsible, moral life of a person. An established goal provides all that is there, of the moral theory and morality as such. Focusing on “liberation” theories gives their proponents easy access to such morality and such an understanding of reality, by exposing one dimension of human existence as the sole interpretative tool. Sexual identity, race, class and social status are to provide an insight into the understanding of the whole, enabling one to identify enemies and friends – a dichotomy providing a sense of belonging to the morally righteous. This is an understanding of virtue not in terms of personal responsibility, but virtue by identification, meaning “virtue is not a matter of who you are but of what you stand for”.

Thus in the name of virtuousness that could redeem society and allow for our fulfillment, we created a new ‘good’ in which private moral responsibility was secondary, if not passé. We created a virtuousness that could be achieved through mere identification. It is a matter of identifying with the right causes and with those who identify with the right causes. But iconography of this sort is even more effective in its negative mode. Because it represents virtue, it also licenses demonization. Those who do not identify are not simply wrong, they are against virtue and therefore evil. Any politics of virtue is also a politics of demonization, and this has been a boomer specialty since the 1960’s.¹¹⁸

Identity politics is interwoven with an idea of tolerance as a sign of “diversity” contributing to the richness of life. But such tolerance constitutes in fact “the petty intolerance of its infatuation with tolerance, that is intolerance of people who consider such an approach as erroneous and conflict-ridden, people who ‘must become like us...’ It is the new world of secularism’s oppressive tolerance”.¹¹⁹ Ideological identity politics thus corrupts intellectually, but also has deeply epistemological consequences. Such a narrow vision defines the way such ideologues seek and find knowledge, looking at reality solely for a proof of the verity of their dichotomic view. Truth as such becomes just an instrument of our desires to corroborate our longings, meaning truth is being found in a lie, and not where it is and should be.

The Naked Public Square

Neuhaus’s contribution to the culture war debate was especially interesting in his criticism of the modern liberal state’s attitude towards religion, a practice which Neuhaus famously termed the “naked public square”. The “liberation” of the 60s and radical secular modernity accelerated this tendency and threatened the moral order

¹¹⁸ Idem, *Bill Clinton and the American Character*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square...*, p. 164. Neuhaus follows this observation about politics of virtue after Shelby Steele.

¹¹⁹ Idem, *What Then is to Be Done*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square...*, p. 111, 113.

and the free exercise of religion. It was a kind of cultural revolution defined as the final and long awaited freedom, abandoning habits, disciplines and communal life. A “naked public square”, a denial of freedom of religion in the public square, was troubling for Neuhaus, because it would eventually elevate the state to a position of an absolute, uncontested sovereign.

The question of the public presence of religion was taken up in modern America by the Supreme Court decision of 1947 in “*Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing Township*”.¹²⁰ It ostensibly concerned issues related to participation by church-affiliated schools in public programs, but it stated in effect, in the voice of Justice Hugo Black who delivered the 5–4 decision, that the First Amendment was meant to create a neutral public sphere. Neuhaus starts by pointing out that this decision led to a secular “sacralization” by the Supreme Court of the “wall of separation” between the state and society, understood as a separation of religion from society and culture.¹²¹ This was only a short step away from concluding, Neuhaus argued, that the aim of the First Amendment was to protect the state and the public space from religion in the name of neutrality and the rights of non-religious people. The whole post-Emerson adjudication thus revolved around the idea that religious people constituted a threat to public order. On the basis of this adjudication, the American liberal elites, especially after the 1960’s “liberation” revolution, began to interpret the Constitution and public space in such a way as to slowly push religious people onto the margins of public life. What was crucial here was a new anthropology which undermined the cultural authority of Christianity by the imperial autonomous self as the basis of morality, a self-referential secular moralism. Its creation was connected with a monistic understanding of public values, of which moral equality – and as a consequence a democracy composed of liberated individuals in free association with others – was an ideal and a goal to be strived for. Such individuals have to tolerate all views as equally valid, since any moral hierarchy of goods is nullified; thus words such as tolerance, non-discrimination, or non-judgmentalism became a new (and the only legitimate) vocabulary and “religion” of liberalism. Christianity, a dominant cultural code in America, was immediately put on the defensive and pressured to conform, which meant in effect that it was to be tolerated as long as it changed its teachings or went totally private, out of public sight.¹²² Religious people had to accept religion as simply a spiritual department of the liberal state or disappear.

For Neuhaus, the public rise of religiously minded people in America, especially fundamentalist and evangelical Protestants since the 70s, was essentially a self-

¹²⁰ 330 US 1, 1947.

¹²¹ Idem, *The Public Square...*, p. 78; the case was complicated and has caused controversy till today. For a standard liberal-left interpretation of it, see L. Pfeffer, *Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing Township*, [in:] *The Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court of the United States*, ed. K. L. Hall, Oxford 2005, p. 303–304; for a liberal-conservative view see J. Hitchcock, *The Supreme Court and Religion in American Life*, Princeton 2004, p. 121–123.

¹²² The process was multidimensional and complicated. See: H. Hecló, *Christianity and American Democracy*, Cambridge Mass 2007, p. 85–104.

-defence move made in the name of freedom and in the name of the community, which in many respects was the same. Religious people, dubbed by the liberal press “the Religious Right”, decided to defend their right to participate as religious citizens and act on their convictions in public life and in the 70s entered politics and supported Ronald Reagan in 1980. Neuhaus diagnosed this new situation in 1984 in “The Naked Public Square”, the most influential of Neuhaus’s books, which brought him to public prominence.¹²³ Neuhaus was writing shortly after Reagan’s victory in 1980, which began the longest conservative ascendancy in modern American history. The Christian Right was part of the Reagan coalition and hated by the liberal elites as a danger to democracy. Whatever the usefulness of the Christian Right to foster democratic discussion, it constituted a defensive move stemming from a recognition that “man has not ‘come of age’ in the way that many thought. We still need, we more urgently need, the critical tutelage of traditions that refuse to leave ‘man on his own’”.¹²⁴

The Naked Public Square, a baroque, wordy, ruminative book – both a serious intellectual tract and a kind of passionate polemic – was an instant bestseller presenting a forcefully explained case. The phrase itself permanently entered the language of public discourse. The main thesis is looked upon from different angles, sometimes a disorganized argument. Yet, because of its intellectual depth and range, the book has become one of the most important books of Neuhaus’s generation, dealing with a topic of critical importance. He put forward the thesis that religious communities were in fact fighting for a separation of state and church, in a situation where the state had begun to dictate to religious communities their proper social and doctrinal place. It was precisely, argued Neuhaus, a lack of such a separation mandated by the First Amendment which threatened religious communities, subjecting them to public discrimination in traditionally Christian America, while at the very same time naming such a situation “neutrality”. He understood that the aim of the First Amendment was partly to protect citizens from domination by uncongenial faiths, but above all from domination by the state itself. This also constituted a guarantee that churches would be protected from the dangerous and tempting situation of courting powerful people running the state.

Neuhaus wrote his book when the Supreme Court religious decisions were beginning to accept a new anthropology of the imperial autonomous self as the sole arbiter of individual rights against community rights. The line between real, inalienable human rights and social rights, increasingly defined by different ideological lobbying groups as human rights, also began to blur. The imperial self was the sole arbiter of his/her “rights”, a.k.a. a subjective wish determining what constituted “exclusions” and “intimidations”. Such a doctrine could not be an effective policy, but it was an effective battering ram to push the language and actions of religious people from the public square, and to prepare a doctrine of a legitimate new community defined by

¹²³ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*, San Francisco 1984.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 93.

secular elites. For Neuhaus, the ultimate question of the “naked public square” was whether Christianity could be part of culture, with religious citizens fully participating in public life. Religious freedom, if this concept means anything, has to include communal functioning of religion. Religion is communal because it is not private, but personal. The real challenge is not only to keep the faith but to hand it down to the next generation. This is essentially a communal, public activity, even if not a state activity, carried out inside autonomous institutions which have a right to operate undisturbed within the public square: families, churches themselves, and charitable and educational organizations.¹²⁵

If religious freedom means anything, argued Neuhaus, it cannot be reconciled with liberal monism treating the imperial autonomous self as an uncontested basis. When imposed on all autonomous institutions and their legitimate *modus operandi* by the state, treating it as the only legitimate public anthropology, it simply becomes the anthropology of the state – a totalitarian ideology. If such a monistic liberalism becomes an ideology of the state, pointed out Neuhaus, it inexorably tries to squeeze religion, including the mediating institutions of churches, out of the public square. We arrive at a situation in which the government becomes the ultimate tool of defining the social, economic, cultural and moral life of its citizens. Civil society becomes limited and subordinated to the state. The jealous state begins to function as the sole point of identity of citizenry, defining at the same time the legitimate and illegitimate beliefs of such identity. This is a doctrine, argued Neuhaus, which is utterly against a republican government of ordered liberty, founded on an independent civil society and its autonomous way of defining aims apart from the state.

Neuhaus observes that Christianity is never to be found apart from a cultural matrix. Christianity is in all its forms “enculturated”, meaning that in relation to culture, the Church is both acting and being acted on, shaped and shaping it. The Church, broadly defined by Neuhaus as “the Christian movement through time”, can sometimes adopt a way of

[...] being in the world which is deliberately indifferent to the culture of which it is a part. That indifference results in the Church unconsciously adopting and thereby reinforcing, in the name of the gospel, patterns of culture that are incompatible with her gospel.¹²⁶

He is aware that worrying about this cultural conformity of Christianity has a long history in Christian thinking.¹²⁷ Neuhaus knows that in contemporary Ame-

¹²⁵ In order to have religious freedom, it is not enough to have a “warm heart” in private life, it is necessary to have the communal setting in which such a “warm heart” of religious rights can operate. See also: R. L. Wilken, *The Christian Intellectual Tradition*, “First Things”, June–July 1991.

¹²⁶ R. J. Neuhaus, *Christ Without Culture*, “First Things”, April 2007, p. 56.

¹²⁷ Saint Paul in Rom. 12: 2 wrote “be not confronted to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind”. In the third century, Tertullian asked a defiant question: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” In modern times, the question is especially dramatic, with Christianity having a self-conscious attitude of being confronted with a modern liberal, anti-Christian world. Kierkegaard’s withering critique of culturally domesticated discipleship or Karl Barth’s emphatic *Nein!*

rica there are also principled – both left and right wing – nonconformity groups of Christians who are reviving, or trying to revive in theological and moral discourse, a model of “Christ against culture”, which in particular means “Christ against American culture”. Such phenomena testify to a worldwide observation that religion, Christianity in particular, is not disappearing, that *homo religious*,

[...] man in search of transcendent meaning, is irrepressible. The secularization theories that held sway over our high culture for three hundred years, ever since the Enlightenment, have been falsified by the very history to which they so confidently appealed and yet the Enlightenment prognosis of secularization may not be falsified in its entirety. While religion is certainly not withering away, one may wonder whether it is fulfilling the second part of the prognosis, namely that the ‘Christ without culture’ model is impotent, and quite prosperously happy in its impotence, when it comes to exercising cultural influence. [In America today] there is a greater awareness of the public influence of religion. But that awareness is almost entirely centered on the political influence of religious voters and activists, leading to alarmist cries of a threatening theocracy. [But] Christianity in America is not challenging the ‘habits of the heart’ and ‘habits of mind’ that dominate American culture, meaning both the so called high culture and the popular culture. On the contrary some of the most flourishing forms of Christianity not only do not challenge those habits; they exhibit a wondrous capacity to exploit them, and thus to reinforce them.¹²⁸

Neuhaus shows how the Christian orthodoxy has been subtly transformed by modern liberal culture and how it has adapted to it. “Self-esteem”, “identity”, “well-being”, “prosperity”, and “happiness” are the symbolic words testifying to the fact that worshippers and preachers resist anything which contradicts this state of affairs, for instance suffering and unhappiness, as diseases to be immediately rectified. Self-criticism with an awareness of the limitations of life are considered as dangerous thoughts. Putting off self-gratification and consumption is treated as being contrary to human rights. Christianity and its orthodoxy become, from such a perspective, a mirror of society, its habits of heart and mind, even if participants think that they are challenging or escaping them. As

[...] everything goes better with Coke, so everything goes better with Jesus, and, if that doesn’t work, there is always Prozac. The chat that such religious enterprise presents itself as ‘evangelization’, should not mislead us. Despite the talk about a religious resurgence or revival, the percentage of the population characterized by a disciplined commitment to Christ and by active engagement in Christian service to the Church and the world has not grown appreciably. Religious entrepreneurs are increasingly competing for niche markets within a stable population that prefers religion to Prozac, or prefers Prozac with a panache of religion. There is, to be sure, the undeniable reality of the culture wars. Christians not only voting their moral convictions but, especially with respect to the conflict between the culture of life, and the culture of death, making truth claims and advancing arguments in terms of public reason aimed at engaging the centers of cultural influence. But it is an exception. The centers of cultural influence [in America] do not recognize that they are being challenged by Christians, except for the allegedly theocratic challenge in electoral politics. They do not recognize that they are being intellectually, conceptually and culturally challenged, in largest part because Christians are not persuasively articulating such

thrown in the face of the *Kulturprotestantismus* – that was the form taken by the ‘Christ of culture’ model in liberal Protestantism – were the most dramatic examples of that worry.

¹²⁸ R. J. Neuhaus, *Christ Without Culture...*, p. 57.

a challenge. Their complaint is that Christians are trying to 'impose their values' on them. They do not understand that we want to engage them in a civil argument about the possibility of moral truth, about what kind of people we are and should aspire to be, and therefore about how we ought to order our life together. They do not understand that, because so few Christians understand and attempt to practice such engagement [...] John Paul II said 'The Church imposes nothing; she only proposes'. But what she proposes she believes to be truth [...] Of course, it is true that many people will reject the proposal, and many will simply refuse to be engaged by it. They simply *know* that, no matter how winsomely proposed, the conversation with Christianity is but a cunningly disguised threat of imposing on their freedom. Their default position, so to speak, is one of methodological, if not metaphysical, atheism. Any reference to God or transcendent truth, any proposal associated with religion is a threat to the autonomous self and to the achievements of a rigorous secular modernity. They live in what Max Weber called 'a disenchanted world', and they are determined to keep it that way'.¹²⁹

Such a mindset, points out Neuhaus, is powerfully influential in liberal culture today. Karl Marx once identified the people who had it as those who "control the commanding heights of economies". Today they (the liberal elites) are the people who control "the commanding heights of culture", and even if they may constitute the minority of the population, they succeed in presenting themselves as "the mainstream" through the control of powerful institutions such as the media, entertainment, the arbitration of literary tastes, the great research universities and professional associations, with business and advertising seeking their approval. Neuhaus thinks that is necessary to remind such people that they are a minority in America by defeating them in electoral politics. But such victories are shallow since they immediately intensify alarms that "the theocrats are coming", reinforcing the convictions of the people on "the commanding heights of culture" that their defeats corroborate their fears and that they should resist such "populist" uprisings against the hegemony of their enlightened ways.¹³⁰ Neuhaus realizes that Christians often correctly view those who control "the commanding heights of culture" as political opponents since they usually view Christians that way. Theirs is a world view that is monistic and totalitarian in its implications, stemming from the new liberalism's slogan of "personal is political", where all human relations are looked upon essentially as relations of unequal power in need of "liberation", from religious "oppression" as well. Such an approach means that "politics is the name of the game", a kind of Leninist "Who whom?" (Who does what to whom?), a merciless fight until opponents submit. For Neuhaus, the liberal opponents of "theocracy" are secular fanatics themselves.

This monistic version of contemporary liberalism means the establishment of an ideology as a mandatory standard of judgment in the public square. It wants to see its ideas, passions, policies and all idiosyncrasies as wholly innocent of negative consequences. Neuhaus, a person of faith, cannot imagine any accommodation with such a monistic liberalism as a way of perceiving reality and engages it in the public square. But this monistic system of thought leads to liberal fanaticism, excluding any plurality of language, institutions and political life as such. Then electoral victories

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

¹³⁰ *Ibidem*.

are just inconsequential victories of the moment. The most important battlefield is, claims Neuhaus

the great contest over culture, the guiding ideas and habits of mind and heart that informs the way we understand the world and our place in it. Christians who, knowingly or unknowingly, embrace the model of 'Christ without culture' are captive to the culture as defined by those who control its commanding heights. They are not only captive to it but are complicit in it. Their entrepreneurial success in building religious empires by exploiting the niche markets of the Christian subculture leaves the commanding heights untouched, unchallenged, unengaged. Christianity does indeed have its own culture, its own intellectual tradition, its own liturgy and songs, its own moral teachings and distinctive ways of life, both personal and communal. The Church must carefully cultivate that culture and, in times of severe persecution, cultivate it, if need be, in the catacombs. But that is not our time in America, although there are Christians who, embracing the model of 'Christ against culture', invite us to take refuge in the catacombs of their own imagining. A rich ecclesiastical culture, a distinctively Christian way of being in the world, sometimes finds itself positioned against the world as the world is defined by those who are hostile to the influence of the Church. But even when the Church is against the world, she is against the world for the world.¹³¹

If the Church "imposes nothing, she only proposes", what does it (she) propose? For Neuhaus, St. Paul stated this at the end of I Corinthians 12: "a more excellent way", a challenge to the imperial self, a call to heroic life. This call is not so much a message "as a person, the one who is the way, the truth, and the life".¹³² Neuhaus insists that the Christian proposal of "a more excellent way" is not just one option among others, although "it must be freely chosen". It is not, he insists, an option for those who might be interested. In America religion flourishes, observed Neuhaus. But it is largely of the Christ-without-culture variety. That is why there have been no distinctive Christian contributions that deserve, as he writes, to command the attention of the cultural gatekeepers of America, in literature, the arts, in music and entertainment, in political philosophy and the humanities. Distinctly Christian cultural products typically cater to the Christian market, but they "are not proposals of a more excellent way for American culture". This is a defeat in the face of an adversary who considers the anthropology of the imperial self to be public language and political order.¹³³ Neuhaus rejects the

¹³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

¹³² *Ibidem*.

¹³³ Neuhaus is arguing here not only with a flourishing niche of Catholic culture in America but also with a large section of Protestant evangelicals, and cultural conservatives in general. All these groups have been in politics since the 90s and have often been victorious, but failed culturally and decided to go back to their niche culture without an ambition of influencing outside culture. Thus Paul Weyrich, the head of the Free Congress Foundation, one of the most important conservative political organizers, lamented conservatives' failure to address the cultural issues. In an open letter to conservatives in February 1999, he argued that it was time for religious conservatives to withdraw from national politics in order to concentrate on problems of their own communities, on problems of faith, family and community. Politics was not a successful vehicle for changing culture. Weyrich was not clear whether he advocated withdrawal from the mainstream culture or simply a tactical retreat. He wrote that "we probably have lost the culture war. That does not mean the war is not going on to continue, and that it isn't going to be fought on other fronts. But in terms of society in general, we have lost. This is why, even

Christ without culture approach, the model which induces contentment with being a subculture. But Christianity that is indifferent to its cultural context is captive to its cultural context. Indeed, it reinforces the cultural definitions to which it is captive. Nowhere is this so evident as in the ready Christian acceptance of the cultural dogma that religion is essentially a private matter of spiritual experience. Against that assumption, we must insist that Christian faith is intensely personal but never private. The Christian gospel is an emphatically public proposal about the nature of the world and our place in it. Many Christians, possibly most Christians, have uncritically accepted the dichotomy between public and private, between fact and value, between knowledge and meaning.¹³⁴

True, these dichotomies are entrenched in American religion and culture as such, and associated with American individualism. In high culture, this understanding of religion as private and subjective was presented in William James's classic "Varieties of Religious Experience".¹³⁵ But as subjective experience it cannot lay claim, by definition, to public proposition. It cannot be translated into a rational public language, since it is by definition a province of subjective emotional and psychological reactions to the emptiness of the cosmos – and thus solitude. Such a language cannot for this reason have a legitimate status in culture, in public life. It has to be consigned to the private domain of personal feeling.¹³⁶ For some, as Neuhaus points out, such a subjective understanding of religion was the reality of American religious experience from the beginning, and James just captured this phenomenon in a more philosophical way. For them, this is essentially a post-Christian attitude, pushing consciousness into a religion of "me", already visible in the Transcendentalist movement and the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote that it is by yourself, without an ambassador, that God speaks to you. It is God within you

when we win in politics, our victories fail to translate into the kind of policies we believe are important. Therefore, what seems to me a legitimate strategy to follow is to look at ways to separate ourselves from the institutions that have been captured by the ideology of Political Correctness or by other enemies of our traditional culture. I would like to point out to you that the word 'holy' means 'set apart', and that it is not against our tradition to be, in fact, 'set apart'. You can look at Christian history. You will see that there were times when those who had our beliefs were definitely in the minority and it was a band of hardy monks who preserved culture while the surrounding society disintegrated". *An Open Letter to Conservatives*, [in:] *Conservatism in America since 1930*, ed. G. L. Schneider, New York 2003, p. 430. See also similar observations by another important conservative activist, R. A. Viguerie, *Conservatives Betrayed*, Los Angeles 2006, p. 101–114.

¹³⁴ R. J. Neuhaus, *Christ Without Culture...*, p. 58.

¹³⁵ James defined religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whether they may consider the divine". In such an understanding of religion, as Neuhaus points out, "church, community, doctrine, tradition, morality – all of these are secondary and, as often as not, hindrances to genuine religion. Genuine religion is subjective experience, and subjective experience is solitude". R. J. Neuhaus, *Christ Without Culture...*, p. 58.

¹³⁶ This is one of the demands of such modern liberal canonical – even if different – thinkers as John Rawls or Jurgen Habermas, to "translate" private language into a public objective in order to clear a debris of false, unverifiable, non-objective standards – of which religion was a part – from human consciousness. See a liberal canonical work by J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge Mass. 1971; for a good criticism of such a liberal monism, see: J. Kekes, *The Illusions of Egalitarianism*, Ithaca 2003.

that responds to God without, which essentially amounts to total moral freedom.¹³⁷ But this “religion” of the imperial self, realizes Neuhaus, also corrupts and relativizes morality. Since moral autonomy is God, and God is moral autonomy, then so is morality. The main moral problem then is an inability to discern, and defend moral truth as such, a universal system of reference transcending the whimsical wishes of the imperial self. This relativist stance, shows Neuhaus, makes one believe that morality is a purely individual matter, or a consensual endeavour, varying from age to age, from society to society, precisely because it varies from person to person. This is the politically correct position of liberal monism today, which treats creedal religions as a scandal of illegitimate thinking. One of the consequences is an inability to justify moral revulsions in universal terms, paradoxically at a time when liberal society is saturated with “moral” revulsions at moral “hard” truths, while promoting the “hard” truths of “good” social causes. As a result morality is turned into “good” social causes, the content of which is defined, arbitrarily for a given day and place, by those occupying the “commanding heights of culture”.¹³⁸ In such a situation, creedal religions and traditional morality are treated as threatening arrogance, oppression, scandal and menace ready to be imposed on someone else. Christianity is pressured into the province of mild morality of “goodness” with Jesus as one of the great human teachers.¹³⁹ This attack on creedal religions as irrational, in the name of the imperial self, had been challenged, observed Neuhaus. The Enlightenment settlement

[...] that imposed a public truce with respect to the truths that really matter, divorcing fact from value, knowledge from meaning, and faith from reason, is being boldly challenged [and] that challenge is being pressed most boldly by the Bishop of Rome, Pope Benedict, who in the name of de-Hellenizing Christianity, pit biblical faith against the great synthesis of faith and reason achieved over the centuries of the Christian intellectual tradition [and] also challenged non-Christian intellectuals to free themselves from the truncated and stifling definition of rationality imposed by the Enlightenment. In

¹³⁷ Harold Bloom called this type of religion an American ‘Gnosticism’ – a belief, as Neuhaus wrote, that “each individual possesses a divine spark and salvation consists in the liberation of that divine spark from the body and from the particularities of its constraints in history and cultural space”. Bloom, in turn, wrote: “Unlike most countries, [Americans] have no overt national religion; but a partly concealed one has been developing among us for two centuries now. It is almost purely experimental, and despite its insistences [to the contrary], it is scarcely Christian in any traditional way. A religion of the self burgeons, under many names, and seeks to know its own inwardness, in isolation. What the American self has found, since about 1800, is its own freedom – from the world, from time, from other selves”. Quoted in R. J. Neuhaus, *Christ without Culture*..., p. 59.

¹³⁸ A good analysis of that attitude can be found in K. Minogue, *The Epicureans*, [in:] *Survival of Culture: Permanent Values in a Virtual Age*, ed. H. Kramer, Chicago 2002.

¹³⁹ Neuhaus’ stance was close, of course, to C. S. Lewis’ stance in *Mere Christianity*, when the latter stated that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, whose claim was either true or false: “Jesus may be a liar or a lunatic, or he may be the Lord, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. You must make a choice. When Jesus is just a human teacher, and the imperial self is the agency of getting to the core of existence than we have here a kind of Pelagianism, in a secular garb, one of the greatest Christian heresies”. Quoted in: C. C. Campbell, *Jesus Christ Superfluous*, “First Things”, April 2005, p. 45.

these and many other ways, the case is advanced that Christianity is a public proposal within the realm of authentically public discourse, and requiring decisions of immeasurable consequences, both personal and cultural. In different times and in different places, the Church has understood its relationship to culture in different ways. There is Christ against culture, the Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ transforming culture. H. Richard Niebuhr's useful taxonomy can be expanded and modified. The one model that is not possible, except by deluding ourselves and betraying the Church's proposal to the world, is Christ without culture.¹⁴⁰

Neuhaus puts his argument in a historical context, showing how the move of Protestant evangelicals into politics was essentially a self-defensive action, which alarmed liberal, progressive mainline/oldline Protestant Churches and the progressive wing of the Catholic Church as well as the secular, post 1968 liberals.¹⁴¹ The mainline, liberal Churches were surprised that the fundamentalist and evangelical Protestants entered politics, which they had left in the aftermath of their defeat in the Scopes Trial of 1925.¹⁴² The consequences of the split reached far beyond the churches, since it constituted one of the first instances in America of a culture war. Fundamentalism itself has been associated with "bigotry, intolerance, and abysmal ignorance" and with a subconscious fear of it being obsessed with the "theocratic" order in America.¹⁴³ But while those who controlled the "commanding heights of culture" were not looking, fundamentalists spent decades rebuilding their morale and institutions until, toward the end of World War II, they were confident enough to reappear in public, now calling themselves not fundamentalists but "neo-evangelicals". Within a fairly short time, the "neo" was dropped and America was faced with a maddeningly diverse and rapidly growing network of churches, "parachurch" movements, and entrepreneurial spiritual empires referred to as evangelical Protestantism or – with increasing frequency – just evangelicalism.

However, many of them prefer to be identified simply as "Christian".¹⁴⁴

In principle, the victorious mainline/oldline Protestant churches advocated a connection between faith and action, including political action, arguing that religio-

¹⁴⁰ R. J. Neuhaus, *Christ without Culture*..., p. 59–60.

¹⁴¹ See on that: I. Kristol, *Taking the Religious Conservatives Seriously*, [in:] *Disciples and Democracy: Religious Conservatives and the Future of American Democracy*, ed. M. Cromartie, Washington DC 2005, p. VII–VIII.

¹⁴² The term 'fundamentalist' was connected with a series of monographs entitled *The Fundamentals*. They were written between 1910–1915 by scholars at major universities in Germany, Scotland and England, and focused on the erosion of Christian doctrine by certain forms of 'biblical criticism' and the implications of the naturalist interpretations of the Darwinian theory of evolution for the Biblical message. However, in the 1920's, H. L. Mencken and others derided fundamentalists as 'yokels', 'rustic ignoramuses' and 'anthropoid rabble' (and used other quasi-racist epithets as well) and this stereotype stuck. Since then, the battle has continued between 'modernists' or liberal 'social gospel' churches, as well as secular liberals on the one side and the 'fundamentalists' on the other. The fundamentalists lost the fight over the control of the oldline churches and were forced out from public life and consigned to the niche of backward, rural regions, mainly in the South.

¹⁴³ R. J. Neuhaus, *Catholic Matters: Confusion, Controversy, and the Splendor of Truth*, New York 2006, p. 6–7.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 7–8.

us convictions could not be relegated to one sphere and political activities to another. But Christian faith was now mainly focused on social justice. The key elements of this “social gospel” activity for justice, however, began to be associated with the aims of liberal America, including a recognition of a democratic liberal regime as the best regime in which Christian justice could be realized, and freedom, including religious freedom, secured. This reasoning was based on a conviction that in a democratic society only individual social actions could make a real difference. Metaphysical, pietistic concerns were to be relegated to a second division. The progress of the Christian “social gospel” in congruence with the American democratic regime was the aim. Criticism of those who maintained no particular social or political responsibilities became the standard policy of the mainstream Protestant churches.¹⁴⁵ Pietistic relegation of salvation to the individual’s relation with God – as advocated by the fundamentalists and evangelicals – betrayed the basic Christian claim, according to the mainline Protestant churches, that God was the God of all creation and still creating the world in time, whose tool was a democratic liberal state realizing the goals of progressive Christianity. Indifference to injustices, social and political, was condemned and a call to action made it easy to claim that the American regime was fulfilling the conditions for such actions, making the “world safe for democracy”.

Pietists responded by appealing to their theological convictions and the Constitutional “wall of separation between church and state”, claiming that while upholding freedom of religion, the church “claims no competency in matters political”.¹⁴⁶ But such an interpretation, claimed the progressives, was drastically individualistic, and the First Amendment did not prohibit Christians, both as individuals and institutionally in churches, from influencing their societies or governments. Suddenly in the 70s the message of Christian political activity reached the fundamentalist Christians, who emerged from their “caves” and entered politics in the name of making a better society. The mainstream stance won, but to the surprise of the mainline Protestant churches and the horror of secular liberals. The mainstream Protestant attitude won in the most forgotten “backwater” of American Christianity, among people with anachronistic – so the mainstream Protestants thought – theology and reactionary social policies. It was

[...] not a victory they [were] celebrating. For it turn[ed] out that once politically inactive Christians became active, the causes they supported were not those the mainstream wanted or supported. The temptation [has been] to defeat this new political activism by using the slogans of the past, that ‘religion and politics do not mix’, or that ‘one should not try to force one’s religious views on anyone through public policy’ but to do so was to go against the position the mainstream has been arguing for years.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ For an excellent exposition of this process, see R. M. Gamble, *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation*, Wilmington 2003, p. 49–68.

¹⁴⁶ S. Hauerwas, *A Christian Critique of Christian America*, [in:] *The Hauerwas Reader*, eds. J. Berkman, M. Cartwright, Durham 2001, p. 462.

¹⁴⁷ S. Haurewas, *A Christian Critique...*, p. 463.

This was so because this entrance into politics was not in the name of “justice”, “progress”, or a “cause”, which was defined by liberals and mainline Protestant churches as the only legitimate mode of public engagement.¹⁴⁸ The liberals, or by European standards, the liberal left, who monopolized and redefined the meaning of liberalism after 1968 to incorporate into it ideas of “emancipation” and the anthropology of the imperial self, battled the conservative Christian Right on ideological and constitutional grounds. Ideologically, they thought their idea of progressive politics was the only legitimate one. Constitutionally, the participation of the Religious Right (mainly evangelicals, but also conservative Catholics, and later some orthodox Jews) threatened the allegedly established tradition of the separation of state and religion. Religion was to be banned for constitutional reasons from the public square, which was to be devoid of religiously grounded arguments and values. A more sinister justification for such a radical separation, a.k.a. elimination of religion from the public square, gradually entered the public language following the “Engels vs. Vitale” Supreme Court decision of 1947, which, contrary to the American constitutional understanding defined religion as uniquely problematic politically and morally in a liberal democracy. The latter, defined as an ideal regime, was to realize the only progressive moral vision, to which all churches should be subject, as indeed the mainline churches had been, with their “social gospel” and therapeutic, spiritual teachings. Because religion allegedly fostered divisiveness, the liberal state had to keep it private, or otherwise problems would abound.¹⁴⁹ Behind such thinking, there was a much more dangerous idea that religion could function under such conditions as the state sovereign would allow it to function, meaning that religion was a province of state sovereignty, not a force outside of it – essentially the ancient Roman concept of religion. But from the Christian point of view, the ways in which Caesar – or the state or any other worldly institution – acted was to be subjected to outside moral judgment, the very principle destroying political tyranny *per se*.

Neuhaus’s “The Naked Public Square” located itself at the intersection of these discussions, with an assertion of public, non-liberal Christian activism as a necessary ingredient. He saw the bankruptcy of the mainline liberal churches, which had abandoned Christian orthodoxy and more or less become departments of liberal progressive causes. The liberal democracy Neuhaus had in mind was not the monistic type, which began to be understood as the definitive type post-1968. Writing in the tradition of Reinhold Niebuhr and John Courtney Murray, he did not consider liberal-democratic political theory to be the best. Neuhaus, as an Augustinian, understood it as approximately the best arrangement so far – a good way of realizing goals most suited to forming the proper consciences of people. Democracy was a value dependent on the pre-political sources of its successful, freedom-oriented operation. Chri-

¹⁴⁸ For instance, to claim as Jerry Falwell of the “Moral Majority” that he was leading the same fight for justice as Martin Luther King was once leading was an abhorrent thing for mainline “social gospel” churches, let alone secular liberals.

¹⁴⁹ See: G. V. Bradley, *Religious Liberty in the American Republic*, Washington 2008, p. 113–120.

stianity was here the most important source, thwarting the emergence of the monistic sovereign state. It was precisely this evolution of liberal democracy in the wake of the 1968 transformation which made such a monistic type of a regime with a total sovereignty over the lives of citizens, including the spiritual sphere, possible.

For Niebuhr, democracy was the best regime which institutionalized Christian social philosophy. He opposed the limited understanding of Christian doctrine in relation to the liberal state as practised by the theologians and the Protestant mainline churches, and the socially optimistic idea that liberal progress was an ally of Christianity. Democracy was at this point in history just the most appropriate form of government imaginable. What he criticized was the inadequate liberal justification for a democratic regime, which the mainline Protestant Christianity accepted with its progressive optimism, disregarding the realistic account of human nature by orthodox Christianity.¹⁵⁰ For Murray, America became an important subject of the Christian project: since the Declaration of Independence, the foundational document of America had been Christian, in fact Catholic, in character. The American regime was thus supported best when Christian anthropology and ethics provided it with the necessary basis for its successful operation. America, if it strayed from this ideal, could be amenable to Catholic social theory “by interpreting the separation of church and state as a confession by the state of its incompetence in matters of religion”.¹⁵¹ For Murray, American democracy could be sustained only by the Catholic theory of natural law, also written in the Declaration, since its moral and political identity defined by natural law is antecedent to its actual constitutional framework. It could be sustained only by the Catholic theory of natural law, because it was by implication the only alternative to the alienating, destructive individualism of Locke and Hobbes.¹⁵² Neuhaus shared Niebuhr’s and Murray’s approach to public life, democracy

¹⁵⁰ For Niebuhr, the “Christian view of human nature was more adequate for the development of a democratic society than either the optimism with which democracy has become historically associated or the moral cynicism which inclines human communities to tyrannical political strategies”. R. Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, New York 1944, p. XIII. Niebuhr remained throughout World War II a firm supporter of democracy as a social system that best embodies the Christian understanding of man, although he dampened down his idolization of it by the end of the war; see also S. Hauerwas, *A Christian Critique of Christian America...*, p. 466; for a criticism of Niebuhr’s thinking, which was interpreted to be overly optimistic and idolatrous towards democracy, despite his disclaimers – a criticism which was leveled against Neuhaus too – see R. Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography*, New York 1985, p. 22.

¹⁵¹ S. Hauerwas, *A Christian Critique of Christian America...*, p. 467; see J. C. Murray’s articles, *The Church and Totalitarian Democracy* and *Leo XIII: Separation of Church and State*, “Theological Studies” 1953, No. 13–14. At the same time Catholics could be amenable to America, since Catholics “can enthusiastically support democracy as an imaginative solution to the problem of religious pluralism”; the argument was developed in J. C. Murray’s book *We Hold These Truths*, New York, p. 60.

¹⁵² J. C. Murray, *We Hold These Truths...*, p. 308; it is interesting that Murray’s book was published in 1956, one year after Leo Strauss’s *Natural Right in History*, in which he argued that America is indeed Lockean and Hobbesian, that the natural law was rejected by the Founding Fathers in favour of natural rights, individualistic and autonomous, and that the liberal regime was in need of support because of its shortcomings.

and America, but his argument was more nuanced. Neuhaus asserted that culture was at the root of politics, and religion was the root of culture. The primacy of politics over culture was disastrous; it essentially meant a refusal to recognize a normative, universally bound ethic, a reality of public virtue as standing above the political command.¹⁵³

Neuhaus pointed out that the crisis of liberal democracy in America stemmed from the fact that religion had been excluded from public life. This was an instance of an individual being isolated from the mediating structures, with no power to resist the omnipotent, bureaucratic state.¹⁵⁴ This is not necessarily a novel idea. It was visible in Tocqueville and articulated earlier by Hegel.¹⁵⁵ To prevent the totalitarian pretensions of the bureaucratic, liberal state aiming at homogenizing natural communities, including communities of faith, it was necessary, claimed Neuhaus, to mend the

[...] rupture between public policy and moral sentiment. But the only moral sentiment of public effect is the sentiment that is embodied in and reinforced by living tradition. There are no a-religious moral traditions of public, or at least of democratic, force in American life. This is not to say that morality must be embodied in religion nor that the whole of religion is morality. It is to say that, among the American people, religion and morality are conjoined. With the effective disestablishment of the coercive power of religion, religion has become part of culture. So close is the union that they are sometimes indistinguishable. Religion in our popular life is the morality-bearing part of culture, and in that sense the heart of culture.¹⁵⁶

This challenge of the bureaucratic pretensions of the monistic liberal state has been powerful enough to change culture and establish its own “religion” of alleged secular “neutrality”. There have been philosophical and legal efforts to “isolate and exclude the religious dimension of culture”. The liberal state tries to shape culture in order to cleanse it of religious content and to be the source of “compulsory authority”. It has used its institutions, for instance, the judicial system or public state education, since the 18th century. This is the logic of monistic sovereignty, speeded up by the 1968 revolution when the state became an agent of “liberation” from all real and imaginable “oppressions”, including the oppression of culture, which has been defined as exclusively a province of power. After 1968, classical liberalism incorporated and used this “liberation” ideology to “liberate” all kinds of “oppressed” minorities, not only legally but culturally, also changing “oppressive” language constructs. The state has collaborated here with other public institutions like the media. They aim at power, not information any more. In such a situation those

¹⁵³ In the *Naked Public Square* Neuhaus deliberately and provocatively shows how both Martin Luther King Jr. and Jerry Falwell, both in their own time, challenged the status quo and state pretensions to omnipotence.

¹⁵⁴ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square...*, p. 83–86.

¹⁵⁵ For Hegel “absolute freedom requires homogeneity. It cannot brook differences which would prevent everyone participating totally in the decisions of the society. It requires some near unanimity of will to emerge from this deliberation, for otherwise the majority would just be imposing its will on the minority and freedom would not be universal”. Ch. Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, Cambridge 1979, p. 114–115; S. Hauerwas, *A Christian Critique of Christian America...*, p. 468.

¹⁵⁶ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square...*, p. 154–155.

[...] who desire a neatly unitary social order, the most problematic ‘loose cannon’ on the deck is religion. That is because, of all institutions in society, only religion can invoke against the state a transcendent authority and have its invocation seconded by ‘the people’ to whom a democratic state is presumably accountable. For the state to be secured from such challenge, religion must be redefined as a private, emphatically *not* public, phenomenon. In addition, because truly value-less existence is impossible for persons or societies, the state must displace religion as the generator and bearer of values. Therefore it must screen out of public discourse and decision-making those values too closely associated with religion, lest public recognition be given to a source of moral authority other than the state itself. In the eyes of the state the dangerous child today is not the child who points out that the emperor has no clothes but the child who sees that the emperor’s garments of moral authority have been stolen from the religion he has sent into exile from the public square.¹⁵⁷

There were critics claiming that Neuhaus’s criticism was powerful but he did not provide an adequate response, since he continued to “support the political and economic presumptions that are the source of the difficulty”.¹⁵⁸ Whatever the shortcomings of the book, it shattered the complacency of the liberal world. The public response to it surprised even Neuhaus. The book defined a new language in the public discourse about politics and religion. Shortly before his death, Neuhaus stated that the book was an argument and like most arguments it

[...] had to wait its time to get a hearing. Books that become something of a point of reference appear at the edge of a time when a lot of people are already persuaded of the argument but have not quite put it together. The ‘Aha! Experience’ That’s what I’ve been thinking”. [But] those who are unsympathetic to the argument are more likely to say, That’s just what I suspected *they* were thinking. Who was the ‘we’ and who the ‘they’ [in 1984]. ‘We’ were then, and, for the most part, still are, liberals of one kind or another. The then-emerging ‘they’ was what was called and is still called ‘the religious right’. The book was in large part a response to the question: What are ‘they’ saying that ‘we’ got wrong, and what should be done about it? [Today] many of those who were once ‘they’ are now ‘we’. The growing public influence of politically engaged conservative Christians has frequently been accompanied by an immersion in the theory and practice of democratic politics. Theirs is no longer simply an aggressive defense against those who once made up the rules that excluded them. [Then], the very phrase ‘religion and public life’ was highly controversial. In that combination they were fighting words. Today there are numerous institutes, academic centers, and publications established on the almost taken for granted premise that we cannot understand this society or sustain this polity without engaging the cultural and religious dynamics that shape the “We the people” that is the locus of political sovereignty. [But] many of the ‘we’ are [today] less worried about being viewed as ‘they’. Those who are most militantly committed to the ideology of the naked public square have of late taken to raising alarms about the threat of ‘neoconservatives’, ‘theoconservatives’, and even of ‘theocrats’. This is for the most part the last

¹⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 155.

¹⁵⁸ S. Haurewas, *A Christian Critique of Christian America...*, p. 468. This criticism may be correct but it does not point out that the main object of Neuhaus’s criticism is the omnipotent sovereign state created in the 15–16th century. He rightly recognized that Christianity, because of the Augustinian distinction, might be the only barrier to its totalitarian pretensions. What should be the practical means of securing the plurality of autonomous worlds is another matter. It might be that Neuhaus’s proposition, including the idealistic view that people of good will should engage in civil argument over the common good, is utopian. But the essence of his analysis – the danger of modern sovereignty – is correct. He should be more honest and admit that Christianity, especially the Catholic Church, is the only barrier to such a sovereignty, opposed by the secular liberal state because it is exactly the only contender worthy of the name.

gaps – although it may be a very long last gap – of those who would deny the self-evident truth that this constitutional order is not sustainable apart from the cultural, moral, and religious expression of the self-evident truths on which it is founded.¹⁵⁹

Neuhaus challenged the “secular city” as the reigning ideology of the post-1968 liberal democratic order. Its implications, if not countered, would create a public – and as a consequence – private world destined to become, as one of the commentators said, like Narnia under the rule of the White Queen: a place where “there is always winter but never Christmas”, never hope and never freedom.¹⁶⁰ Neuhaus’s goal was not to replace the “secular city”, as his ideological opponents stated, with a “religious city”. The “naked public square” was not to be replaced with the “sacred public square”. He was a staunch believer in religious freedom, deliberative democracy and political equality. The idea of any establishment of religion was for him tantamount to a heretical nullification of the crucial Christian distinction between *sacrum* and *profanum*, the City of Man and the City of God, the highest form of idolatry. But for the same reasons, he opposed the pseudo-religion of modern ideologies, of which liberal monistic secularism was one. Religious theocracy was no different in kind from the secular liberal “theocracy” of the self-imposed elites as alleged bearers of wisdom about the meaning of reality, trying to impose this monistic ideology as the official state “religion”. His was the ideal of the civic, republican public square in which all voices are examined within a civilized circle of moral conversation. In this public square, religiously informed reason bearing an insight into the reality of human existence is recognized as a legitimate voice of conversation, without which human self-understanding is truncated and without which justice and human happiness are not possible.

In such a liberal civic public square, people do not split their personalities into allegedly “neutral”, “unencumbered” rational selves. This is a classical case of John Rawls “original position”. The public space of “neutral” selves is a totally utopian project in need of state bureaucracy paternalism. In the case of religious people, it would require a radical separation of their religiously informed consciences from their “rationally neutral” informed and shaped consciences. This is, claimed Neuhaus, a utopian, morally artificial and politically dangerous project. People as personalities shaped by their cultures – at the root of which is a religious understanding of reality which is not a “false consciousness” but a legitimate way of gaining an insight into the reality of human life – should, according to Neuhaus, draw on wisdom from every tradition they come from, to order life according to the common good as decently as they can. A proper ordering of public life is thus, pointed out Neuhaus, a profoundly moral enterprise applied to the cultural and political arrangement of people. Religiously informed insights are crucial to it and must be recognized as a legitimate part

¹⁵⁹ R. J. Neuhaus, *Afterword*, [in:] *The Naked Public Square Reconsidered: Religion and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Ch. Wolfe, Wilmington 2009, p. 189–190.

¹⁶⁰ B. Miner in edited by him *Good Order: Right Answers to Contemporary Questions*, New York 1995, p. 58.

of the public square through a democratically exercised conversation of people who have such insights. This is the meaning of Neuhaus's often repeated adage, taken from Elliott, that "Culture is the root of politics, and religion is the root of culture". Neuhaus is also led by an Augustinian belief that public life is nothing, if it does not lead people to such a conversation which best shapes their moral consciences, so they can justly order their lives together, pursue the common good and lead meaningful lives – by which he means reaching the best possible understanding of the Whole, the truth of Being. His is the heroic conviction that

[...] whenever you are as certain about something as I am, go forward with me; whenever you hesitate, seek with me; whenever you discover that you have gone wrong, come back to me; or, if I have gone wrong, call me back to you. In this way, we will travel along the street of love together as we make our way toward Him of whom it is said, 'Seek His face always'.¹⁶¹

For Neuhaus, the so-called "strict separationism" between religion and the public square – the aim of the liberal secularists – was totalitarian in its implications. They would eventually have to use power, real or symbolic, judicial or executive, cutting people off from their chances of truly understanding their predicament. For instance, the judicial disenfranchisement of people of faith from participation in public life only if they violate their personal beliefs constitutes an imposition of idolatrous liberal ideological orthodoxy as a new "religion". The separation of the church from the state was taken for granted by Neuhaus. His aim was not a "Christian America" – an accusation he adamantly rejected. The state should not tell the religious communities how to perceive reality, he claimed, and the religious communities should not operate government institutions. His message, as one observer noted, coming from his teachers Rabbi Heschel and Martin Luther King, was that "the separation of church and state should never be twisted to mean the separation of religion and religiously informed moral witness from public life".¹⁶²

Ostensibly, Neuhaus – still a Lutheran pastor – began with a nuanced assessment of the political ascent of the Christian Right, warning against both simple-minded denunciation and advocacy of it.¹⁶³ But his concerns in the "Naked Public Square" were manifold, revolving around the collapse of public virtues in America and the failure of the Protestant "mainline" churches to confront it effectively, and also the rise of "moral majoritarianism" as a kind of populist religiosity. He was critical of American religiosity and its inability to confront the problems of morality and demo-

¹⁶¹ St Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 1, 5. Not coincidentally, this was the very last quotation which Neuhaus chose in his very last text he published before death. R. J. Neuhaus, *Afterword...*, p. 193.

¹⁶² R.P. George, *Foreword*, [in:] *The Naked Public Square Reconsidered...*, p. XI.

¹⁶³ Neuhaus sided with the evangelicals in their opposition to a devaluation of the sacred in the name of scientism, and secularism, including legal secularism as ideology, while parted ways on science as such. For instance, distancing himself from their teaching on evolution, he was against teaching it as a proof of the materialist origins of reality – that is evolution taught as ideology derived from a scientific fact. See: N. Feldman, *Divided by God: America's Church – State Problem And What We Should Do About It*, New York 2005.

cracy in the late liberal era. He had reservations about the populist ascendancy of the Christian Right, especially the Moral Majority of Jerry Falwell, in the public square, but did not object to linking it to the civil rights struggles of Martin Luther King. Such analogies surprised and offended many. However, as Neuhaus pointed out, they were in the same category as religious American protesters – a religiously motivated response to an injustice in the public sphere. They were dissimilar figures, their analyses differed, and in the civil rights struggle in the fifties and sixties they disagreed for some time, with Falwell acknowledging later his moral wrong. But they were similar in one fundamental sense. Both

[...] disrupt the business of secular America by an appeal to religiously based public values. Both are profoundly patriotic figures. King's dream was of America as an exemplar of racial and social justice, an anticipation of that 'beloved community' promised by God. Current political preachers are alike in proposing a vision of public virtue and that vision is religiously based. The assertion that binds together otherwise different causes is the claim that only a transcendent, a religious vision, can turn society from certain disaster and toward the fulfillment of its destiny. In this connection 'destiny' is but another word for purpose. From whatever point on the political spectrum such an assertion is made, it challenges the conventional wisdom that America is a secular society. In recent decades we have become accustomed to believe that of course America is a secular society. That, in the minds of many, is what is meant by the separation of church and state. But this way of thinking is of relatively recent vintage. Such a religious evacuation of the public square cannot be sustained, either in concept or in practice. When religion in any traditional or recognizable form is excluded from the public square, it does not mean that the public square is in fact naked. This is the other side of the naked public square metaphor. When recognizable religion is excluded, the vacuum will be filled by ersatz religion, by religion bootlegged into public space under other names.¹⁶⁴

Neuhaus recognized the importance of the Moral Majority resurgence. The crudeness, theological confusions, and social and moral sins of its message did not obliterate the fact that it had raised the fundamental issue of religion as a barrier against the totalitarian pretensions of the modern liberal state. Previously, classical liberals had valued religion in the public square as an indispensable part of maintaining American freedom. However, not any more. But Neuhaus considered the Moral Majority as a good, even if crude, way of bringing the larger issue of religion into public life, and at the same time raising the issue of freedom in a liberal society. However, the crude Moral Majority public principles needed to be converted into principles accessible to the public at large. He postulated that the

[...] publicly assertive religious forces will have to learn that the remedy for the naked public square is not naked religion in public. They will have to develop a mediating language by which ultimate truths can be related to the penultimate and prepenultimate questions of political and legal content. In our several traditions, there are rich conceptual resources for the development of such mediating language – whether concepts be called natural law, common grace, general revelation, or the order of creation. Such a civil engagement of secular and religious forces could produce a new public philosophy to sustain this American experiment in liberal democracy. The result may not be that we would agree with one another. Indeed there may be more disagreement. But at least we would know what we are di-

¹⁶⁴ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*..., p. 78–80.

sagreeing about, namely, different accounts of the transcendental good by which we might order our life together. Contra [some judges] and legions of others, democracy is not served by evading the question of the good. Democracy becomes a political community worthy of moral actors only when we engage the question of the good.¹⁶⁵

Neuhaus criticized the Christian Right less for theological reasons than for reasons of political prudence and out of a sheer aesthetic dislike of its bluntness and its sometimes repugnant public activities.¹⁶⁶ This amounted to a politicization of a religious cause. But he lauded the Christian Right for its concern over a debased American culture and public morality: “the issue of the proper relation between church and state, which he believe[d] [was] very much out of balance”.¹⁶⁷ The Christian Right was correct in rebelling against the monistic pretences of the liberal state, confining religious people to the ghetto of their private convictions, but was wrong if it wanted to win over a public without persuading others why it was dangerous for freedom and democracy to push religion out of the public square, and why it was beneficial for the secularists to engage in conversation with them. At issue was communication, a need to engage society in a language comprehensible enough to become an effective medium of searching for the common good in a civilized way. When the Religious Right

[...] enter the public arena, New Right leaders [should] not insist that everyone there must pass a test of Judeo-Christian moral orthodoxy. They do insist that they will not check their own beliefs in the cloakroom before entering. No longer content to be smugglers, they are in open rebellion against the border patrols that would maintain and even intensify the line between sacred and secular.¹⁶⁸

Whatever its immediate policies, pointed out Neuhaus, the political and theological dilemmas of the religious New Right stem from the fact that it

[...] wants to enter the political arena making public claims on the basis of private truths. The integrity of politics itself requires that such a proposal be resisted. Public decisions must be made by arguments that are public in character. A public argument is transsubjective. It is not derived from sources of revelation or disposition that are essentially private and arbitrary. The perplexity of fundamentalism in public is that its self-understanding is premised upon a view of religion that is emphatically not public in character. Fundamentalism is the religious variant of what Alasdair MacIntyre calls ‘modern emotivism’. By emotivism is meant that state of affairs in which every moral statement is simply a statement of private preference. It has no inherently normative or public force.¹⁶⁹

Such emotivism may have force in the public arena, for instance winning elections from time to time. But this is just politics, civil war carried on by other means

¹⁶⁵ Idem, *Nihilism without the Abyss: Law, Rights, and Transcendent Good*, as quoted in: S. Hau-erwas, *A Christian Critique of Christian America...*, p. 469.

¹⁶⁶ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square...*, p. 6.

¹⁶⁷ J. Caiazza, *The American Religion in Decline: Five Views*, “The Political Science Reviewer” 2010, Vol. 39, p. 200.

¹⁶⁸ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square...*, p. 36.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

The Religious Right mobilizes against secular humanists and the “naked public square”, when in fact it is

[...] an indispensable collaborator in that creation. By separating public argument from private belief, by building a wall of strict separationism between faith and reason, such fundamentalist religion ratifies and reinforces the conclusions of militant secularism. The religious new right [should] take a leaf from the manual of an earlier Christian liberalism that, despite differences in religious belief, there is a core consensus on what is moral. This is the much discussed ‘moral agenda’ on which, presumably, Christians of all stripes, even nonbelievers, can come together. The issues themselves may be penultimate or less, but their resolution requires a publicly discussable sense of more ultimate truths that serve as points of reference in guiding our agreements and disagreements. Such resolution requires a public ethic that we do not now possess.¹⁷⁰

For Neuhaus, the biblical anthropological vision ultimately provided the surest guarantee of freedom for all, religious and nonreligious, whatever the historical vicissitudes of Christianity. The elimination of religion, a.k.a. Christianity, from the public discourse was thus contrary both to the American identity and the aims of the liberal project of equal rights in freedom. The American experiment guarantees freedom because it is rooted in a transcendent anthropological vision. This vision is still present in America, even if not overtly conceptualized, but it

[...] is not contentless. Both historically and in present sociological fact, it is religiously specific, it refers to the Judeo-Christian tradition. The acknowledgment of this reality is in the most particular interest of the considerable number of Americans who do not subscribe to that tradition in any conscious manner. And that is because it is precisely by the authority of that tradition that the rights of dissent are protected.¹⁷¹

Neuhaus acknowledged that the Religious Right rebelled against secularism, subverting this tradition. But the understanding of the language of and reason for the rebellion – as well as who was and who was not an ally – was limited. Many of them did not understand that democratic dissent is also mandated by biblical faith. It seemed to them that if Christian faith was the absolute truth, then all citizens

[...] ought to subscribe to it and public life ought to be ordered according to that truth. This universal mission should be carried out by persuasion, if possible, and (although few would put it so bluntly) by coercion, if necessary. To those who think in this way, talk about democracy and diversity as part of the divine interest seems to undercut the universal mission of the church. This is a perennial problem in Christian thinking. Diversity in belief is inherent in, and not accidental to, the divine purpose. That some do not believe is not necessarily evidence that the entirety of God’s purpose is limited to our programs, including our programs of evangelism. The democratic sense of accountability is also a check upon the pretensions of the church. The basic lesson, which Christians must learn again and again, is that the church is not the kingdom of God. The disappointment was understandable. If the church is the same as the kingdom of God, we have no reason to ‘seek first the kingdom’, for the Church is undoubtedly already here. The grand inquisitors of our day, whether of the left or the right, are as impatient as was Dostoyevsky’s with limitations of their authority. Talk about Christian America will continue to frighten many sensible

¹⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

¹⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 121.

people until Christians make clear that they welcome and cultivate such limitation of their authority. People will continue to seek in secularity their safety from religious tyranny until Christians believably propose that there is greater safety under a sacred canopy that brings all institutions and belief systems, and most particularly religion, under judgment. The canopy is that to which Judeo-Christian religion points. Religion bears witness to it but our religion is not to be equated with it. On the other hand, the canopy is a canopy, it is not mere ‘emptiness’ [but] promises and judgments revealed in the biblical story. It is not Hinduism or Taoism. Historically and in present democratic judgement, it is the biblical story. That story is not over yet. We act in a sense of provisionality and historical modesty. Only as the Church, in its own teaching and life, cultivates this sense of provisionality and modesty will religion seem less threatening to those who would now bar it from the public square. Unfortunately, there are those who insist upon what they think of as a full-blooded and aggressive version of the Christian mission.¹⁷²

Neuhaus rejected relativism and acknowledged that Christians must risk ridicule when saying that they do indeed know the most important truth about personal and cosmic salvation, but at the same time this did not mean that

[...] to know the truth is not the same as claiming to have the truth in the sense of mastering or possessing it. We are subject to the truth we possess, and therefore do not possess it in the sense of mastery. Christians, if they are faithful, seek no triumph [of] earthly rule over all things. The cultured despisers of religion need no longer see the sacred canopy as an instrument of closure or coercion, rather it can be seen for what it is: the transcendent truth that both legitimizes and makes necessary the cultivation of democratic diversity. Then it will be seen that secularism’s denial or attempted dismantling of the canopy removes what is finally the only moral check upon people who would repress those who do not subscribe to *their* truth.¹⁷³

Religious groups such as the Moral Majority, of course, touched a fundamental nerve of American liberal culture, showing its “pervasive contradiction”. This contradiction stemmed from a fissure, Neuhaus pointed out, between democratic ideals and the exclusion after World War II of the crucial values of the American people grounded in religious beliefs. Acknowledging the importance of the Religious Right in setting off the alarm, it itself

[...] was at the heart alarming. Fundamentalist morality, which is derived from beliefs that cannot be submitted to examination by public reason, is essentially a private morality. If enough people who share that morality are mobilized, it can score victories in the public arena. But every such victory is a setback in the search for a public ethic. A serviceable public ethic is not somewhere in our past, just waiting to be found and reinstalled. From the past there may be clues to the reconstruction [of it] for our time. In exploring this possibility we should [have] hope that the [new religious right] may become partners in that reconstruction.¹⁷⁴

Neuhaus noticed a crisis in mainline Protestant liberalism stemming from its failure to create such a “serviceable public ethic”, especially in its idolatrous form of equating “Christian America” with “democratic America”. By the end of the 20th century efforts in that direction had been spent. But his concern was mainly the Chri-

¹⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 122–123.

¹⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 124.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

stian Right. The American experiment in democracy was not without historically and sociologically specific Judeo-Christian content, but its presentation as a form of political regime constituted a form of idolatry and scared away secularists.¹⁷⁵ Neuhaus rejected this attempt, which had reappeared amongst sections of the Christian Right. Counting himself among the majority of Christians in America, he noted that they “have the gravest reservations about the idea of ‘Christian America’”. It always makes sense to speak cautiously about America as a Christian society in terms of historical forces, ideas, and demography. But no society is worthy of the name of Christ, except that society which is the church, and then it is worthy only by virtue of being made worthy through the grace of God in Christ”.¹⁷⁶

But the secular left also failed to create a “serviceable public ethic”. Their public ethic is inadequate on its own terms. While pushing for the “naked square”, it is at the same time perversely “Christianizing” the social order, using such terms as justice, equality and sustainability, but without the Christian anthropology behind them. In the case of the liberal Protestant mainline, their churches’ “social gospel” program accepted such a goal – to achieve “Christianizing” of the economic order – as their mission. The trouble with the liberal Protestant mainline churches was, pointed out Neuhaus, that if such a goal “could in fact be achieved. What then is the mission of the church?”¹⁷⁷ In the case of the secular liberal-left, the problem does not stem from a confusion of realms, as is the case with the liberal Protestant churches, but from their anthropological mistake and the social orders proposed by it. Neuhaus showed how the most popular liberal theory of secular “public ethic”, based on the theory of justice as fairness by John Rawls, was inadequate. He recognized the novelty of Rawls’ “A Theory of Justice” and the recovery of political philosophy. Nevertheless, Rawls

[...] assumes a rather narrow definition of the rational person. Antecedent and abstract choices are qualitatively and substantively different from choices made in particular circumstances. It is by no means obvious that people would choose equality as the chief goal; they might well prefer some other personal or social excellence. Rawls’ ‘sense of fairness’ would not necessarily be the controlling moral sentiment – a sense of obligation, of altruism, or of achieving some collective purpose might well have priority. It is argued that, while Rawls’ theory is on the surface relentlessly individualistic, it in fact destroys the individual by depriving him of all those personal particularities that are the essence of being an individual.¹⁷⁸

For Neuhaus, Rawls’ theory of justice was riddled with a substantial amount of ignorance and selfishness, a noble intention gone sour. Beyond Rawls’ “veil of

¹⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 121; on the scare which secularists spread indiscriminately against the Christian Right, whether of the Moral Majority or Neuhaus type, see, for instance, D. Linker, *Theocons: Secular America Under Siege*, New York 2006; also G. Wills, *A Country Ruled by Faith*, “The New York Review of Books” 2006, November 16, p. 8–32.

¹⁷⁶ R. J. Neuhaus, an unpublished paper “Democratic Morality: A Possibility”, as quoted in S. Hauerwas, *A Christian Critique of Christian America...*, p. 470.

¹⁷⁷ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square...*, p. 230–231.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 257–258.

ignorance” we have non-persons, people without history, tradition, vested interests, having no self-knowledge, no loves or fears, but also no dreams of transcendent purpose or duty. It is impossible to depict living people impartially, without their passions, that is their idiosyncrasies. Such a political and legal construct would be artificial and would sooner or later, if taken seriously, be totalitarian, with life being shaped by the principle of law seeking justice. Rawls thus subsumed life, noted Neuhaus, into an abstract idea of justice, removed from the world in which the legitimacy of law must be renewed. There is no history behind his “veil of ignorance”. Like many contemporary liberal theorists, he assumed a universe in which history and human life had been closed, but had finally arrived at an ideal ending point, repeating endlessly the same game beyond the “veil of ignorance”. In such a theory, real history does not exist, contingency is banned and no real change can happen. The world is composed of static entities. When allowed, change is simply a cyclical recurrence of the same old scheme, like the same tune of a jammed record. Nothing can be more alien, pointed out Neuhaus, to the Judeo-Christian tradition premised upon

[...] the concept of real history, real change, happening in an incomplete universe that is still awaiting its promised fulfillment. There is no alternative to history. Only in history can we address the problems of history. [Thus] the contrivance of a historyless idea of justice that miscarries such an idea will not serve [as a basis of ‘serviceable public ethic’] because it is impossibly exotic. The legitimacy of law in a democratic society depends upon the popular recognition of the connections between law and what people think life is and ought to be. [There are] limitations to theories of justice that cannot sustain a democratic consensus regarding the legitimacy of law.¹⁷⁹

The creation of a “serviceable public ethic” stood at the centre of Neuhaus’ subsequent public endeavours. Apart from his writings, there were the institutional undertakings: setting up “The Institute of Religion and Public Life”, the magazine “First Things” as well as efforts to form an ecumenical basis for such a public ethic in “The Evangelicals and Catholics Together” manifesto. His public ethic rejected the fallacy of the secularist culture, which excluded any indebtedness to religious thought, mainly Christian, even if it inherited its intuitions, habits of mind, heart and aspirations. For such a “serviceable public ethic” to be real, the secular culture has to recognize that, as Michel Novak wrote

[...] their own claim to universal superiority – the enlightened looming over those still walking in darkness was premature [and that] to be forced to choose between science and religion, or between the ways reason and the ways of faith, is not an adequate human choice. Better it is to take part in a prolonged, intelligent and respectful conversation across those outmoded ways of drawing lines.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 257–258. Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice* influenced generations of liberal post-1968 thinkers, devising an idea of human dignity as essentially a self-referential concept, with an ideology of liberal human rights as the universal basis of the liberal world order. The fallacy of such a self-referential anthropological perspective has been exposed by many, later in his life, even by Rawls himself. See: J. Kekes, *The Illusions of Egalitarianism...*; P. Manent, *The City of Men*, Ithaca 1998; M. J. Perry, *Toward a Theory of Human Rights: Religion, Law, Courts*, Cambridge 2007, p. 14–32.

¹⁸⁰ M. Novak, *Remembering the Secular Age*, “First Things”, June–July 2007, p. 40.

Of course, the problem with Neuhaus's argument was whether this effort was realistic and not stemming from a need to redefine American democracy with a hope of thwarting the new reigning anthropology of the imperial self of the post-1968 liberalism, recognized as the only legitimate public language, excluding any common moral goods, except in the utilitarian, or sensationalist sense. The assumed neutrality or objectivity of such of a liberal discourse is spurious.¹⁸¹ Neuhaus postulated a recovery of some substantive account of goods that make a good society possible. For that to happen the wishes, hopes and desires of real people have to be taken into account. Their religious convictions cannot be left behind when they participate in the public arena. They constitute the richness of the human species; they cannot be private, even if they are deeply personal. Some doubt whether the Christian Right which Neuhaus criticized differs so much from Neuhaus's in its postulate of reconstituting the social ethic on a Christian basis.¹⁸² They definitely share the same anthropological basis of the social order, and think that without it secular liberalism's theory of justice and rights cannot sustain itself. They differ in their way of conducting the argument, and the aims they want to achieve. Neuhaus wants to use the non-denominational language of natural law and reason to search for common ground. The Christian Right, an overwhelmingly Protestant phenomenon, disregards it.

Spinoza said that transcendence abhors a vacuum, and for Neuhaus there were reasons why the "naked public square" was dangerous. The term for him was an oxymoron; a new ideology would have to take the place of religion in the public square. For Neuhaus it was the "religion" of the state and its bureaucratic-intellectual new elite, a lethal threat to a self-governing society. The very nature of things would demand such an outcome, since

[...] if law and laws are not seen to be coherently related to basic presuppositions about right and wrong, good and evil, they will be condemned as illegitimate. After having excluded traditional religion, then, the legal and political trick is to address questions of right and wrong in a way that is not 'contaminated' by the label religious. The tortured reasoning required by the exclusion of identifiable religion is a puzzle to many, perhaps most, Americans. It may be that they are puzzled because they do not understand the requirements of a pluralistic society. Or that may be puzzled because they are more impressed by the claim that this is a democratic society. In a democratic society the public business is carried on in conversation with the actual values of people who are the society. There is among Americans a deep and widespread uneasiness about the denial of the obvious. The obvious is that, in some significant sense, this is a Christian people.¹⁸³

Neuhaus's aim was to show, in the tradition of Oresten Brownson, Reinhold Niebuhr and Murray, that a modern intellectual can think about religion in the public square in an intelligible language, engaging opponents in a universal, reasoned

¹⁸¹ For broader coverage, see J. Coleman, *An American Strategic Theology*, Ramsey NJ 1982, p. 197–198.

¹⁸² For instance, Stanley Hauerwas criticized both Neuhaus and the Religious Right, claiming that they constitute "a call for reconstituting Christian America". S. Hauerwas, *A Christian Critique of Christian America...*, p. 473.

¹⁸³ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square...*, p. 80–82.

argument accessible to all – not just showing gestures of irritation and using war-mongering tactics that are then justified in religious language as being a way of pre-empting the argument from the beginning. He knew the dangers of translating faith into a political agenda. It is characteristic that “First Things” never published any official editorial on contemporary political affairs. Neuhaus published his comments in a review in “The Public Square” in each volume, but not as an official stance. His interlocutors were extremely diverse. He wanted to hear what others had to say, because he wanted to think his way forward from shared convictions about first things, not backward from the happenstance of agreement about this or that political issue of the day. He understood religious freedom and the Christian public role in this way, repeating that “in the Christian tradition, being true to yourself means being true to the self that you are called to be”.¹⁸⁴ Neuhaus pointed out that the idea of the United States as a secular society was false and dangerous. It was false despite the Supreme Court’s interpretation since 1947 of the First Amendment as requiring a strict separation of the state from society.¹⁸⁵ Neuhaus stressed that the First Amendment was one unified structure. It did not create two separate rights from the anti-establishment clause and the freedom of religion clause. The First Amendment was put into the constitution so that the anti-establishment clause could guarantee the freedom of religion clause. The separation of the church from the state, as the first part of the First Amendment is usually referred to, was not put into the constitution to protect the state and the people from religion, but to protect religion and religious people from the state, and also to prevent the threat of the state machinery being captured by one of the warring Protestant sects, establishing a state religious monopoly against other denominations. The intention of the First Amendment was to separate religion from the state to prevent an official European-type state faith favoured by the federal government. But society was to be left free to exercise its religious freedom as a public affair, an exercise in legitimate citizenship.¹⁸⁶ This idea of the United States as a secular society was also dangerous politically since the values of the American people were rooted in overwhelmingly Christian religiosity. They might not tolerate an attempt by the Supreme Court to take from them this fundamental right and power of deciding how to organize their life together.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Quoted in R. Ponnuru, *The Gift of Lightheartedness*, “First Things”, April 2009, p. 57.

¹⁸⁵ Here the Court used the phrase “the wall of separation”, coined by Thomas Jefferson in a private letter to a Baptist congregation at the end of his life. On the evolving use of the phrase “wall of separation”, see: D. Dreisbach, *Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation between Church and State*, New York 2000, p. 55–70, 83–106.

¹⁸⁶ Since Neuhaus’s argument in 1984, this politically driven interpretation of the First Amendment as a justification for a “wall of separation” between not only the state and religion, but also society and religion, has been amply documented. The best study showing how this interpretation was driven by the anti-Catholic sentiment within the Protestant establishment was provided by P. Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State*, Cambridge Mass. 2002.

¹⁸⁷ This danger eventually drove Neuhaus to organize the “The End of Democracy?” symposium in 1996, one of the most controversial ones in American public debates after 1945.

Biblical religion was for Neuhaus the surest safeguard of freedom in a liberal democracy, as the final brake on the omnipotent pretensions of the state. With that barrier gone, the greatest achievement of Western civilization, the limited government rooted in the Christian division into *sacrum* and *profanum* would be gone too. For Neuhaus, the Judeo-Christian religion should be the anthropological foundation for liberal democracy. For him, the post 1947 Supreme Court interpretation of the First Amendment dovetailed with the post-1968 anthropology of the imperial self and was to bring not a separation of the state from religion for the sake of neutrality, but an imposition of a state “religion” in the public square.¹⁸⁸ To do so it was necessary to delegitimize and define religion as a “problem” in the public square, a process which started a long time before with modern sociology, anthropology and psychotherapy as “disenchantment” techniques.¹⁸⁹ A recognition of religion as a threat to public order has been visible in the adjudications of the Supreme Court since 1947, changing the traditional meaning of the First Amendment and defining religion in an ideologically motivated way.¹⁹⁰ Religion, observed Neuhaus

[...] no longer referred to those communal traditions of ultimate beliefs and practices ordinarily called religion. Religion, in the court’s meaning, became radically individualized and privatized. Religion became a synonym for conscience; religion is no longer a matter of content but of [sheer] sincerity. It is no longer a matter of communal values but of individual conviction. In short, it is no longer a public reality and therefore cannot interfere with public business.¹⁹¹

He opposed an interpretation of the First Amendment which would make freedom of religion a function of freedom of speech and convert it into a mere freedom of conscience, contrary to both the letter of the law and its intention. This was an interpretation in the light of secular, atheistic axioms, according to which the First Amendment was to defend the state and the people against religion, not to defend

¹⁸⁸ See: T. Dostert, *Richard John Neuhaus: Judeo-Christian Religion as Cultural Foundation for Democracy*, [in:] idem, *Beyond Political Liberalism: Towards a Post-Secular Ethics of Public Life*, Notre Dame IN 2006, p. 103–113.

¹⁸⁹ On this issue, see: A. Bryk, *Konserwatyzm amerykański: od Reagana do Obamy*, [in:] *Ronald Reagan. Nowa odsłona w 100-lecie urodzin*, ed. P. Musierowicz, Kraków 2011, p. 212–214; A. Heinze, *Jews and the American Soul: Human Nature in the 20th Century*, Princeton 2004.

¹⁹⁰ As late as 1931, in “*US v. Macintosh*”, the Supreme Court asserted without fear of contradiction that Americans “are a Christian people acknowledging with reference the duty of obedience to the will of God also, we are a nation with the duty to survive”. 283 US 605, 632–633. In “*Zorach v. Clausen*” in 1952, the Court, in the words of Justice Douglas declared “We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being”, 343 US 306, 1952, p. 313. Justice Potter Stewart in “*McGowan v. Maryland*” of 1961 stated that the American tradition came from the Declaration of Independence, which avowed “a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence”. The Founders wanted to disestablish an official state church, but not to ban religion from public life. Thus “what is relevant [is] the history of the religious traditions of our people, reflected in countless practices of the institutions and officials of our government”, 366 US 420, 1961, p. 445–450. This move from religion as a right to religion as a threat, “as religious indoctrination” to the public square, see J. Hitchcock, *The Supreme Court and Religion in American Life...*, p. 73–76.

¹⁹¹ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square...*, p. 80.

religion and the people from the state – interpretations where freedom of religion was treated not as a separate right, but a subspecies of the free speech clause. He quoted Christopher Hitchens here, an exemplary representative of secular public intellectuals, an avowed atheist battling Christianity as a “pernicious superstition”, who reflected the thinking of secular constitutionalists: “No other country has such a terse and comprehensive statement of the case for free expression: considered important enough to rank first, and also to rank with the freedom of religious conscience”.¹⁹² Neuhaus replied that

[...] free expression does not rank first, unless he means the free expression of religion. But [Hitchens] cannot mean that, because he then says freedom of expression ranks with the freedom of religious conscience. Which is wrong, since the first freedom guaranteed by the First Amendment is not the freedom of religious conscience but of religious exercise. It is a nuisance that ideological secularists have such difficulty making their peace with the fact that most of the Founders believed that religious freedom is the foundation of all freedoms. Their right to disagree with the Founders is guaranteed, but their persistent misinterpretation of what the Founders believed and did is at least unseemly.¹⁹³

Neuhaus pointed out that the American identity was incomprehensible without a religious dimension inseparable from a tradition of freedom. The struggle for independence in the 18th century, the anti-slavery movement, the progressive movement, the civil rights revolution in the 1950s, even the rise of the religious right in the 1970s, could not separate this religious dimension from the American freedom experience of a self-governing people. America has been such a success not despite this religious dimension, but because of it, a case drastically different from the European post-1789 tradition of liberalism, which fascinates larger and larger circles of American cognoscenti in academia and the media.¹⁹⁴ That is why, wrote Neuhaus

[...] the notion that [America] is a secular society is relatively new. While the society is incorrigibly religious, the state is secular. But such a disjunction between society and state is a formula for governmental delegitimation. In a democratic society, state and society must draw from the same moral well. In addition, because transcendence abhors a vacuum, the state that styles itself as secular will almost certainly succumb to secularism. Because government cannot help but make moral judgments of an ultimate nature, it must, if it has in principle excluded identifiable religion, make those judgments by ‘secular’ reasoning that is given the force of religion. This process is already advanced in the spheres of law and public education [and is called] secular humanism [which is], in this case simply the term unhappily chosen for *ersatz* religion. More than that, the notion of the secular state can become the prelude to totalitarianism. That is, once religion is reduced to nothing more than privatized conscience, the public square has only two actors in it – the state and the individual. Religion as a mediating structure – a community that generates and transmits moral values – is no longer available as a countervailing force to the ambitions of the state. The chief attack is not upon individual religious belief. Individual religious belief can be dismissed scornfully as superstition, for it finally poses little threat to the power of the state. No, the chief attack is upon the *institutions* that bear and promulgate

¹⁹² Idem, *While We're At It...*, p. 82.

¹⁹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹⁴ On this difference between the American and the European traditions concerning religion see G. Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French, and American Enlightenment*, New York 2005, p. 147–226.

belief in a transcendent reality by which the state can be called to judgment. Such institutions threaten the totalitarian proposition that everything is to be within the state, nothing is to be outside the state.¹⁹⁵

Using the Augustinian distinction, Neuhaus showed that Nazi Germany and Marxism-Leninism and its communist embodiments were not the only threats to freedom. The fragility of liberal democracy could manifest itself the moment liberalism turned itself into a monistic ideology of a benevolent, omnipotent state. The chief threat came from a collapse of the idea of freedom and the social arrangements necessary to sustain liberal democracy. Institutional, public – not privatized – religion was one of its preconditions. Crucial for a free democratic liberal order was thus a public square in which there are

[...] many actors. The state is one actor among others. Indispensable to this arrangement are the institutional actors, such as the institutions of religion that make claims of ultimate or transcendent meaning. The several actors in the public square – government, corporations, education, communications, religion – are to challenge, check, and compete with one another. They also cooperate with one other. [Yet] in a democracy the role of cooperation is not to be deemed morally superior to the roles of checking and competing. Giving an unqualified priority to the virtue of cooperation, as some Christians do, is the formula for the death of democracy. There is an inherent and necessary relationship between democracy and pluralism. It means that there are contenders striving with one another to define what the play is about—what are the rules and what the goal. The democratic soul is steeled to resist the allure of a ‘cooperation’ that would bring that contention to a premature close. Indeed within the bond of civility, the democratic soul exults in that contention. He exalts not because contention is a good in itself but because it is a necessary provisional good short of the coming of the kingdom of God.¹⁹⁶

Neuhaus takes this idea of the nature of democracy in which citizens are engaged in a contest from Reinhold Niebuhr and Murray. This is an act of defiance against the mood of the day. Their dismissal as old hat is a

[...] mindless dismissal [which] results in part from a desire to espouse the latest thing. It is a bias of the superficially educated that books written thirty years ago, not to say three hundred years ago, are passé. In Christian circles this dismissal takes the curious twist of being conducted in the name of the most current version of ‘true Christianity’ [but] epochs are not demarcated by publishers’ seasons. The test of our epoch is to sustain the democratic ‘proposition’ in the face of the human yearning for monism. Monism is another word for totalitarianism.¹⁹⁷

Neuhaus asserted the fundamental political contribution of Christianity to human freedom: a dualism of powers – an unbridgeable division between *sacrum* and *profanum* – a precondition of true freedom, the aims of which were not political. He repeated that “the first thing to know about politics is that politics is not the first thing”. Christianity’s gift to political thought was a rejection of the false anthropology that politics was the end of life, capable of overcoming human alienation. Christianity destroyed once and for all the monistic concept of sovereignty from which the ultimate commands came, never to be contested for want of a proper justification. Such commands were to define without any outside verification the aims of a socie-

¹⁹⁵ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square...*, p. 82.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 84.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 84–85.

ty, its laws, values, its religion, the very essence of human existence. The modern concept of sovereignty in the 17th c. rejected this Christian dualism and pushed to privatize Christianity, rejecting Christianity as a community of faithful organized by the Church, the bearer and transmitter of *anamnesis*, the true interpreter of the human predicament. But Neuhaus was also resisting the monistic pretensions of post-1968 liberalism, which tried to monopolize the meaning of this modern sovereignty.¹⁹⁸ Judeo-Christian ontology and anthropology was for him the surest guarantee of human freedom and its perpetuation in culture was a *sine qua non* condition of liberal democracy being both liberal and democratic.¹⁹⁹

A precondition of this was the presence of religion in the public square, treated not as a spiritual tool of personal self-contentment but as a guardian of the autonomy of human existence against the monistic pretensions of the state. Neuhaus battled the “liberal” version of Christianity, seeing it as a servant of the aims set by the monistic liberal state, limited to the role of its spiritual department and defining orthodoxy according to the aims set by such a state – as in ancient Rome, working towards augmenting the glory of the empire and not carrying out an assessment of its actions from outside. The public presence of religion meant the freedom of autonomous institutions such as churches, families, and associations from the intrusion of the omnipotent sovereign state.²⁰⁰ The monistic pretensions of contemporary liberalism do not limit themselves to the national context. It tries to create one universalistic ideology – for instance, human rights ideologically defined. For Neuhaus, the post-1968 liberalism had a tendency to turn to such a new ideology, since “the prelude to this totalitarian monism is the notion that society can be ordered according to secular technological reasons without reference to religious grounded meaning”.²⁰¹ But liberal monism could not sustain the meaning which it wanted to create. An

[...] effort to establish and maintain the naked public square would be the source of the collapse. Totalitarian monism would be the consequence of such a collapse. Americans may, with a little help from their adversaries, find their own distinctive way to terminate the democratic experiment to which they gave birth. The ‘naked public square’ is an ‘impossible’ project. That does not deter people from attempting it. In the minds of some secularists the ‘naked public square’ is a desirable goal. They subscribe to the dogma of the secular Enlightenment that, as people become more enlightened (educated), religion will wither away; or, if it does not wither away, it can be safely sealed off from public consideration, reduced to a private eccentricity. Our argument is that the ‘naked public square’ is not desirable, even if it was possible. It is not desirable in the view of believers because they are inescapably entangled in the belief

¹⁹⁸ It is beyond the scope of this article to answer the question of whether there is any other form of liberalism possible, in other words whether liberalism of its own nature leads towards a monistic understanding of sovereignty and an elimination of any competitor, with its new “religion” of human rights defined essentially on the basis of the anthropology of an imperial self, the aims of which are to be set by the strongest in the political or economic market. On that fascinating issue, see P. Manent, *The City of Man...*, p. 156–182.

¹⁹⁹ See: T. Dostert, *Beyond Political Liberalism...*, p. 103–113.

²⁰⁰ This was the idea which Neuhaus, together with Peter Berger, explored in their book *To Empower the People...*

²⁰¹ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square...*, p. 85.

that the moral truths of religion have a universal and public validity. The Ten Commandments, to take an obvious example, have a normative status. They are not, as it has been said, Ten Suggestions or Ten Significant Moral Insights to be more or less appreciated according to one's subjective disposition. In addition to not being desirable the 'naked public square' is not possible. It is an illusion, for the public square cannot and does not remain naked. When particular religious values and the institutions that bear them are excluded, the inescapable need to make public moral judgments will result in an elite construction of a normative morality from sources and principles not democratically recognized by the society. The truly naked public square is at best a transitional phenomenon. It is a vacuum begging to be filled.²⁰²

The new sovereign monistic state is prone to being operated by the New Class of cognoscenti, who are the most powerful group in the public square, imposing their vision of political order on (against) the self-governing people. This was one of Neuhaus's obsessions: he was looking at politics as a faulty, necessary tool in this corrupted world of plural people organizing themselves as a free community. People who are formed from bottom up by institutions and then impart such values for the sake of the public order and engage in a moral debate, answering questions about a civilized society. If such institutions transmitting values were excluded, the vacuum

[...] will be filled by the agent left in control of the public square, the state. In this manner, a perverse notion of the disestablishment of religion leads to the establishment of the state as church religion is viewed [here by some] as a repressive imposition upon the public square. They would cast out the devil of particularist religion and thus put the public square in proper secular order. Having cast out the one devil, they unavoidably invite the entrance of seven devils worse than the first. The totalitarian alternative edges in from the wings, waiting impatiently for the stage to be cleared of competing actors. Most important is that the stage be cleared of those religious actors that presume to assert absolute values and thus pose such a troublesome check upon the pretensions of the state. The state is not waiting with a set of absolute values of its own or with a ready – made religion. Far from waiting with a package of absolutes, in a society where the remnants of procedural democracy survive, the state may be absolutely committed only to the relativization of all values. In that instance, however, the relativity of all things becomes the absolute. Without the counterclaims of “meaning-bestowing” institutions of religion, there is not an absence of religion but, rather, the triumph of the religion of relativity. It is a religion that must

²⁰² *Ibidem*, p. 85–86. Neuhaus here follows Murray on the dangers of ideological monism, a code word for totalitarianism. Murray wrote that the “cardinal assertion is a thorough-going monism, political, social, juridical, religious: there is only one Sovereign, one society, one law, one faith. And the cardinal denial of Christian dualism of powers, societies, and laws – spiritual and temporal, divine and human. Upon this denial follow the absorption of the church in the community, the absorption of the community in the state, the absorption of the state in the party, and the assertion that the party-state is the supreme spiritual and moral, as well as political authority and reality. It has its own absolutely autonomous ideological substance and its own absolutely independent purpose: it is the ultimate bearer of human destiny. Outside of this One Sovereign there is nothing. Or rather, what presumes to stand outside is ‘the eternity’. And if this country is to be overthrown from within or from without, I would suggest that it will not be overthrown [Murray wrote in 1960 – AB] by Communism. It will be overthrown because it will have made an impossible experiment. It will have undertaken to establish a technological order of most marvelous intricacy, which will have been constructed and will operate without relations to true political ends and this technological order will hang, as it were, suspended over a moral confusion; and this moral confusion will itself be suspended over a spiritual vacuum. This would be the real danger resulting from a type of fallacious, fictitious, fragile unity that could be created among us”. Neuhaus did not give the source of these quotations but they are obviously from Murray's magnum opus *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* [1960].

in principle deny that it is religious. It is a religion that dare not speak its name. In its triumph there is no contender that can, in Peter Berger's phrase, 'relativize the relativizers.'²⁰³

Neuhaus was depicting here the value of "liberal tolerance", the "religion" of the post-1968 era, as opposed to true tolerance. He pointed out that tolerance was not a value in itself; it was just a utilitarian tool, making it possible for differently thinking people to co-exist relatively peacefully. Tolerance was more the province of prudent politics than morality.

For Neuhaus, the "naked public square" in principle posed no danger, provided that a society could go along without a normative ethic. However, its relativist elite guarding "liberal tolerance" – as observed by Alisdair MacIntyre and quoted by Neuhaus – who have been governing liberal societies for quite some time, should properly be called "barbarians". They are the New Elite. The fact that

[...] the barbarians are composed of the most sophisticated and educated elites of our society makes them no less barbarian. The barbarians are those who in principle refuse to recognize a normative ethic or the reality of public virtue. The barbarians are the party of emancipation from the truths civilized people consider self-evident. The founding fathers of the American experiment declared certain truths to be self-evident and moved on from that premise. It is a measure of our decline into what may be the new dark ages that today we are compelled to produce evidence for the self-evident. Not that it does much good to produce such evidence, however, for such evidences are ruled to be inadmissible since, again in principle, it is asserted that every moral judgment is simply an instance of emotivism, a statement of subjective preference that cannot be imposed upon others. [This is] an accurate description of the logic of contemporary philosophical, moral, and legal reasoning. Fortunately, the real world is not terribly logical. The vitalities of democracy protest that dour logic. That resentment against the logic of the 'naked public square' is a source of hope that resentment is premised upon an alternative vision that calls for a new articulation. When it finds its voice, it will likely sound very much like the voice of Christian America. That voice will not be heard and thus will not prevail in the public square, however, unless it is a voice that aims to reassure those who dissent from that vision.²⁰⁴

For Neuhaus conceptually there is no alternative to a de facto state "religion", i.e. ideology, once transcendental religion has been removed from the public square. This is so because it

[...] is in the nature of the public square not to remain naked, and a certain type of "new" religion has to be provided for the sake of the legitimacy of the system, the idea understood well by Rousseau. In America, observed Neuhaus, the proponents of the 'naked public square' deny that they want exactly that. Whether they call themselves technocratic liberals, secular pragmatists, libertarians or socialists they pretend to talk about 'rational control' of political, economic and cultural forces. But whatever the rationale or intention Neuhaus thinks the presupposition is the 'naked public square', which is tantamount to an exclusion of religious and moral belief from public discussion. And whatever the intention, because the 'naked public square' cannot remain naked, the direction is towards the state as church, toward totalitarianism. The nub of the dispute is not [the choice] between private conscience and the public conscience expressed by the state. The private conscience is not private in the sense of being deracinated, torn from its roots. It is not individualistic. Private conscience too is communal; it is shaped by the myriad communities from which we learn to 'put the world together' in

²⁰³ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square...*, p. 86–87.

²⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

an order that is responsive to our understanding of right and wrong. As for ‘the public conscience’, it is a categorical fallacy. It harks back to Rousseau’s mythology of a ‘general will’ of which the state is the expression. The Public does not have conscience. ‘The People’ does not have conscience. Only persons and persons-in-community have consciences. There is a growing awareness of the limits of the political, a recognition that most of the things that matter most are attended to in communities that are not government and should not be governmentalized. We are no longer content to let ‘public’ be synonymous with ‘government’. Jefferson, Jackson, Lippmann, Dewey, Schlesinger, and others strove to articulate democracy as a creedal cause. But finally it is a faith in which freedom is the end as well as the means. It is a faith devoid of transcendent purpose that can speak to the question of what freedom is for. This is, of necessity, a religious question. The truly ‘positive’ state that presumes to address this question becomes the state – as-church. The political freedom of liberal democracy is essentially a ‘negative’ freedom, freedom from. If we are not to succumb to totalitarianism, the positive meaning of freedom must be addressed in a manner, and through institutions, beyond the competence of what is ordinarily meant by politics or the government. The public square is the stage of many actors, not all of whom are following the same script. It is very confusing. It is democratic.²⁰⁵

Neuhaus pointed out that this general assumption of a necessity of a naked public square stemmed from a certain feeling of “guilt” on the part of Christian churches in America, mainly liberal Protestant ones. Historically, these churches had articulated a positive side of the American freedom crusade to promote the “Righteous Empire”: an attempt to create “a complete Christian commonwealth” combined with the rhetoric of making the “world safe for democracy” according to mainline Protestant churches’ understanding of such terms in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.²⁰⁶

This was a political project of progressive Christianity, a process which was to be a response to a crisis of capitalism but which instead caused a crisis of Protestantism and its split into the fundamentalist and the “Social Gospel” wings. The churches had competitors here: the rise of psychotherapy and then the post-1968 anthropology of the imperial self and the expansion of welfare – which also acted as a provider of meaning through being an element of the never-ending realization of the progress of humanity. In response, the mainline Protestant churches gradually abandoned orthodoxy and merged their aims with the progressive aims of the liberal state, treating “religious” public presence as a support for socially “right causes” defined by the state and the elites operating it.

Neuhaus does not describe in detail in “The Naked Public Square” the abandonment by mainline American Protestantism of its role of engaging the democratic, pluralistic public, a development he subjected to theological, moral and political scrutiny years later. But he predicted that the retreat from a reasoned religious public argument by the mainline Protestant denominations meant giving away this argument to the elite of the liberal state, which would merge such an argument within its progressive aims.

That is why there was a “sense” of guilt coming from the jingoistic part of the liberal Protestant establishment combined with an internal crisis brought on by being

²⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 89, 92–93.

²⁰⁶ On this religious-political alliance see R. M. Gamble, *The War for Righteousness...*

in a culture encompassing anti-Christian modern anthropology exemplified by “competitors” for the human soul, e.g. psychotherapy. This meant that

[...] those who retired the idea [of Christian American Empire] tended to share the liberal assumption that the task of moral definition could and should be taken over by ‘the public conscience’ expressed through the state. In the frequently uncritical affirmation of ‘the secular city’ [the modern liberal state – AB], it was thought a triumph that the churches could step back from what had been a transitional role in the public square.²⁰⁷

Neuhaus advocated negative freedom against the monistic pretensions of the liberal discourse, aware that this could also lead to nihilism, an escape to private quarters or libertarian self-absorption. Negative freedom could preserve the autonomy of institutions, churches, families and associations from the monistic pretensions of the liberal state, but by itself it could tell us nothing positive about the nature of this freedom. Neuhaus’s was the Aristotelian and Christian concept of truth. Positive freedom could not come from the monistic state. It was to come, thought Neuhaus, from public argument by morally concerned citizens for whom religiously grounded arguments were important for liberal democracy. That is why, as he wrote,

negative freedom is dangerous to ourselves and others if it is negative freedom alone. As Murray argued, it is not only dangerous but it is ‘impossible’. It is most *dangerous* because it is impossible. That is, its very attempt invites the termination of the democratic freedom in the name of which the attempt is made. The question is not *whether* the questions of positive freedom will be addressed. The question is by *whom* – by what reasonings, what traditions, what institutions, what authorities – they will be addressed. If they are to be addressed democratically in a way that gives reasonable assurance of a democratic future, we must work toward an understanding of the public square that is both more comprehensive and more complex. Along the way to such an understanding, we must listen with critical sympathy to those who are speaking the very new-language of Christian America.²⁰⁸

The “Naked Public Square” recognized and critically assessed rampant secularism, a new phenomenon in America, the consequences of which were not yet properly defined. The secular “creed” was diffused in America, but it was becoming dominant and focused on pushing religion out of the public square. The consequences of this situation were not recognized properly, thought Neuhaus. He did not use the phrase “secular humanism”, but he was, nevertheless, following in the footsteps of evangelical Protestant critics of it, such as Tim Le Haye or Francis Schaeffer,

²⁰⁷ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square...*, p. 93. This was already sensed by Murray, who epitomized the Catholic ascendancy in America. Catholics were discriminated but came of age socially and culturally in the 1950s. For Murray, the Protestant mainline churches were incapable of stepping outside their role as a spiritual department of the liberal state. They abdicated their role and their orthodoxy. In turn, the Protestant fundamentalist churches were isolated, anti-intellectual and incapable of engaging in the public square in a rational discourse. Murray combined Catholicism with the American tradition, showing the natural law basis of Catholicism and the Declaration of Independence, and then offering a reasoned Catholic argument. It was a modern, reasoned argument for religion’s engagement in the public square and a delegitimization of the totalitarian pretensions of liberal monism, defined as contrary to the very sources of American identity.

²⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 93.

the latter being the author of the term itself. All of them agreed on the dangers of pushing religion into the private sphere, showing the culture forming and mediative role that religion played. Neuhaus also observed a dissolution of the mainline Protestant Churches and their post-1968 liberation from any orthodoxy. Instead of being watchful observers and critics of liberal society, these churches radicalized the social gospel “creed”, and identified with the goals of the post-1968 political liberalism, becoming subservient to the increasingly secularized culture. This related not only to such social concerns as the poor, blacks or peace and war issues, which could be reconciled with the traditional Christian or Jewish teachings, but also more alienating issues connected with the consequences of the sexual revolution, such as sexual ethics, abortion, divorce, and homosexuality. The main Protestant churches began here to reflect the liberal post-1968 sensibilities at the cost of a dilution of Christian ethics and morality, beginning to define morality according to the utilitarian ethics of the allegedly neutral state and mass culture.

Neuhaus showed that the pernicious effects of the secularist attempts to exclude religion from the public sphere threatened democratic society by depriving it of public virtue, which might cause extremist responses, which the Christian Right sometimes exhibited out of a feeling of being deprived of citizenship and a consequent helplessness. Such an exclusion was also against the constitutional structure. For the Founding Fathers’ religion, a.k.a. mainline Protestantism in all its varieties, underlay the “bare-bones constitutional polity” based on rampant commercial individualism and self-interest – it would make this self-interest “well understood”, in the words of James Madison, harnessing it to more noble impulses.²⁰⁹ The decline of Protestantism as a religious and cultural force shaping American public morals was connected with many negative social consequences, which reached “a frenzied apex” in the 60s and the 70s: rampant social decay and a gradual de-civilization.²¹⁰ Neuhaus assumed that it was Catholicism which was going to resurrect this religious public moral discourse, because he thought that teaching natural law was congruent with the American founding principles of the Declaration of Independence. It could stimulate a reasoned public debate via natural law without employing a language directly tied to religious imagery. Catholics, much more than Protestants, could engage secular humanism in a language which was religious and rational at the same time. Such a stance presupposed an anthropology which the post-1968 secularism rejected with its solipsistic anthropology of the imperial self.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 140–141; this thesis is explicated best in M. Diamond, *Ethics and Politics: The American Way*.

²¹⁰ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square...*, p. 33.

²¹¹ Later in life, Neuhaus wanted to find a different language from that of natural law, associated inescapably with theology: “I realize that many people are convinced that the concept of natural law has a specifically ‘Catholic’ brand. This is a real difficulty. The very sound of the word “law” elicits today an allergic reaction. Law seems to be something arbitrary, imposed from the top. I am not personally a rigorist as far as an argument from a natural law position, because of the limited persuasive possibilities of the very word ‘natural law’. Although I do not know what better word could be substituted for

He argued for a moral gravity in the personal sphere as well as in the public square against secularism hiding behind many veils, of which one of the most important was human rights culture – as an ideology insisting that Christians must not only respect other religions, but must accept their views as a precondition of legitimate public presence. He noted futile efforts to create a public civil ethics by means of law in the service of secularist ideology, pointing out that

[...] it is culture that has the mediate role between the state and the individual, and it is therefore culture on which Americans should rely for the emplacement of religious and civic values in the fabric of American law. Reliance on law can too explicitly define matters in a theoretical manner rather than in a manner based on the history and character of the American people.²¹²

But a postulate to bring religion and thus culture to bear on public morality was not an easy matter. A revival of Protestant ethics was for him a plausible approach but he was critical of the overt politicisation of the Christian Right. Neuhaus advocated a broad alliance of traditional Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish influence and a serious multi-faith dialogue to engage citizens in a serious discourse about the remedies of the growing malaise.²¹³ He considered that the need for a public ethic was self-evident and that American culture had been formed in large – though unacknowledged – part by Christians. But, as one observer remarked, judging with hindsight, Neuhaus's

[...] analysis of the dire effects of American culture without a religious basis has become increasingly evident, but [it looks] that the serious debate about the need for a public ethic that he looked forward to has not taken place. Instead of a movement to restore public virtue have come trends that have obviously obviated the felt need for an extended and serious debate about the relationship between religion and a public philosophy.²¹⁴

Neuhaus's hope has not materialized. If there is a debate about this need for a religious revival and public philosophy that would link the individual and public

it. Maybe one could stress more the fact that a human being participates in God's mind? I think, that in the future, we could find an argumentation in the light of which it will be obvious that our interlocutor derives his life choices from the basis of natural law, even if he does not use that concept. In a dialogical way we can come to a conclusion that there is something as the moral truth. We cannot easily reject a suspicion inherent in modernity. In too many false hopes people believed in history. There are some people convinced that the entire history of humanity depends on wagging a flag of hope in the face of a fear of death. Fear is a powerful force, it contributes to generating of different narratives which divert our attention from our greatest enemy – death, a destroyer of sense and of everything we know. But it is not only fear which governs our reality. What with a flag of victory, the victory of love over death shown by Christ? This is exactly the Christian wager, the Christian risk. Can one prove that the Christians are not wrong? No. Yet despite that can we be sure, that Christ rose from the death and defeated death? Yes". R. J. Neuhaus, *Katolicy nie potrafią udowodnić swych racji...*, p. 12.

²¹² Idem, *The Naked Public Square...*, p. 249; J. Caiazza, *The American Religion in Decline...*, p. 200–201.

²¹³ For this reason in 1990 Neuhaus started the journal "First Things" with a wide group of intellectuals from all denominations on its editorial board, with different opinions on a wide range of issues.

²¹⁴ J. Caiazza, *The American Religion in Decline...*, p. 201–202.

order it is found only within a narrow circle of academia. It is no longer part of the mass culture. A pernicious effect of the secularization of the public square has been the gradual, dangerous substitution of political for religious categories of public morality. As a consequence

[...] belonging to a religious body that accepts the traditional or biblical standards of morality has become a political act. Believers in traditional religious morality are termed 'conservative' or right – wing by the secular culture; correspondingly eschewing organized religion and accepting the freedom now protected by expanded legal standards of behavior, such as elimination of sodomy laws, identifies one as politically 'liberal' or progressive. The conflict between the conservative and liberal belief systems continues to dominate mainline religious organizations. Neuhaus is the gloomy prophet perceiving the dissolution of church from state from the point of view of traditional Christianity, but he seems to have been the most accurate in predicting its effects. Because of its exclusion from the public square, traditional religious activity has been moving inward rather than attempting to influence the culture in general, as if recognizing that religion has been so thoroughly excluded from the public square that American culture can no longer be directly influenced by the doctrines of traditional religious bodies. Within the traditional and orthodox religious groups there has been a sharpening of appreciation of their traditional discipline, doctrine and practice as if the effort at culture forming is wasted so that at this point in American history it is better to cultivate one's own religious garden. The ongoing process of exclusion of religion from the public square has helped foment a cultural and political divide in America.²¹⁵

Neuhaus took it for granted that being a good religious person was tantamount to being a good American. But today this connection is questioned: being a religious person and trying to influence the public morality is considered dangerous – a serious (display of) faith in public would not be seen as a sign of a "good American" by large and influential segments of American culture and politics. Neuhaus's was a diagnosis and a call to reclaim the American public square from the usurpers who appropriated for themselves a prerogative to define the truth and the (liberal) language and institutions of democracy, while delegitimizing religious people as citizens and imposing on them their secular "faith", making them second class citizens and allowing them to participate in the public discussions not as full persons, but as citizens by concession of the liberal state and its new elites. The Roman idea of an omnipotent sovereign that tolerated religion as long as it was congruent with the imperial aims and strengthened them was back, threatening democracy. With "The Naked Public Square", Neuhaus catapulted himself into the very centre of the public discussion, becoming one of the major public intellectuals, demanding arguments from opponents, not slurs or derisions. It was at the same time a personal beginning of Neuhaus's odyssey into the Catholic Church. The Church became for him the centre of a reasoned, moral presence in the public square in conditions of liberalism's transformation from a pluralistic doctrine of social organization into a monistic ideology of human existence. The Church became thus a guardian against the totalitarian pretensions of the secular mind dismantling the boundary between *sacrum* and *profanum*, which could lead to a situation where human freedom would simply turn into a mere concession from the state. Neuhaus warned that this secular liberal search for Utopia was leading to

²¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 201–205.

a dissolution of all human ties and institutions – in fact all culture (so a rationally organized state could lead us to such a situation).

He exposed the fallacy of the secular mind – the mantra of which is always the same, as is its Gnostic, totalitarian hubris – which preaches that after a dissolution (“liberation” from such ties) people would finally have real obligations. But the hardest obligation and the most challenging adventure was to get there and that is why the self-proclaimed leaders were social engineers, leading allegedly confused people there. This was surely a recipe for slavery. Neuhaus helped to jump start a debate which has been going on for decades and which has drawn even liberals into its vortex, smug in their understanding of the neutral public square. It was a criticism of the state effort, through legislature, courts and the media, to enforce a secular, allegedly “neutral” public square. “The Naked Public Square” was a transforming book in the sense that it put religion as a cultural, social and political issue back into the mainstream discussion in an increasingly smug liberal civilization. Religion was suddenly recognized not as a margin of human existence within a liberal civilization, but a fundamental fact of life which had to be taken into account in any discussion of the right political order. The liberal civilization had to confront its own contradictions and the metaphysical emptiness of its secular promise, which caused bitter denials. This process was soon to be called “the culture wars”, but it was in fact a war over culture as such. Neuhaus’s book constituted a reflection on a much deeper conviction that

his era, our era, was unprecedented, puzzling, and fraught with possibility and peril. The combination of public secularism countered by the emerging ‘religious new right’ signaled, he thought, a new and paradoxical chapter in the providential story of the world. More than a theoretical argument. The *Naked Public Square* was Neuhaus’s attempt to interpret a distinctive episode in the saga of God’s loving struggle with a wayward humanity. The book represents an earnest, deeply learned, sometimes meandering meditation on the meandering of modern secularism. How on earth, Neuhaus wondered, had the nation come to its current embrace of public secularism?²¹⁶

Neuhaus was perplexed because neither American tradition nor the Constitution dictated any such position. But he thought that although the elites embraced liberal secularism as a salvationist orthodoxy and psychotherapy as its gospel, with the imperial self as a new sacrament individually dispensed (an outcome of the fundamental changes of culture in the post-1968 world), the American people did not. They resisted the liberal secularist appeal, being devout as they have always been, even if in a crazy, confused and unorthodox way.

Neuhaus had no doubts that modernity and public secularism as the ideology of the post-1968 liberalism was self-contradictory and totalitarian. This public secularism constitutes the end station of the fight of Western rationalists for a perfect social and political order, emerging after a long struggle with prejudice and superstition. Such a rationalism used science to empirically create a new world against the

²¹⁶ S. D. Smith, *On the Square*, “First Things”, April 2009, p. 84.

repressive authority of the Christian churches, mainly the Roman Catholic Church. It was to express pure human intelligence, which put itself in opposition not only to immediate political reality. Culture and religion were also seen as reservoirs of threats to be cleared by rational thinking. Reason considered itself to transcend culture, religion and social mores, becoming a bridge to perfect humanity, capable – so secular rationalism claimed – of achieving unity and the end of alienation. It wanted to be seen as a demiurge of history, coming from an eternal vantage point which the secular rationalists themselves created.²¹⁷ The postmodern attack on the Enlightenment rationalism is part of that Gnostic enterprise as well. The great postmodernist despair of not being able to tolerate any strong value judgments, including ones made on the basis of reason alone, stemmed from an awareness that “the same standards of truth and rationality” no longer existed – the “Great Disenchantment”. But postmodernism created its own strong value judgment of not tolerating any (values) and making sure that no one would dare to act on such values, for fear of again causing the calamities visible in 20th century European history. But it was also a totalitarian desire to keep a watchful eye on a populace having a proclivity to slip into such an error.²¹⁸ Neuhaus’s is thus a consistent argument which might be understood as a critique of liberalism in all its versions, as a political tool of secular rationalism – a quasi “religion” for humanity.²¹⁹ Christianity is not treated here as one among many enemies of secular liberal monism, but the main enemy, the only competitor capable of facing the whole and destroying liberalism’s false anthropological pretensions. This is inevitable and an “either-or” situation, since Christianity cannot tolerate a unified sovereignty defining not only utilitarian political aims, but also the aim of human existence.²²⁰ Allegedly irrational Christianity is thus positioned as the enemy by the secular rational monistic ideology (with liberalism as its carrier), despite the fact that Christianity does not consider such a dichotomy as contradictory, but considers science to be an instrument of theological argument, although not treated as an idolatrous god.²²¹ Secular reason having defined its pretensions in totalitarian terms cannot leave Christianity alone. The latter’s message has to be treated as superseded by secular reason – including in its postmodernist form – and thus tolerated on condition that it reduces itself, like all

²¹⁷ This is “Baron Munchausen’s” contradiction of the secularist project. If it is materialistic, as it assumes, and if rationality itself is a product of evolutionary forces with a chemical mechanism, this reason is just a utilitarian way of adjusting to reality. It cannot make any ultimate judgments beyond that point since it immediately transcends the limits of its legitimate claim, trying to put itself at the same time inside matter and outside matter. On the fallacy of pitting theology against science in discussions of reality, see a fascinating study by L. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis*, Chicago 2003. Also P. Haffner, *Creation and Scientific Creativity: A Study in the Thought of S. L. Jaki*, Fort Royal Va 1991, p. 48, 71–72.

²¹⁸ Neuhaus deals with this problem in his devastating critique of postmodernism. See R. J. Neuhaus, *An Age of Irony in his American Babylon: Note of a Christian Exile*, New York 2009, p. 119–162.

²¹⁹ See: A. McIntyre, *After Virtue...*, for whom liberalism is waging war on everything, not accepting its defining first principles, even if waged by non-military means.

²²⁰ D. B. Hart, *Christ or Nothing*, “First Things”, October 2003, p. 47–57. The gist of it is captured by one sentence “If we turn from Christ today, we turn only towards the god of absolute will, and embrace him under either his most monstrous or his most vapid aspect”.

²²¹ S. L. Jaki, *Angels, Apes and Men*, La Salle Il. 1983.

religions, to spiritual privacy, to just a hobby. But other religions are treated leniently by such secular reason, because they are considered – and they consider themselves – as part of culture, not a challenger in the public square. This is a stance that is congruent with the phony multiculturalist doctrine, since it is tolerated in an Orwellian way, as long as it does not question the mastery of the secular rationalistic paradigm. It is tolerated as a spiritual department of a secular liberal monistic rationality, as an Indian reservation to visit to buy some artefacts – to demonstrate interest in diversity and tolerance. Religions – and Christianity is the main culprit here – may thus be respected as long as they fit into the pluralist constitutionality of the new world order organized by secular reason. But the moment any religion tries to position itself as a judge of this world it is branded as fundamentalist and considered to be an enemy.

However, such a situation cannot be accepted by religious people and is dangerous. The modern secularists' search for a public moral order grounded solely in neutral categories of cold, intellectually concocted schemes of rationality must be insufficient since it has not been successful. This search has not created lasting normative commitments, truths or moral dispositions which might convincingly be regarded as ultimate and authoritative, accepted by all as binding because of the universal verity of such truths. Such truths should be felt not only at the intellectual level, but above all at the existential level of private and public morality. Neuhaus thought that religiously grounded argument was necessary for the sustenance of such universalistic claims and that pushing out religious argument from the public debate was morally untenable and a threat to the perpetuation of public order. Historically, religion had been the principal well of normative command, and pushing it out of that role would not mean that the public square would remain empty of new quasi "religions", self-delusion or tactics to hide the true motives of liberals. Some new orthodoxy, other creed or ideology would move in to fill the space and be imposed on public opinion. This new orthodoxy, Neuhaus knew, was to be likely, as one critic observed,

[...] far less benign than traditional American religion was. It threatens to be totalitarian. The new orthodoxy might be a distinctly American form of Marxism. It might be an oppressive, state imposed individualism, or, conversely, a sectarian, authoritarian religion. Neuhaus suggested that the rabbi who, on hearing talk of 'Christian America' saw an image of barbed wire was not being merely paranoid. All such outcomes were to be fiercely resisted: 'The 'victory' either of the forces of secularism or of the forces promoting an uncomplicated view of Christian America would be disastrous.'²²²

For Neuhaus, history was full of hope and there were other possibilities. Politics did not have to operate in the "naked public square" according to the dictates of this new ideology, and become totalitarian and nihilistic. It could be directed by a public philosophy that, although

[...] religiously grounded, would be committed to a politics not of enforced private revelation but rather of engaged public reason. This sort of public religion that could guide and illuminate without

²²² S. D. Smith, *On the Square...*, p. 85.

being authoritarian would need to be ecumenical, Neuhaus maintained; it would need to encompass – and in a genuine and not merely cosmetic way – Mainline, Jews, Catholics, Lutherans, evangelicals, fundamentalists. In the prevailing secular climate critics are quick to suspect authors who take a theological perspective. But in the *Naked Public Square*, Neuhaus's providence-oriented approach to his era missed not in dogmatism but in sober humility. We can be confident that there is a providential design, he thought, but we can at best catch glimpses of what it is. So we are left to practice 'that faith filled modesty by which Christians seek to apprehend, however tentatively, the meaning of the penultimate present in relation to the ultimate future'. God may well have 'surprises in store'. And so it is just possible that, [he thought] 'these despised moral majoritarians may turn out to be the first wave of the democratic renewal of the twenty-first century'.²²³

Neuhaus expected that an attempt to achieve the "naked public square", to establish the sovereignty of the state, liquidating the greatest achievement of human freedom, the Christian division of *sacrum* and *profanum*, might continue over "the longer term – say, the next thirty to one hundred years". The mood of those who recognized the presence of transcendental religion, not just the "religion" of spiritual well being, as a prerequisite of human freedom, and a barrier against a slide to a monistic, jealous ideology grounded in the imperial self as its anthropology may thus have been gloomy. But the more the grounds of a secular society have been questioned, the more aggressive its proponents have become, with the courts, not only in America, essentially following suit.²²⁴ Neuhaus's call for a restoration of a public philosophy in a truly ecumenical mood through reasoned mutual deliberation remains valid, although he knew that an effort to devise forms

[...] which can revive rather than destroy the liberal democracy that is required by a society that would be pluralistic and free may not succeed, or succeed only in such a degree that would find us the mortals in a permanent state of alienation. But, it may be that God's grace is such that what has been done by human beings can be undone by human beings [and we may be able to muster] the imagination to move beyond present polarizations [and] become partners in rearticulating the religious base of the democratic experiment.²²⁵

²²³ *Ibidem*, p. 85–86.

²²⁴ But the courts in the United States have recently taken a new path in interpreting the First Amendment. From "Lamb's Chapel v. Center Moriches Union Free School District" of 1993, through "Rosenberger v. Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia" of 1995 to "Cutter v. Wilkinson" of 2005, the US Supreme Court has modified its position. But the Court still treats religion like any other form of speech, for instance pornography, not as a distinctive category of reality, a source of ontologically grounded moral arguments engaging the public in a conversation about the common good. This trivializes religion, reduces it to a hobby to be tolerated, without any claim of forcing the public to reconsider its moral aims seriously. See: G. V. Bradley, *Religious Liberty in the American Republic...*; J. Hitchcock, *The Supreme Court and Religion...*, Vol. 2: *From 'Higher Law' to 'Sectarian Scruples'*.

²²⁵ Quoted in S. D. Smith, *On the Square...*, p. 86. Looking with hindsight, Neuhaus was surprised how in 1984 certain issues dominated the discourse about the *Naked Public Square*: for instance, the shadow of the Cold War and the Vietnam War, the conflict between those "who do and those who do not agree with the proposition that 'on balance and considering the alternatives, America is a force for good in the world'". But a more important issue then seemed the challenge from people described as "secular humanists", that is "the band of supremely confident secular intellectuals" who took as their role models figures such as John Dewey, with the 1933 *Humanist Manifesto*. A generation later Neuhaus observed that this "species is almost extinct", but they have begun to "present themselves in a different guise. In public

Later in life, Neuhaus was both more and less optimistic about a “civil public square”. More, since the Christian Right had entered the public square, less because he realized that the reality of the culture war prevents an effective and civilized public discussion. The encroachments from the “culture of death” and in general the “culture of the imperial Self” converted into ubiquitous rights might make the Augustinian postulate of retaining the freedom of the Church illusory. A more robust Church engagement in public policy was needed to bring moral first principles to bear on public life. What was needed was not so much Counter-Reformation as evangelical witnessing and a defence of religious freedom against the encroachments of the monistic liberal state. *The Naked Public Square* made Neuhaus a fully-fledged public intellectual. But personally he was nearing the end of a road towards the Catholic Church. The title metaphor came to symbolize – and embolden – growing discontent with the extreme secularization of American public life. It became an effective rhetorical device to counter the trite and misleading “wall of separation” metaphor. Still, this debate about religion and politics continues to rage.

However, Neuhaus tried to articulate a wider argument. He was writing at a time when the liberal establishment, called the New Class by Neuhaus, began to show a growing cultural mistrust towards the majority and defined common culture as a problem to be “corrected”. Technocratic effectiveness and management of differences by conflict resolution and psychotherapeutic mentality were to be substituted for other sources of allegiance. Religion was one such “obstacle” to such a progressive idea, unless subordinated to welfare liberalism as its spiritual, psychotherapeutic department. Religion was not treated any more as an important source of social solidarity and meaning. An efficient, caring, liberal state managing conflicts was to be put in its place. *The Naked Public Square* showed the fallacy of such thinking. It was a repudiation of the new liberal-left paradigm of ideas and ideological prejudices. This paradigm stated that the existing cultural narrative and social solidarity were rooted in a wrong anthropology. The alternative personal and social ethics were from now on to be built on the anthropology of the unencumbered moral imperial self. Neuhaus showed that the liberal-left establishment’s image of this new order was wrong and his voice was one of the most powerful ones to challenge it.

education there is less frequently a frontal assault on Christianity and the Judeo-Christian moral tradition. Almost nobody today is explicitly proposing a ‘religion of secularism’ or ‘a common faith’ to replace biblical religion. But the religions and quasi religions of ‘multiculturalism’ are pervasive and they provide a more insidious replacement. The newly imagined religions of native Americans and devotions to Mother Earth and her pantheon of nature gods and goddesses are commonplace in school curricula. The currents of thought that now run under the banner of ‘postmodernism’ are a major factor in undermining the former confidence of secularists who opposed religion in the name of Enlightenment rationality”. *1984 and Now*, [in:] *The Best of the Public Square...*, p. 232.

Liberalny monizm i wojna kultur. Richard J. Neuhaus i moralne imperialne „ja”

Autor poruszył zagadnienie liberalnego monizmu jako doktryny o pretensjach totalitarnych – stojących w centrum wojny o kulturę. Podejmuje analizę liberalnego monizmu i antropologii stojącej u jego podstawy na przykładzie ich krytyki, dokonanej przez wybitnego amerykańskiego teologa i intelektualistę Richarda J. Neuhaus.

Christopher S. Dadak, Kazimierz Dadak

THE UNITED STATES AT A CROSSROADS

Introduction

The United States is experiencing a social and economic upheaval not encountered since the early 1970s. The validity of many fundamental functions the federal government has been performing for decades is being questioned. On the right, the Tea Party movement attacks the principles of the welfare state; and, on the left, the Occupy Wall Street movement doubts the state's impartiality in addressing the question of social justice. The Republicans feel great pressure to drastically limit the spending on programs benefiting primarily the less fortunate while the Democrats are being pushed to increase taxes on the wealthy. This tension translates into political paralysis.¹ For instance, Congress has failed to pass a budget for the past three years.²

The rise of the Tea Party

The past few years have seen the rise of the "Tea Party." Despite its name, the Tea Party is a loose movement rather than a unified entity. "The Tea Party is a far-flung patchwork of organizations, some local and some national, with a related set of issue concerns and positions."³

¹ T. Mann, N. Ornstein, *It's even worse than it looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided With the New Politics of Extremism*, New York 2012.

² J. Rubin, *Senate Democrats Won't Pass a Budget*, "The Washington Post", February 5, 2012, www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/post/senate-democrats-wont-pass-a-budget/2012/02/03/gIQAblWfpQ_blog.html.

³ Ch. Karpowitz, J. Quin Monson, K. D. Patterson, J. C. Pope, *Tea Time in America? The Impact of the Tea Party Movement on the 2010 Midterm Elections*, "PS: Political Science & Politics" 2011, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp. 303–309.

The movement has humble, if not inauspicious, roots. Ms. Kremer, a former flight attendant, and Ms. Martin, a former software manager, were two central figures in the movement's formation. Both were outraged by the government bail-out of financial institutions and fueled their frustration into their political blogs. On February 19, 2009, Rick Santelli, a financial market commentator on the television channel CNBC, had an on-air outburst regarding President Obama's \$75 billion assistance program for homeowners who could not pay their mortgages. In now-famous words, he exclaimed, "We're thinking of having a Chicago Tea Party in July."⁴ Mr. Santelli's rant became an internet sensation.

A group of internet-linked political activists, including Ms. Martin and Ms. Kremer, decided to organize a host of simultaneous protests nationwide within a week. They succeeded in staging 50 protests all over the country. Another nationwide set of protests for the US deadline for filing taxes, April 15, exceeded all expectations and instead of the planned 40 cities as sites for protests, the organizers "lost track at 830" – the protests gathered hundreds of thousands of participants.⁵ Three days before the protests, Ms. Kremer's husband came up with a name for the organization: the Tea Party Patriots. The Tea Party gained national prominence and recognition, and several conservative political analysts, such as Glenn Beck and Sean Hannity, started their own Tea Party organizations.⁶

"Contract from America"

The Tea Party seeks a limited government, individual liberty, and economic freedom. These principles have been enshrined in a "Contract from America." It is reminiscent of the "Contract with America" that the Republicans, led by Newt Gingrich, propagated and used to take control of Congress in the mid-1990s. The contract contains ten main principles: "1) Protect the Constitution, 2) Reject cap and trade, 3) Demand a balanced budget, 4) Enact fundamental tax reform, 5) Restore fiscal responsibility and constitutionally limited government, 6) End runaway government spending, 7) Defund, repeal, and replace government-run health care, 8) Pass an 'all-of-the-above' energy policy, 9) Stop the pork, and 10) Stop the tax hikes."⁷

Special elections in Massachusetts

In January of 2010, the Tea Party gained national recognition of its strength when Republican Scott Brown won the special election to fill the late Ted Kennedy's se-

⁴ D. von Drehle, *Why the Tea Party Movement Matters*, "Time Magazine", February 18, 2010, www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1966475,00.html.

⁵ D. A. Blackmon, J. Levitz, A. Berzon, L. Etter, *Birth of a Movement: Tea Party Arose from Conservatives Steeped in Crisis*, "The Wall Street Journal", October 28, 2010, www.online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304173704575578332725182228.html.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Contract from America, www.contractfromamerica.org.

nate seat in Massachusetts. Mr. Brown's win was quite the upset. In Massachusetts, registered Democrats outnumber Republicans by three to one and the state had not elected a Republican senator since 1972.⁸

The election had significant practical and symbolic implications. Mr. Kennedy considered health care reform (at the time not passed yet) the cause of his life. Mr. Brown's election not only signaled a rejection of the health care reform but also gave Republicans forty-one seats in the senate – the bare minimum necessary to prevent Democrats from overriding a filibuster. Buoyed by Tea Party energy, support, and volunteers pouring in from around the nation, Mr. Brown ended up winning handily with 52 percent of the votes to 47 percent for his opponent. Exemplifying his populist appeal and approach, Mr. Brown declared, "With all due respect, it's not the Kennedys' seat, it's not the Democrats' seat, it's the people's seat."⁹

2010 midterm elections

The 2010 midterm elections marked the Tea Party's demonstration of strength. Forty percent of voters overall¹⁰ and seventy-one percent of Republicans expressed support for the movement.¹¹ Energized by the Tea Party, the Republicans exceeded already high expectations and gained a significant majority in the House of Representatives. The GOP picked up sixty-three seats in the House, the largest midterm election swing since 1938.¹² Even President Obama described the results as a "shellacking" for the Democrats.¹³

However, during that election the Tea Party took on both parties. In terms of the GOP, the Tea Party exerted its influence in the primary contests. The Tea Party was not afraid to challenge Republicans who in the movement's mind did not have sufficient conservative credentials or had compromised by collaborating with the current administration. It was in the Republican primaries that the Tea Party was particularly strong. Statistical analysis of the Tea Party impact on the 2010 Republican

⁸ *The Unstoppable Truck: How Scott Brown Swept up the Bay State and Stymied Health Reform in Washington, DC*, "The Economist", January 21, 2010, www.economist.com/node/15330692.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ G. Langer, *Exit Polls: Economy, Voter Anger Drive Republican Victory*, ABC News, November 2, 2010, www.abcnews.go.com/Politics/vote-2010-elections-results-midterm-exit-poll-analysis/story?id=12003775&page=1.

¹¹ P. Wallsten, D. Yadron, *Tea-Party Movement Gathers Strength*, "The Wall Street Journal", September 29, 2010, www.online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703882404575520252928390046.html.

¹² C. Dodge, L. Lerner, *Democrats Face Biggest House Midterm Defeat Years*, Bloomberg, November, 2, 2010, www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-11-02/republicans-approach-biggest-house-midterm-win-in-seven-decades.html.

¹³ K. Rowland, *Obama Concedes 'Shellacking': Blames Process, not His Policies, for Democrats' Setback*, "The Washington Times", November 3, 2010, www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/nov/3/obama-concedes-shellacking.

primaries found that endorsement by the Tea Party increased a candidate's votes by eight to nine percentage and that signing on to the "Contract from America" increased votes by twenty percentage points. In sum, "either bearing a Tea Party stamp of approval or showing a willingness to affiliate with Tea Party principles clearly improved a candidate's electoral prospects."¹⁴

In Delaware, the Tea Party supported Christine O'Donnell to a shocking Republican primary upset over Mike Castle, former governor and the incumbent representative, who had been the presumptive nominee and winner. The Tea Party had similar success in Alaska, where the incumbent, Senator Lisa Murkowski lost the primary battle to the Tea Party candidate Joe Miller. At the time these two races were indicative of the Tea Party's strength. However, eventually they also exposed the Tea Party's weakness. Christine O'Donnell, with headline-grabbing views against pre-marital sex and masturbation, was simply too extreme a candidate and ended up losing the general election in a state that was thought to go Republican. In Alaska, Senator Murkowski ran independently and through her successful write-in campaign was re-elected.

The Tea Party loses momentum?

According to some experts, the Tea Party seems to currently be in decline. Polling numbers for the movement have decreased. Virtually half of the population "say-[s] the more they hear about the Tea Party, the less they like it."¹⁵ Tea Party candidates for the Republican presidential nominee, such as Michele Bachmann and Herman Cain, despite brief surges in popularity, ultimately performed poorly in the primaries. Nevertheless, in May of 2012 in a primary in Indiana, Richard Mourdock, the movement's candidate, managed to defeat by a shocking twenty-point margin a veteran Republican senator, Richard Lugar.¹⁶

Part of this is natural growing pains and the effect of a movement shifting from rhetoric to actually being in a position of responsibility. An example of such blowback was the negative response to the hard-line stance against raising the debt ceiling advocated by Tea Party members in the House. It is one thing to support the Tea Party principle of cutting government spending and another to realize that a possible result of their activities is government shut down and the US credit rating being downgraded. The Tea Party, perhaps in acknowledgment of its weakening national pull, is focusing its attention on local-level elections and fostering a new generation of political leadership rather than larger elections where candidates may be reluctant to alienate a variety of groups by siding with the Tea Party.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ch. Karpowitz, J. Quin Monson, K. D. Patterson, J. C. Pope, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ G. Langer, *Tea Party Movement Looks Stalled; Half Like It Less as They Hear More*, ABC News, Apr 15, 2012, www.abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/04/tea-party-movement-looks-stalled-half-like-it-less-as-they-hear-more.

¹⁶ *The Tea Party: Another Moderate Shown the Door*, "The Economist", May 9, 2012, www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2012/05/tea-party.

¹⁷ R. W. Stevenson, *THE CAUCUS: Political Memo: For Tea Party, Priority Is an Enduring Future, Not Just a Candidacy*, "The New York Times", March 10, 2012, www.query.nytimes.com/

The “Citizens United” Supreme Court decision

In 2010, the US Supreme Court handed down a decision with profound political impact. In *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*,¹⁸ the Court eliminated restrictions on independent expenditures on political advertising. As a result, a new type of political advocacy emerged: organizations called super-PACs (Super Political Action Committees). Super-PACs face no limits on raising funds from citizens or corporations, including trade unions. As a consequence, they are able to spend unlimited funds to support or attack causes and individual candidates as long as they do not coordinate their activities with those of political parties and specific candidates. Prior to this Supreme Court ruling, only “regular” PACs were legal and significantly restricted in their fundraising capabilities. For instance, individuals and corporations can donate at most \$5,000 to PACs established by political parties and candidates.¹⁹

That decision elicited immediate public backlash and even prompted a much-ballyhooed silent “Not true” from Justice Samuel A. Alito, Jr. in response to President Obama’s criticism in his State of the Union Address on January 27, 2010.²⁰ The primary concern was that the decision would usher in an era where elections would be decided by massive corporate spending on candidates willing to follow corporate lobbying demands. The title of an article by regarded scholar Ronald Dworkin, *The Decision That Threatens Democracy*, captures the concern of many, particularly on the left.²¹

The experiences of the 2012 election cycle seem to confirm some of the fears. Wealthy individuals are in a position to influence outcomes of political races to a degree unknown before. The best example is the 2012 Republican presidential primary. Newt Gingrich, who had little success in raising money, received a \$10 million donation from Mr. and Mrs. Sheldon Adelson in January of 2012.²² Thanks to this sudden change in fortune, Mr. Gingrich managed to win the South Carolina Republican primary.²³ This victory, although not decisive, allowed the former Speaker of the

gst/fullpage.html?res=9B04EEDF1138F933A25750C0A9649D8B63&ref=teapartymovement&pagewanted=1.

¹⁸ Supreme Court of the United States, *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, 130 S. Ct. 876 (2010), www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/09pdf/08-205.pdf.

¹⁹ Detailed information of campaign finance issues can be found in: The Federal Election Commission, “Federal Election Campaign Laws,” April 2008, www.fec.gov/law/feca/feca.pdf. The Commission’s web page (www.fec.gov) also provides up to date information on changes in legislation concerning these matters.

²⁰ A. Liptak, *Supreme Court Gets a Rare Rebuke, in Front of a Nation*, “The New York Times”, January 28, 2010, www.nytimes.com/2010/01/29/us/politics/29scotus.html?_r=1.

²¹ R. Dworkin, *The Decision That Threatens Democracy*, “The New York Review of Books”, May 13, 2010, www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/may/13/decision-threatens-democracy.

²² Ch. Palmeri, B. Jinks, *Adelson’s \$10 Million PAC Bet Gives Gingrich Boost for Southern Primaries*, Bloomberg, January 25, 2012, www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-01-25/adelson-s-10-million-pac-bet-gives-gingrich-boost-for-southern-primaries.html.

²³ K. Tumulty, *Newt Gingrich Wins South Carolina Primary*, “The Washington Post”, January 21, 2012, www.washingtonpost.com/politics/newt-gingrich-wins-south-carolina-primary/2012/01/21/gIQAkTxBHQ_story.html.

House to prolong his presidential run. The fact that Mr. Adelson gained his wealth from running huge casino operations, including establishments in China-controlled Macao, and that at the time he faced a federal investigation for a possible anti-bribery law violation brought particular attention to this case.²⁴

However, not all join the chorus of democratic doom. Some scholars note that the decision implemented a relatively mild decrease – in comparison to previous decisions that did not garner such public attention – in restrictions on such political advertising.²⁵ More pertinently, there is a strong argument that such public participation, particularly support of political views, is simply too risky for large corporations due to potential repercussions from voters (citizens) or politicians (regulators).²⁶ However, it is undeniable that rich individuals, corporations, and trade unions have gained a potentially powerful political tool.

The growth of income and wealth disparity

The Tea Party movement is often associated with the Occupy Wall Street protests. The Tea Party blames the federal government for the situation, whereas Occupy Wall Street blames the financial institutions. Nevertheless, both movements exemplify frustration with the political and financial situation of the United States. Their rise to influence is, to a large degree, the consequence of declining living standards that the majority of Americans is experiencing.

The Great Recession caused a drastic increase in unemployment and forced many to file for personal bankruptcy. These events came on the heels of the 2001–2008 period that saw a significant increase in inequality; incomes of a tiny fraction of the population – the super-rich – had been rising rapidly while those of the vast majority had been stagnating. Between 2000 and 2006 the median income (in 2006 dollars) declined from \$49,447 to \$48,233. Over this period of time, the bottom 90 percent of American households recorded a drop in real income of 4 percent, while the top 0.01 percent of families saw an increase of 22.3 percent.²⁷ In order to maintain their standard of living, Americans decreased the rate of savings; it dropped to 0.4 percent of personal income in 2006, from 2.3 percent in 2000.²⁸ The rise in inequality is not a new development. Economists at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

²⁴ N. Confessore, E. Lipton, *A Big Check, and Gingrich Gets a Big Lift*, „New York Times”, January 9, 2012, www.nytimes.com/2012/01/10/us/politics/sheldon-adelson-a-billionaire-gives-gingrich-a-big-lift.html?pagewanted=all.

²⁵ J. Levitt, *Confronting the Impact of Citizens United*, „Yale Law and Policy Review” 2010, Vol. 20, No. 1, p. 217.

²⁶ R. Epstein, *Citizens United v. FEC: The Constitutional Right that Big Corporations Should Have but Do Not Want*, „Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy” 2011, Vol. 34, No. 2, p. 654.

²⁷ J. Jahart, K. Evans, *Trapped in the Middle, The Incomes of Most Americans Have Stalled: Tackling Voter Angst in Pennsylvania*, „The Wall Street Journal”, April 19, 2008.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

calculate that between 1979 and 2007 the top 1 percent enjoyed a 277 percent increase in after-tax income, but the middle 60 percent and bottom 20 percent recorded a gain of only 38 percent and 18 percent, respectively.²⁹

The stagnation in real incomes combined with rapidly growing health care expenditures resulted in a significant decrease in the standard of living. In 1980, Americans spent 8.5 percent of GDP on medical expenses, but by 2010 the share of health care outlays jumped to 17.6 percent of the GDP. In other countries, the rate of growth in health care costs has been much slower. For instance, over the same period in Switzerland the share of medical expenses in GDP rose from 7.2 percent to 11.4 percent and in the United Kingdom from 5.3 percent to 9.6 percent. But this excess spending on medical services does not translate into better health care; citizens of both Switzerland and the United Kingdom have a longer expected life at birth than Americans.³⁰

This drastic growth in health care related costs has particularly negative implications for federal expenditures and, therefore, the size of budget deficits. The federal government runs two programs that cover medical costs: Medicare that pays for medical bills of the elderly and Medicaid, co-financed by states, that reimburses hospitals and doctors for the provision of services to the poor. A decrease in spending on Medicare and Medicaid would substantially add to the growing disparity in equality in the country.

For many Americans, the recent collapse of the real estate market was the death-knell, as the value of their most important asset, their homes, plummeted. Not surprisingly, the 2008 bank bail-out arranged by the Bush administration and an overwhelming majority of Democrats in Congress caused a popular outrage. Many on the right started to demand a radical decrease in the role of the federal government while many on the left demanded punishment of the “fat cats.” This upheaval contributed to a Democratic victory in 2008. But the policies adopted by the new President and Democrat-dominated Congress, the stimulus package (the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act – ARRA), “Obamacare,” and the bail-out of General Motors, gave the Republicans a new lease on political life as the budget deficit and national debt swelled. When the GOP won control over the lower House of Congress in 2010 an unprecedented stalemate set in. The divided government reflects a deeply divided society.³¹

²⁹ Ch. Stone, H. Shaw, D. Trisi, A. Sherman, *A Guide to Statistics on Historical Trends in Income Inequality*, “Center on Budget and Policy Priorities”, March 5, 2012, www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=3629.

³⁰ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD. Stat Extracts, www.stats.oecd.org/index.aspx.

³¹ *Game on: The Campaign Looks Likely to Sharpen America's Divisions*, “The Economist”, April 14, 2012, p. 15.

Macroeconomic imbalances

The political gridlock is a dangerous development as the economic picture is grim. Table 1 presents most important economic data for the past eleven years. The rate of economic growth is anemic, investment rate (real gross capital formation) mediocre, unemployment unusually high, budget deficit (general government net lending) at a record high, and the level of national debt (general government gross liabilities) approaching the level attained at the end of the Second World War. Projections of the federal government revenues and spending point to a long-term unsustainable path.³² The nation needs bold fiscal reform.

The National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform (commonly known as the Simpson-Bowles Commission) and the Rivlin-Domenici Commission laid down a framework for such a change.³³ But President Obama missed this opportunity, even though the Simpson-Bowles Commission was his own creation.³⁴ The main reason for this failure was little interest among members of both parties in following its recommendations. The Democrats oppose a major weakening of welfare programs and the Republicans refuse to accept any increases in taxes.

This stance on taxes reflects a dramatic shift to the right among Republicans.³⁵ Chuck Hagel, a former senator from Nebraska and a seasoned Republican politician, goes even further and says that these days the Republican Party is so ideologically rigid that Ronald Reagan – who was a practical conservative and worked with the other party on many occasions – “wouldn’t even want to be a part of it.”³⁶ But a tax hike is unavoidable, because the level of discretionary spending is relatively small. In 2011, the expenditure on national defense, pensions, health care, and interest on national debt equaled, respectively, 25.3, 23.1, 20.8, and 5.4 percent of the total.³⁷ In sum, outlays on welfare, education, transportation, and all other federal programs were just a quarter of all federal spending. Contrary to popular opinion,

³² G. L. Dodaro, *Fiscal Year 2010 US Government Financial Statements*, Federal Government Continues to Face Financial Management and Long-Term Fiscal Challenges, United States Government Accountability Office, Testimony before the Subcommittee on Government Organization, Efficiency and Financial Management, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives, March 9, 2011, www.gao.gov/assets/130/125667.pdf.

³³ The National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, *The Moment of Truth: Report of the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform*, Washington 2010; P. Domenici, A. Rivlin, *Restoring America's Future: Reviving the Economy, Cutting Spending and Debt, and Creating a Simple, Pro-growth Tax System*, Washington 2010.

³⁴ T. L. Friedman, *Go Big, Mr. Obama*, “New York Times”, November 22, 2011, www.nytimes.com/2011/11/23/opinion/friedman-go-big-mr-obama.html.

³⁵ *The Republicans: A Dangerous Game*, “The Economist”, November 5, 2011, pp. 31–32.

³⁶ J. Rogin, *Hagel: Reagan Wouldn't Identify with Today's GOP*, “Foreign Policy Magazine”, May 11, 2012, www.thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/05/11/hagel_reagan_wouldn_t_identify_with_today_s_gop.

³⁷ usgovernmentspending.com, FY12 Federal Budget Spending Estimates for Fiscal Years 2011–2016, compiled by Ch. Chantrell, www.usgovernmentspending.com/federal_budget_detail_fy12bs1nnonen_1l1n_30.

there is simply not enough “government waste” that could be eliminated to make a significant dent in the size of future budget deficits.

Table. Macroeconomic data for the United States

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
GDP growth (annual rate, %)	1.1	1.8	2.5	3.5	3.1	2.7	1.9	-0.3	-3.5	3.0	1.7
Investment expend. (% change)	-1.0	-2.7	3.3	6.3	5.3	2.5	-1.4	-5.1	-15.2	2.0	3.7
Budget position (% GDP)	1.5	-0.6	-4.0	-5.0	-4.4	-3.3	-2.2	-2.9	-6.3	-11.3	-10.6
National debt (% GDP)	54.4	56.8	60.2	68.0	67.6	66.4	67.0	75.9	89.7	98.3	102.7
Unemployment rate (%)	4.7	5.8	6.0	5.5	5.1	4.6	4.6	5.8	9.3	9.6	9.0
China (GDP growth, annual rate, %)	8.3	9.1	10.0	10.1	11.3	12.7	14.2	9.6	9.1	10.3	N.a.

N.a. = data not available

Data: OECD, accessed on July 12, 2012.

Similarly, any potential savings resulting from the winding down of the war in Afghanistan are limited. In fact, the future spending on benefits to which veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are entitled, especially for health care, will significantly exceed the direct costs related to the actual fighting. Linda J. Bilmes and Joseph E. Stiglitz assessed the total direct and indirect cost of the wars at three trillion dollars.³⁸ As the wars drag on the actual cost may substantially exceed that estimate.

The present tax code is inefficient and should be reformed regardless of the fiscal situation. For instance, the United States is one of the very few countries that use global assertion, which requires both corporations and individuals to pay taxes on their world-wide income. Since the early 1990s the federal and state combined statutory corporate tax rate has been kept at 39.2 percent. But over the past two decades many nations lowered their marginal rates and in 2010 the American rate was the second highest among the OECD countries.³⁹ Over time, as a result of lobbying, Congress adopted various tax-breaks, and many American multinational firms pay

³⁸ L. J. Bilmes, J. E. Stiglitz, *The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict*, New York 2008.

³⁹ M. H. Moffett, A. I. Stonehill, D. K. Eiteman, *Fundamental of Multinational Finance*, Boston 2012, pp. 399–401.

much less than the statutory rate. For instance, in 2007–2009, General Electric, one of the largest transnational firms, paid an average effective rate of only 3.6 percent.⁴⁰

The personal tax code is equally complex and distortionary. Tax on capital income is drastically lower than on labor income. For all practical purposes, top managers can transfer labor income into capital income. Consequently, in 2010 Warren E. Buffett, one of the wealthiest individuals in the United States, paid an effective tax rate of 17.4 percent, while his staff of twenty paid between 33 and 41 percent. The billionaire challenged Congress to change the tax code to make it more equitable.⁴¹ So far, his call to increase taxes on the top 1 percent of Americans has been met, at best, with silence and, at worst, with ridicule.

The tax code is also full of exemptions (recently renamed tax expenditures). The Tax Policy Center estimates that in 2012 the breaks will cost the US Treasury at least \$1.1 trillion.⁴² This is the equivalent of roughly 6 percent of GDP or the entire anticipated budget deficit. The elimination or reduction of some of the exemptions makes economic sense; however, for most Republicans this is synonymous with a tax increase and the entire party leadership and over 270 other members of Congress signed the Grover Norquist pledge not to raise taxes.⁴³

They believe the deficit can be dealt with through economic growth and spending cuts only. This view is challenged by many economists, including former Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers.⁴⁴ Bruce R. Bartlett, a Reagan Administration veteran, recently wrote in support of this position.⁴⁵

Economic challenges

The present stalemate has a clear economic dimension. On April 18, 2011, Standard and Poor's placed its rating of US Treasury debt on a negative outlook and on August 5, 2011 it followed through with a downgrade. In its justification for the government debt (rating), the agency stated that the "downgrade reflects our opinion that the fiscal consolidation plan that Congress and the Administration recently agreed to falls short of what, in our view, would be necessary to stabilize the government's medium-term

⁴⁰ M. A. Sullivan, *Testimony before the Committee on Ways and Means*, US House of Representatives, January 20, 2011, p. 3, www.waysandmeans.house.gov/UploadedFiles/sullivan_written_testimony_WM_Jan_20.pdf.

⁴¹ W. E. Buffett, *Stop Coddling the Super-rich*, "The New York Times", August 14, 2011, www.nytimes.com/2011/08/15/opinion/stop-coddling-the-super-rich.html.

⁴² *The High Price of Tax Breaks: Not so Easy*, "The Economist", April 28, 2012, p. 32.

⁴³ CBS News, *60 Minutes: The Pledge: Grover Norquist's Hold on the GOP*, www.cbsnews.com/8301-18560_162-57327816/the-pledge-grover-norquists-hold-on-the-gop.

⁴⁴ R. Rubin, *Summers Says US Tax Overhaul Should Raise More Money*, Bloomberg, May 3, 2012, www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-05-03/rubin-says-tax-overhaul-presents-difficult-substance-politics.html.

⁴⁵ B. R. Bartlett, *The Benefit and the Burden: Tax Reform – Why We Need It and What It Will Take*, New York 2012.

debt dynamics,” and that it also “reflects our view that the effectiveness, stability, and predictability of American policymaking and political institutions have weakened.”⁴⁶

This judgment accurately reflects the political reality. Instead of tackling major issues, the President and the opposition at best make cosmetic changes to buy time. For instance, rather than follow the Simpson-Bowles recommendation to trim the deficit by at least \$4 trillion, in August of 2011 Congress barely managed to avoid a government shut-down with an agreement that, on one hand, increased the national debt limit by \$2.4 trillion and, on the other, mandated automatic spending cuts of only \$2.1 trillion over the following ten years.⁴⁷ Similarly, rather than reform the tax code, in December of 2010, President Obama and Speaker of the House John Boehner reached an agreement that extended the Bush tax-cuts for two years and decreased payroll taxes by 2 percent.⁴⁸

The political stand-off threatens the fragile economic recovery. Unless there is new legislation, emergency unemployment benefits and the Bush-era tax cuts will expire at the end of 2012. This, together with the mandatory automatic spending cuts “might derail the recovery.”⁴⁹ The May 2012 OECD economic forecast stresses that fiscal consolidation should be implemented at “a steady, gradual pace consistent with a medium-term plan to restore fiscal stability” and that “restricting tax expenditures would lower the deficit while reducing market distortions and narrowing income inequality.”⁵⁰

The above prescription is in line with mainstream economic views. An extensive analysis of fiscal retrenchments conducted by the International Monetary Fund shows that a 1 percent reduction in government expenditure has a significant negative impact on economic growth, employment, and equitable distribution of income. Therefore, the authors recommend the adoption of a plan to reign in the budget deficit that commences at a time when economic growth is robust.⁵¹

This finding is consistent with recent American experiences. The 2009 stimulus package absorbed a significant part of the shock that resulted from the collapse of the real estate market and the financial crisis. Blinder and Zandi estimate that in 2010 alone, the ARRA increased real GDP by 3.4 percent and employment by 2.7 mil-

⁴⁶ J. Detrixhe, *US Loses AAA Credit Rating as S&P Slams Debt, Politics*, Bloomberg, August 6, 2011, www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-08-06/u-s-credit-rating-cut-by-s-p-for-first-time-on-deficit-reduction-accord.html.

⁴⁷ Congressional Budget Office, *CBO Analysis of August 1 Budget Control Act: Letter to the Honorable John Boehner and the Honorable Harry Reid*, August 1, 2011, www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/ftpdocs/123xx/doc12357/budgetcontrolactaug1.pdf.

⁴⁸ M. Spetalnick, P. Zengerle, *Obama Announces Tax Deal with Republicans* (Update 5), Reuters, December 6, 2010, www.reuters.com/article/2010/12/07/usa-taxes-obama-idUSN0621134720101207.

⁴⁹ OECD, *United States – Economic Forecast Summary, May 2012*, www.oecd.org/document/48/0,3746,en_2649_37443_45268528_1_1_1_37443,00.html.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ L. Ball, D. Leigh, P. Loungani, *Painful Medicine*, “Finance and Development”, September 2011, www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2011/09/pdf/ball.pdf.

lion. The authors also believe that without the bail-out of General Motors the entire American auto industry could have perished.⁵² A review of the impact of ARRA for the years 2009–2013 can be found on the Congressional Budget Office’s web page.⁵³ Similarly, estimates of the cost of the bank bail-out have been drastically reduced. In the summer of 2009, the projection was of a \$341 billion short-fall; a recent evaluation shows a loss of only \$60 billion.⁵⁴

In sum, the United States needs to address some fundamental economic problems that hinder the nation’s economic progress. This is a pressing question because of the momentous shift in international relations developing before our eyes: the rise of China. This event, coupled with the rapid economic growth recorded in India and Latin America, poses a tremendous challenge to the economic and political supremacy of the United States.

The rise of China

In a 2007 paper, Robert Fogel prophesized that China’s share in real world GDP would increase from 11 percent in 2000 to 40 percent in 2040, while over the same period that of the United States would shrink from 22 percent to 14 percent.⁵⁵ Overall, the balance of power, according to Fogel, would shift decisively to Asia, as India and a group of six South-east Asian nations (Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, South Korea, and Taiwan) would account for 12 percent of the world output each (for a total of 24 percent). A prediction that reaches over thirty years into the future must be fraught with potential miscalculations; however, if anything the Great Recession has made it more probable. Table 1 presents the rate of economic growth in the United States and China over the 2001–2010 period.

“The Economist” presented an illuminating comparison of the two giants. In 2011 China consumed 6.6 times the amount of steel the United States did and had 3.3 times as many cell phones. The Asian nation also exported and invested, respectively, 30 percent and 40 percent more than the United States. In 2010, China bested America in terms of manufacturing output, car sales, and energy consumption. The United States still enjoys the largest GDP in the world, but this is going to change soon. Taking into account differences in prices, i.e. at purchasing power parity, China is expected to surpass the American output in 2016 and at market exchange rate just two years later.⁵⁶

⁵² A. S. Blinder, M. Zandi, *How the Great Recession Was Brought to an End*, www.economy.com/mark-zandi/documents/End-of-Great-Recession.pdf.

⁵³ Congressional Budget Office, *Estimated Impact of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act on Employment and Economic Output from October 2011 Through December 2011*, February 2012, www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/attachments/02-22-ARRA.pdf.

⁵⁴ The United States Department of Treasury, *The Financial Crisis*.

⁵⁵ R. W. Fogel, *Capitalism and Democracy in 2040: Forecasts and Speculations*, “NBER Working Paper 13184”, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge MA 2007.

⁵⁶ *Economics Focus: How to Get a Date*, “The Economist”, December 31, 2011, p. 61.

This could be a monumental shift in power, one that could also be very painful economically. The fact that the United States is the largest economic power makes US dollar denominated securities very attractive to international investors, including China. Consequently, the American government and private corporations are able to borrow at lower rates than would otherwise be possible. Additionally, American financial markets play a preeminent role in global finance and secure thousands of highly paid jobs for the nation. In the long-run, if the disparity in economic power between the two nations rises, this privileged situation could change. This change could happen faster if the present fiscal trends continue.

Conclusions

The last four years witnessed exceptional political, social, and economic turmoil in the United States. Decades of stagnant or even declining standards of living that the majority of Americans has been experiencing culminated in an unprecedented economic crisis. This experience resulted in drastic polarization of political life and neither the left nor the right is willing to compromise any more. Each side holds a radically different view of the causes of the crisis and, consequently, proposes solutions that are polar opposites. The outcome of this struggle is unknown; but one is certain that whoever loses will not be easily reconciled with the end-result and will probably try to destroy the new order.

The necessary reforms include: a significant tax overhaul that, on one hand, makes it more equitable and efficient and, on the other, raises more revenue; a decrease in government spending on both civilian and military programs; and a re-vamping of welfare programs, especially government expenditures on health care and pensions. As of now, there is no consensus on how to accomplish these tasks. The 2010 Supreme Court *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* decision empowered the dominant special interests with a weapon to stall, if not defeat, any challenge to the present status quo. Therefore, the present political stalemate is likely to continue well beyond the upcoming 2012 presidential elections.

But, for the first time in over a century, the United States has precious little time to resolve the differences and return to normalcy. The rise of China poses an enormous challenge to American supremacy. China's population is over four times that of the United States and the nation is growing at a breath-taking pace. The next decade may be pivotal in deciding the outcome of this race. The longer the deadlock persists at home, the less likely it is the United States will be able to protect its dominant position abroad.

Stany Zjednoczone na rozdrożu

Analiza współczesnego kryzysu ekonomicznego w kontekście szeroko pojętej wojny kultur. Autorzy ukazują, w jaki sposób procesy ekonomiczne są zależne od głębokich zjawisk kulturowych.

Lawrence Grossman

THE CULTURE WARS AND AMERICAN JEWS

Are Jews combatants in the American culture wars? Yes, but in a highly idiosyncratic way. To understand their role we must first delineate the battle lines of the struggle.

The term “culture wars” entered the American lexicon in 1992 with the publication of James Davison Hunter’s book by that name,¹ although the phenomenon he described began in earnest in the late 1970s and its roots go back at least a decade earlier. Hunter argued that instead of contesting with *each other* on historical or theological grounds – as had been the case in the past – Catholic, Protestant and Jewish America were now each *internally* divided about whether, and to what extent, traditional moral values should guide public life. Hunter cited evidence that on this question followers of these religions were increasingly finding that they had more in common with likeminded members of other faiths than with people in their religious community who took the opposite position on the appropriate role of moral values in the civic arena.

On the one side are liberals, adherents of all three religions who tend to view moral choices as private matters and seek to maximize individual freedom by allowing people to decide them for themselves. At the level of public policy, they feel that traditional norms inherited from the past should yield to secular considerations of the present. In their view, allowing religiously-mandated doctrine to affect public policy could trample the rights of those belonging to minority faiths or to no faith. To be sure, proponents of this position are not necessarily consistent, as they often

¹ J. Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, New York 1992.

welcome faith-based support for liberal views they espouse, such as the religious argument for racial equality.

On the other side are those from the traditionalist wings of these same religions who bemoan what the late Father Richard John Neuhaus called “The Naked Public Square.”² They argue that a secularized society that prioritizes individual autonomy and rules out traditionalist religious voices invites moral relativism and may even threaten the individual rights of those guided by traditional values, as they claim is happening in the current push to require Catholic-sponsored hospitals to provide abortions.

The Nature of the Conflict

While the culture wars play out on a host of specific issues, these can be subsumed under three broad categories.

One has to do with religion in public venues. The most important of these are the public schools. In fact the first shots in what would become a full-fledged culture war may very well have been fired in 1962, when the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Engel v. Vitale*, invalidated prayer – even of the nondenominational variety – in public schools. Ever since, there has been ongoing dispute and intermittent litigation over the teaching of religion and the celebration of religious holidays in the classroom, and the use of tax money to provide benefits for nonpublic religiously-sponsored schools. Another hot-button issue is curricular. Should science classes that teach the theory of evolution also present the alternative creationist view, backed by some traditionalists, that explains the world as the product of a Creator? Should history and civics classes stress the unique greatness of the American way of life, in line with the way traditionalists tend to look at their country’s history, or point out its mistreatment of women, blacks and other minorities? Does classroom subjection to theories that undermine his or her family’s deeply-held beliefs violate a child’s rights?

Another public-space issue is the placement of religious symbols in parks and government buildings, or on streets. Here as well, the courts have generally decided against those eager to recognize God in the public square, and this, in turn, has induced proponents of such displays to fall back on the argument that Christmas trees (as opposed to mangers), Easter bunnies and Hanukkah menorahs are actually secular in nature, and therefore permitted in public places.

A second area of contention is the potential conflict between individual choice and the religion-based idea of sanctity of life. The hot-button issue is abortion. For most liberals, termination of pregnancy is a decision best left to the option of the pregnant woman. However the official Catholic position equates abortion – irrespective of the reason – with murder, and a great many traditionalist Protestants and Orthodox

² R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*, Grand Rapids MI 1984.

Jews would allow it under only highly restricted circumstances. This conflict also reflects differing views of the rights of women. Proponents of the right to abortion see it as a feminist cause and criticize opponents as hostile to the interests of women. As in the case of public-school prayer, the Supreme Court has intervened on the liberal side, but efforts to restrict abortion rights and ultimately end them continue.

Another “life” issue is the conflict over “pulling the plug,” terminating the treatment of critically ill patients where there is no chance for recovery. Here too, the autonomous choice of the family to end treatment comes up against the traditional taboo, codified by the monotheistic religions, against ending life.

The third cluster of issues concern sexuality, again pitting individual self-fulfillment against traditional group norms. Some duel over the availability of pornography on the street corner or the internet, and others over whether the government should be funding birth control – here, too, pitting pro-feminist liberals against traditionalists – but the truly explosive debate today concerns homosexuality. The monotheistic religions have traditionally condemned same-sex relations, and so self-evident did the ban appear that American state laws enforced it. But over the last few decades those upholding the heterosexual standard have been put on the defensive: homosexual activity was first decriminalized and then given social cachet, and now several states have legalized gay marriage on the grounds that people ought to be allowed to marry whom they please, irrespective of older, religion-based norms.

It is surely noteworthy that every one of these battles in the culture wars arrays proponents of individual choice against norms associated with the Judeo-Christian tradition, a tradition originating in the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible. The assumption that religious values must underpin all aspects of life; the conviction that God purposefully created the world; the notion that all life is sacred since God is its source; and the privileging of heterosexual marriage as the norm for society all originated as Jewish ideas, and were carried on by Christianity. Yet paradoxically, contemporary American Jewish opinion, unlike the situation among Christians, veers overwhelmingly to the liberal side of the culture wars.

Where the Jews Are

Studies conducted over the years comparing the views of Jewish and non-Jewish Americans have repeatedly confirmed the Jews’ anomalous position in the culture wars.

The 1981 National Survey of American Jews, conducted by Steven M. Cohen, found that 72% of American Jews favored enactment of the Equal Rights Amendment, which would have enshrined equality of men and women in the Constitution. In contrast, two national polls on this question yielded 45% and 52% in favor. Asked whether homosexuals ought to be allowed to teach in the public schools, 67% of the Jewish sample answered in the affirmative as compared to just 45% in a national Gal-

lup poll. Half of the Jews polled agreed to government funding for abortions, a position that only 40% took in two national surveys. Not surprisingly, 65% of the Jews said they were Democrats, the more liberal party, generally unfriendly to allowing religion a role in public decision-making. In contrast, 45% of the general American public identified as Democrats.³

Things were no different two decades later. A survey sponsored by the Center for Jewish Community Studies in 2000, also conducted by Steven M. Cohen, asked a national sample of Jews an even more extensive battery of questions and compared the results to national polls. While 65% of the general public would allow display of the Ten Commandments in public schools, only 38% of the Jews agreed, and even allowing a moment of silence each day for students wishing to pray, approved by 84 percent of the public, received support from just 48% of Jews. Similar gaps between Jews and non-Jews were evident on every question dealing with the role of religion in the schools.⁴

The same paradigm held for views on the appropriateness of religious expression in public life. Asked if “organized religion should stay out of politics,” 56% of the general public and a whopping 88% of Jews agreed. Among the general public, an overwhelming 70% were “pleased when political leaders publicly affirm their belief in God.” Only 30% of the Jewish sample was pleased – a harbinger of the displeasure many Jews would feel that summer when the Democratic vice-presidential candidate, Senator Joseph I. Lieberman, spoke openly about his Jewish faith. And while the general sample, by almost identical majorities, felt it “okay” for municipal authorities to put up manger scenes and Hanukkah candles on public property during the winter holiday season (80% for the former, 79% for the latter), just 43% of Jews approved of the mangers and 46% the candles. The extraordinarily paradoxical fact was that Christians were far more in favor of the public display of Jewish religious symbols than Jews themselves.⁵

Jewish and non-Jewish culture-war differences were seen on abortion and sexuality as well. On the former, the gap had widened considerably since 1981. On the abortion question, 88% of Jews and 58% of the general public said that “abortion should be generally available to those who want it.” And while 42% of Americans considered it appropriate for the Right to Life movement to use religion in its opposition to abortion, only 15% of Jews thought so. Forty-eight percent of all American opposed same sex relations as compared to 23% of Jews who did; 52% of Jews, but just 32% of Americans, favored homosexual marriage.⁶

Not surprisingly, the Jewish preference for individual choice and distrust of religion in public life once again surfaced in response to questions about political views. While only 31% of the American public identified itself with the Democrats,

³ S. M. Cohen, *American Modernity and Jewish Identity*, New York 1983, p. 140.

⁴ *Idem*, *Attitudes of American Jews in Comparative Perspective*, Philadelphia 2000, p. 19.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 23

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 26, 28.

fully 59% of Jews did. In a way, this gap actually understates the Jewish preference for the Democrats. In a separate polling of a sample of Jewish communal leaders – people who spoke for and presumably represented American Jewry to the broader American public – 81% were Democrats.⁷

At December 2011 survey conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute suggests the same, if not a greater, Jewish–non-Jewish divide, even though the differently-worded questions rule out direct comparison with the 2000 study. Fifty-three percent of all Americans believe that abortion should be legal in all or most cases, far less than the 93% of Jews who think so. The percentage of Jews favoring legalization of same-sex marriage outstrips the non-Jewish figure by 81% to 48% (51% of the Jews “strongly” favor it). In response to a question, not asked in 2000, about their opinion of various non-Jewish groups, Jews gave a “favorability rating” (on a 100-point scale) of 47 for Mormons, 41.4 for Muslims, and just 20.9 for the Christian Right, a group primarily associated with promoting religious values in American public life. That the generally pro-Israel Christian Right is viewed so much more unfavorably than Muslims in a post-9/11 world demonstrates that American Jewish opposition to Christian influence on the domestic scene would seem to dwarf its concerns about the Middle East conflict.⁸

And again, Jews are overwhelmingly found in the Democratic political camp. In September 2012 – even as the Israeli prime minister berated the American administration for failing to set forth “red lines” defining at what point it will use force against the Iranian nuclear project, and soon after the Democratic national convention had to embarrassedly insert a missing plank in its platform affirming that Jerusalem is Israel’s capital – Gallup reported that President Obama held a 70%-25% lead over Mitt Romney, his Republican challenger, among Jewish voters.⁹

Judaism Liberalism, Religious or Secular

Why American Jews should be so much more averse to allowing religion a place in public life than Catholics or Protestants has generated a considerable amount of scholarship.

Many Jewish liberals consider it axiomatic that the Jewish tradition motivates their attitudes. Political scientist Lawrence Fuchs, who first analyzed this mindset, argued that most Jews consider the Hebrew Bible’s prophetic teachings of humanitarianism and compassion – as in the much-cited command “Love Your Neighbor As Yourself” – the basis for an ethic stressing social justice and support for individual self-fulfillment; Jewish respect for learning and intellect as promoting unfettered freedom of thought and expression; and Judaism’s alleged this-worldly, non-ascetic

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

⁸ R. P. Jones, D. Cox, *Chosen For What? Jewish Values in 2012*, Washington DC 2012, pp. 39, 19.

⁹ www.jpost.com/USPresidentialrace/Article.aspx?id=285336.

appreciation of physical pleasure as buttressing the case for noninterference with peoples' sexual predilections.¹⁰

Whether or not this is an accurate picture of the Jewish tradition, a good number of Jews have a deep need to believe it to be what Judaism demands. Beautifully exemplifying this need is Kenneth Wald's story of a congregant who asked his rabbi about the Jewish position on abortion. "The rabbi tried hard to provide an answer that captured the subtlety and ambiguity of Jewish thinking on this perplexing topic," finally concluding that abortion was "morally permissible under certain circumstances." The congregant "breathed an audible sigh of relief, saying how happy he was to learn that Judaism supported his pro-choice position on abortion."¹¹

But, as Charles Liebman has pointed out, "Jewish religious values are not unambiguously liberal; they are folk oriented rather than universalistic, ethnocentric rather than cosmopolitan, and at least one major strand in the Jewish tradition expresses indifference, fear, and even hostility toward the non-Jew."¹² The neighbor to be loved as oneself was a fellow Jew; Jewish respect for intellectuality was, until modern times, geared toward knowledge of Jewish sacred texts, not academia; and sexuality, according to the classical Jewish codes, was to be channeled exclusively into heterosexual marriage. Similarly, traditional Judaism's respect for authority, reverence for tradition, and unwillingness to sacrifice group identity through assimilation into the wider society fit well with an outlook that favors the expression of religious points of view in the public debate, even though comparatively few American Jews in fact espouse this course. Forty years ago Liebman identified an important element of the minority that did, Orthodox Jews, noting that they, the Jews most strongly committed to the precepts of the faith, "are less liberal than non-Orthodox,"¹³ a situation that continues today and will be discussed below.

To be sure, sophisticated American Jewish liberals are well aware that the sources of Judaism contain much that contradicts the liberal political and social ethos that predominates in the Jewish community today. They concede that by interpreting Judaism to fit contemporary sensibilities they are announcing, in the words of Leonard Fein, that "we, the living Jews of this generation, *are* the text." Fein explains, "I take what I need from the tradition, and what I like, and what I can use, the parts that make substantive sense and the parts that have stylistic appeal."¹⁴ But there is

¹⁰ L. H. Fuchs, *Sources for Jewish Internationalism and Liberalism*, [in:] *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group*, ed. M. Sklare, Glencoe IL 1958, pp. 596–613. This is excerpted from Fuchs's book, *The Political Behavior of American Jews*, Glencoe IL 1956.

¹¹ K. D. Wald, *The Probable Persistence of American Jewish Liberalism*, [in:] *Religion as a Public Good: Jews and other Americans on Religion in the Public Square*, ed. A. Mittleman, Lanham MD 2003, p. 65.

¹² Ch. S. Liebman, *The Ambivalent American Jew: Politics, Religion, and Family in American Jewish Life*, Philadelphia 1973, p. 140.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 143.

¹⁴ L. Fein, *Where Are We? The Inner Life of America's Jews*, New York 1988, pp. 32, 41. The most recent treatment of the Biblical evidence (M. Walzer's, *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible*, New Haven 2012), concludes that it presents no coherent political viewpoint.

good reason to believe that the overwhelming Jewish preference for sharply limiting the role of faith-based values in the public square has less to do with religious beliefs than with their lack. American Jews may be disproportionately liberal because they are far less religious, both in terms of belief and of action, than Christians.

The Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, conducted in 2008, compared the various American religious denominations on a host of theological, behavioral, social and cultural issues.¹⁵ It found that while 90% of Protestant Evangelicals, 73% of Mainline Protestants, and 72 percent of Catholics were absolutely certain of the existence of God, only 41% of Jews were. American Buddhists, adherents of a non-theistic religion, were the only group scoring lower, at 39%. Ten percent of the Jews said they did not believe in God, a position that no more than 1% of the Catholics or any group of Protestants took. Asked about the importance of religion in their life, just 31% of Jews thought it “very important,” an answer given by 79% of Evangelicals, 52% of Mainliners, and 56% of Catholics. Sixteen percent of Jews said they attended religious services at least once a week, as compared to 58% of Evangelicals, 34% of Mainline Protestants and 42% of Catholics. And the 26% of Jews claiming to pray daily was by far the lowest of any group, trailing even the Buddhists.

The same anomalous position of Jews in the American religious spectrum shows up in the responses to Pew’s questions about religious beliefs. While 37% of Jews believed that Scripture was the word of God – either literally or in some other sense – 80% of Evangelicals, 62% of Catholics and 60% of Mainline Protestants thought so. Only 5% of the Jews viewed their own religion as the one true faith, tied with Buddhists and Hindus for last place.

The low scores of Jews on measures of religion undoubtedly reflect the fact that unlike Christianity, Jewish identity is not just a matter of religion, but implies ethnic and cultural content as well as, or even instead of, religion. While a Catholic atheist, for example, may be a contradiction in terms, Jewish atheists exist in abundant numbers. Also, low Jewish religiosity in such surveys may be partially due to the growing phenomenon of young adult and middle-age Jews who identify with Judaism but reserve the right to live out that identification in highly individual, even idiosyncratic terms. Their expression of Jewishness may not necessarily conform to the standard categories of religious belief and behavior that an earlier generation recognized, or that present-day social scientists would recognize, as Jewish.¹⁶

The Historical Dimension

An alternative to the religious explanation of the Jewish proclivity toward the liberal/secularist side of the culture wars is the history of the Jewish people. Centuries of li-

¹⁵ www.religions.pewforum.org/comparisons.

¹⁶ S. M. Cohen, A. M. Eisen, *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America*, Bloomington IN 2000.

ving as an often persecuted minority under Christian governments, in which religion and state were intimately bound together (a similar situation confronted Jews living under Muslim rule) left the Jews of Europe with a collective aversion to religion exercising power and influence in the public square. The emergence of the modern Western nation-state, where religion's public wings are clipped, ultimately brought with it Jewish emancipation, as previous restrictions on Jews' religious, economic, occupational and residential freedom were gradually lifted.

But these gains did not come without struggle. Almost invariably, the dominant Christian religious establishment sought to use its remaining public influence to block Jewish equality, while the anticlerical elements in the various countries advocated Jewish rights as part of their broader liberal, secularist agenda. Thus the French Revolution, which destroyed the Bourbon monarchy and the power of the established church allied with it, emancipated the Jews. A similar, if less dramatic and bloody, pattern was evident elsewhere in Europe, seemingly teaching Jews the lesson that they, the small minority, were best off when religion is kept out of public life.

This explains the unique place that the United States holds in Jewish history. From the nation's beginnings, there was no established national religion, and Jews were on a plane of legal equality with Christians. As newly-elected President George Washington wrote to the Jewish congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, in 1790, this was not mere toleration, "as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights." Rather, in the United States everyone alike enjoyed "liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship."¹⁷

While certainly welcome, this novel situation of no national religious establishment did not ease Jews' insecurity about their status in America. Christianity was still the religion of the vast majority, and popular culture was not free of denigration of Judaism and outright anti-Semitism. Jews, ever on the alert for signs of religious encroachment into public life, have viewed any attempt to inject religion – it would, of necessity, be the majority Christian religion – into governmental decision-making as a clear and present danger to Jewish interests and a violation of the Jewish American dream.

Furthermore, Jews tended to support the rights of other minorities and their struggles for equality, on the grounds that depriving one group of rights threatened the rights of all. Most American Jews, then, have felt they were acting not only on the basis of Jewish values, but also in their own self-interest by supporting organizations and voting for political candidates committed to civil rights, civil liberties, broad free-speech protections, sexual freedom, and a strict interpretation of Church-State separation. It is no accident that a good number of the court cases that gave rise to legal precedents in these areas were litigated by Jewish organizations.¹⁸

¹⁷ www.gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/hebrew/reply.html.

¹⁸ G. Ivers, *To Build a Wall: American Jews and the Separation of Church and State*, Charlottesville VA 1995; S. Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties*, New York 1997.

Jews on the Defensive

The culture wars, strictly speaking, began with the emergence of a Christian Right, a traditionalist backlash against the gradual removal of religious values from public life that had been happening, with the blessings and often the political advocacy of Jews, since the 1960s.

This came as an unwelcome shock to the mainstream Jewish community, whose organizations naturally mobilized to protect what they saw as under threat, which was, in the words of the American Jewish Congress, "support for the separation of Church and State and the protection of the public school classroom; support for the Equal Rights Amendment [barring discrimination against women] and the right of women to choose to have an abortion; support for human rights and opposition to all oppressive governments; support for the right to dissent and opposition to censorship; support for compassionate social welfare legislation... the classic agenda of democracy."¹⁹ The National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, whose annual *Joint Program Plan* reflected the consensus of organized American Jewry, put front and center the need to oppose restoration of prayer and other religious practices in the public schools, enactment of tuition tax credits for private schools, and all other measures that threatened the Jewish community's insistence on keeping religion a private matter.²⁰

Jews felt an added degree of alarm over the new political role of Evangelical Protestants. Jewish groups were long used to the Catholic Church's opposition to birth control, abortion, and homosexuality, and its attempts to secure government support for parochial schools. But the newly aroused Evangelicals, whose militancy in opposition to the naked public square appeared to far outstrip the Catholics, was something else entirely.

The mainstream Jewish organizations, all liberal in orientation, had historically found natural allies in the Mainline Protestant denominations, as represented by the National Council of Churches, in their opposition to assaults on separation of Church and State that came mainly from the Catholics. But Jews had little awareness that there was another, quite substantial variant of Protestant Christianity that looked askance at strict separation, and this took them by surprise. Adding to the alarm was the substantial size of the Evangelical population and its potential political clout. Estimates ranged from 30 million adults, total church membership in the major Evangelical denominations, to as high as 130 million, if people formally outside these bodies but sympathetic to the Evangelical message were included. The Gallup organization, in 1981, estimated that 35 million potential voters could be classified as Evangelicals, roughly 20% of the electorate.²¹

¹⁹ *Where We Stand: The Evangelical Right*, "Congress Monthly", January 1982, p. 8.

²⁰ National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, *Joint Program Plan 1982-83*, pp. 50-54; 1983-84, pp. 59-64; 1984-85, pp. 31-35; 1985-86, pp. 7-15; 1986-87, pp. 38-40; 1987-88, pp. 39-42. This body changed its name to the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) in 1999.

²¹ K. D. Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, New York 1987, pp. 199-200.

One could hardly blame the Jews for not expecting this Evangelical surge. For one thing, Evangelicals had more or less quit the national political arena in the 1930s, after the embarrassment of their involvement with the Ku Klux Klan and opposition to the teaching of Darwinian evolution, and the failure of prohibition. Their return to the debate over religion in public life surprised most observers.²² Also, since Jews tended to live in cities and on the East Coast, and the Evangelical center of gravity was in rural and small-town America, the two groups rarely interacted.²³ A corollary of this geographic and social distancing was the growth of stereotypes: just as Evangelicals might assume that all Jews were conniving bankers and businessmen (and Christ-killers to boot), so too did Jews tend to think that Evangelicals were uneducated country bumpkins, hardly worthy of serious engagement on issues of public policy.²⁴

Another reason for Jews to place themselves on the other side of the barricade from Evangelicals in the culture wars was fear of the latter's conversionary intentions and denigration of Judaism. The involvement of Evangelical leaders in the "Key 73" project, designed "to call the continent to Christ," was still fresh in the memory of Jews when the culture wars erupted. In 1980 there was the remark of Rev. Bailey Smith, that "God Almighty does not hear the prayer of a Jew." Nine years later, 15 American Evangelical theologians issued a statement that "failure to preach the gospel to the Jewish people would be a form of anti-Semitism, depriving this particular community of its right to hear the gospel." In 1996, the Southern Baptist Convention, by a large majority, resolved to "direct our energies and resources toward the proclamation of the gospel to the Jews," and six years later its coordinator for Jewish ministries said that the Catholic "exemption" of Jews from proselytization was "withholding the hope of Israel." Even though many of these flare-ups, and others like them, were followed by apologies and acts of reconciliation, the impression that Evangelicals were intent on converting them was widespread in the Jewish community.²⁵

Despite their fear of Evangelical designs on the separation of Church and State, and whatever their suspicions about designs of conversion, Jews had to tread carefully in fighting the culture wars. Evangelical churches, entering an era of expansion, were enhancing their influence in American life at the expense of the mainline denominations. And the fact was that the Evangelicals, though at loggerheads with

²² *Ibidem*, pp. 182–186.

²³ L. Grossman, *Jews – Middle Atlantic and Beyond*, [in:] *Religion and Public Life in the Middle Atlantic Region: The Fount of Diversity*, ed. R. Balmer, M. Silk, Lanham MD 2006, pp. 95–98; J. Hudnut-Beumler, *Protestants in the Middle Atlantic Region*, *ibidem*, p. 48.

²⁴ Consider G. Mamo's protest: "We're not all Elmer Gantry holy rollers. We're not all Southerners. We don't all drive pickup trucks. We're not all poorly educated rednecks. And most of us have never owned a white suit." G. Mamo, *Luckier than Moses: the Future of Jewish-Evangelical Relations*, [in:] *Uneasy Allies: Evangelicals and Jewish Relations*, eds. B. Johnson, Nancy Isserman, A. Mittleman, Lanham MD 2007, p. 77.

²⁵ L. Grossman, *The Organized Jewish Community and Evangelical America*, [in:] *Uneasy Allies...*, pp. 54–60.

the Jewish community in the culture wars, were at the same time its greatest allies in support of the State of Israel. After the Six-Day War of 1967, when American Jews complained of “the relative silence of the Christian world in the face of the threat of the imminent destruction of the two-and-a-half million Jews in Israel,” they noticed that Evangelicals were an exception.²⁶ Ever since, Evangelicals have remained the American Christian group most supportive of Israel, and have contributed many millions of dollars to it.²⁷

Jews are not quite sure why Evangelicals are so pro-Israel – is it a sincere concern for the welfare of a democratic state that shares basic American values, a literal reading of Biblical passages that grant the Promised Land to God’s original chosen people, a Christian eschatological scheme for setting off the war of Gog and Magog and hastening the Second Coming, a conversionary ploy? Whatever the rationale, Jews and Evangelicals were so at odds on domestic issues that the Jewish community could reach no consensus on whether it was wise to ally with these pro-Israel Christians on a common agenda in support of the Jewish state.

The government of Israel itself, removed as it is from the American culture wars, has had no qualms about welcoming Evangelical backing and even encouraging its expression in the American political arena. This was evident as early as 1980, when Evangelical support played a major role in the election of Ronald Reagan as president. Israel’s prime minister at the time, Menachem Begin, conferred the coveted Jabotinsky Centennial Medal on the strongly pro-Israel Jerry Falwell, head of the powerful Moral Majority organization, for “distinguished service to the State of Israel and the Jewish people.”²⁸ The current prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, maneuvering against Barack Obama—a president who both opposes the agenda of the Religious Right and is cooler toward Israel than Reagan—has gone over the president’s head and appealed directly to Congress and the American people, with special attention to the large Evangelical community.²⁹

Today, the prevalent mood within the organized American Jewish community is to encourage the continuing Evangelical commitment to Israel’s security while downplaying areas of continuing disagreement.³⁰

Countervailing Voices: Neoconservatism

While American Jews have arrayed themselves overwhelmingly on one side of the culture wars, in opposition to a public role for religious values, a minority dissents from this consensus.

²⁶ National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, *Joint Program Plan 1967–68*, p. 7.

²⁷ G. R. McDermott, *Evangelicals and Israel*, [in:] *Uneasy Allies...*, pp. 127–154.

²⁸ L. Grossman, *The Organized Jewish Community and Evangelical America...*, p. 55.

²⁹ Idem, *Jewish Communal Affairs*, [in:] *American Jewish Year Book 2012*, eds. A. Dashefsky, I. Sheskin, Westport CT 2012, pp. 115–116.

³⁰ C. Schrag, *American Jews and Evangelical Christians: Anatomy of a Changing Relationship*, [in:] *Uneasy Allies...*, pp. 167–177.

Small in numbers but influential in American intellectual life, Jewish neoconservatives have argued not only that a pervasively secular public square weakens America, but that it could also endanger Jewish group survival. Neoconservatism began in the mid-1960s, when erstwhile liberals began questioning the effectiveness of large-scale government programs to aid the poor. By the end of that decade, as urban racial unrest and protests against the Vietnam War spilled over into campus disruptions, anti-American rhetoric and acts of violence, they found themselves on the other side of the barricade, strongly defending traditional values and American patriotism. The American Left's coolness toward the State of Israel in the aftermath of the Six-Day War of 1967 also provoked neoconservative ire. The subsequent rise of the counterculture, with its attack on the traditional family, approval of drug use, and frequent demonization of established American institutions, reinforced the neoconservative determination to fight back.³¹

Many of the leading neoconservatives – Irving Kristol, Nathan Glazer, Norman Podhoretz, Midge Decter, Allan Bloom, Martin Peretz – were Jewish. Furthermore, under the editorial direction of Podhoretz, *Commentary*, the editorially independent monthly sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, became neoconservatism's leading journalistic voice.³²

Irving Kristol, the acknowledged godfather of the movement, most clearly stated its diagnosis of American Jewish life. "Dedication to secular humanism," he wrote, "is so congenial to American Jews because it has assured them of an unparalleled degree of comfort and security." It provided "individual Jews a civic equality and equality of opportunity undreamed of by previous Jewish generations." But low birth rates encouraged by adoption of an upper-middle-class lifestyle and rising rates of intermarriage produced by the breakdown of older religious boundaries threatened the survival of the Jewish community. Kristol called on American Jews to reconsider their universalism, conquer their "suspicion and fear of Christianity," support a larger role for religion in public life, and "reestablish a Jewish core, a religious core, as a key to its identity."³³ Kristol's argument was fleshed out by Elliott Abrams, a younger neoconservative who served as assistant secretary of state in the Reagan administration. In the increasingly religious America that he saw emerging, Abrams urged Jews to recognize that Jewish survival depended on their seeing themselves as part of a religion, not just as members of an ethnic or cultural grouping, even if they lacked personal religious faith. Such a change of focus would entail a new willingness to cooperate with the Christian Right.³⁴

³¹ M. Friedman, *The Neoconservative Revolution: Jewish Intellectuals and the Shaping of Public Policy*, New York 2005, pp. 116–204.

³² B. Balint, *Running Commentary: The Contentious Magazine that Transformed the Jewish Left into the Neoconservative Right*, New York 2010, pp. 97–177.

³³ I. Kristol, *The Future of American Jewry*, "Commentary", August 1991, pp. 21–26; idem, *Why Religion Is Good for the Jews*, "Commentary", August 1994, pp. 19–21.

³⁴ E. Abrams, *Faith Or Fear: How Jews Can Survive in a Christian America*, New York 1997.

At its height, neoconservatism powerfully influenced the Republican Party, its staunch anti-communism providing the intellectual ballast for policies credited with helping topple the soviet system. But the disastrous invasion of Iraq during the George W. Bush administration, widely attributed to neoconservative influence, the economic collapse of 2008, and the subsequent recapture of the presidency by the Democrats weakened neoconservatism on the American scene and hurt its credibility – never great to begin with – in the predominantly liberal Jewish community.

Countervailing Voices: The Orthodox

Potential new recruits to the side in the culture wars favoring increased public recognition of religion could be found in Jewish Orthodoxy, a sector of the community that was rising steadily in power and self-confidence.

Constituting, according to the most recent national surveys, no more than 10% of affiliated American Jews, the Orthodox were the most tradition-bound and least secularized element of the community, and hence most in tune with the priorities of the Catholic traditionalists and Protestant Evangelicals on the appropriate place of religion in society, the sanctity of life, and the priority of religion-based group values over individual autonomy. For years, this Orthodox minority studiously avoided expressing its voice in public debate. To an extent, this reticence reflected the same fear that motivated the Jewish mainstream: that more religion in public life meant, in the American context, more Christianity, and that was not good for Jews. But there was another inhibiting factor peculiar to the Orthodox. As the weakest and least Americanized Jews, the Orthodox were reluctant to assert themselves. They tended either to defer to the Jewish mainstream, or to seek cultural isolation and “take care of themselves.”³⁵

This began to change, at least for some sectors of Orthodoxy, in the 1960s. The first Orthodox defections from adherence to the naked public square came when the Church-State barrier came up against the financial needs of Jewish schools. First, Agudath Israel of America, an Orthodox body heavily committed to the creation and maintenance of Jewish day schools, began cooperating with Catholic groups in seeking federal funding for non-public schools. Then the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (sometimes called the Orthodox Union, or OU), the largest Orthodox synagogue body, defied the Jewish communal consensus by supporting the “child-benefit” provision of the Elementary and Secondary School Act of 1965, which indirectly provided government aid for private and religious education. Ever since, Orthodox groups have shown little reluctance in seeking ways to secure public help for their educational institutions.³⁶

³⁵ S. C. Heilman, *Haredim and the Public Square*, [in:] *Jewish Polity and American Civil Society: Communal Agencies and Religious Movements in the American Public Square*, eds. A. Mitelman, J. D. Sarna, R. Licht, Lanham MD 2002, p. 333.

³⁶ L. Grossman, *Mainstream Orthodoxy and the American Public Square...*, pp. 293–298.

The OU also began speaking out against what it saw as threats to morality in the public sphere. In the 1960s it denounced what it viewed as declining standards of decency in the media, the ostensible growth of “permissiveness,” especially on the college campus, and the Equal Rights Amendment. When the abortion debate heated up, the OU declared that “an unborn fetus has the right to life,” and opposed government payments for abortion. And when gay rights entered the public arena in the 1970s, the Orthodox group characterized homosexuality as a “perversion” that no Jewish agency should condone. In 1974, the OU noted the sea change that had occurred in its approach to public policy: “Differences of opinion on public issues between the Orthodox community and others are no longer limited to Church-State affairs... Torah thinking, combined with greater communal and organizational strength, has moved the Orthodox Union to adopt different positions on some social issues.”³⁷

The Orthodox community today is far friendlier to the public recognition of faith-based values than mainstream Jewish organizations, but constraining the full political expression of this preference is Orthodoxy’s heavy reliance on government social programs. A disproportionate share of American Jews living in poverty is Orthodox, a problem that is especially severe among the most insular elements, many of whom do not receive sufficient secular education to pursue careers that could afford them a living. As the Democratic Party generally supports these programs but frowns on religion in the public square, many Orthodox Jews find themselves in the uncomfortable position of voting for the party they rely on for material survival even though it stands counter to their culture-war preference for faith-based morality in public life.

A special election for Congress in 2011, however, suggested that more Orthodox Jews might be considering voting their values over their pocketbooks. The congressional district involved, encompassing portions of the New York City boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens, was overwhelmingly Democratic, had a large Jewish population, and its previous representative was a liberal Democratic Jew. To fill this ostensibly “safe” Democratic seat, the party chose David Weprin, another liberal Democrat and an Orthodox Jew. The campaign of his Republican opponent, Bob Turner, went after the votes of Jewish Democrats by criticizing Democratic President Obama’s alleged unfriendliness to Israel.

It also specifically targeted the Orthodox vote with ads, signed by prominent Orthodox rabbis, ripping into Weprin for his enthusiastic support, while serving in the State Assembly, for gay marriage. Even though Orthodox residents of the district risked losing governmentally-funded social programs by electing a Republican, enough of them did vote for Turner to give him victory by a comfortable 6-point margin.³⁸ It remains to be seen whether or not such values-based political behavior becomes more common among Orthodox Jews.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 301–304.

³⁸ T. Kaplan, *G.O.P. Gains House Seat Vacated by Weiner*, “New York Times”, September 13, 2011, p. 1.

What is undeniable is that the Orthodox are becoming more numerous, and hence potentially more influential in shaping the community's priorities. A survey of the Jews in the New York City area, conducted in 2011, indicated that the percentage of Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist Jews – the core constituency for Jewish liberalism – had declined drastically over the previous decade, from 48% to 39%.

In contrast, the Orthodox share rose from 27% to 32%, constituting nearly half a million people. And the disparity appeared likely to widen over time, since an astounding 64% of Jewish children were being raised Orthodox, “about twice as many Jewish children who live in conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist households combined.”³⁹ The reasons for the Orthodox renaissance were clear: unlike many other Jews, the Orthodox had an intermarriage rate of virtually zero and comparatively high fertility. They also had near-universal intensive Jewish education and socialization, factors that naturally inculcated the traditional values that liberal Jews wanted kept out of the public square.

Since New York City Jews constituted about a quarter of American Jewry, this demographic trend could portend a major national shift in Jewish positioning in the culture wars. Orthodox Jews, largely antagonistic to the secular bent of the Jewish mainstream organizations, had the potential, over time, to become a new Jewish mainstream, and align with Christian traditionalists in the battle over the public role of religious values. Of course there is no reason to assume that present trends will continue. In this case there is no way to know if the Orthodox, and especially their children, will be able, over time, to withstand the cultural forces that so powerfully transmit the messages of individualism, secularism and universalism.

Then again, there is no guarantee that Evangelical support for civic recognition of religious values will retain its intensity either. Indeed, there are signs of its possible erosion among some younger Evangelicals.⁴⁰ It may soon become anachronistic to speak of the culture wars as we have known them over the past generation. What configuration of opinions replaces it about the relationship of religious faith to public life is anyone's guess.

Żydzi amerykańscy wobec wojny kulturowej

Autor podejmuje problem stanowiska amerykańskich Żydów w konflikcie kulturowym. Środowiska żydowskie w Stanach Zjednoczonych, traktujące Amerykę jako historyczną szansę stworzenia liberalnego ustroju równych praw – w historii Europy tradycyjnie im odmawianych – zostały postawione wobec dylematu samookreślenia się wobec ewolucji liberalnej. W efekcie nastąpił ich podział z powodu zauważenia obecności w ewolucji liberalizmu pewnych zjawisk antywoleńscoowych i antyamerykańskich. Artykuł jest podsumowaniem dyskusji na ten temat.

³⁹ S. M. Cohen, J. B. Ukeles, R. Miller, *Jewish Community Study of New York: 2011, Comprehensive Report*, New York 2012, pp. 122–123.

⁴⁰ J. Farrell, *The Young and the Restless: The Liberalization of Young Evangelicals*, “Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion”, September 2011, pp. 517–532, and the website www.evangelicaliberal.wordpress.com.

Agnieszka Kołakowska

**MIND THE GAP:
THE NEW CULTURE WARS**

Below are three quotes, picked almost at random from a depressingly long list of contenders. All are public statements. The first is from last year: “Nous servons de la viande halal par respect pour la diversité, mais pas de poisson par respect pour la laïcité.” Here is another, from April of this year: “There will not be any climate justice without true gender equality.” Finally, just to lift the spirits and contribute to the gaiety of nations, here is a well-known one from 1992: “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”

These apparently unrelated statements are linked by something more than the incredulity or helpless laughter they elicit. The first (quoted in Ivan Rioufoul’s excellent book, *De l’urgence d’être réactionnaire*, PUF, 2012) is how the mayor of Strasbourg, Roland Ries, thought fit to explain to bemused parents why their children’s schools serve halal meat but refuse to serve fish on Fridays. He sounds pleased with his choice of words. The second is from the European Parliament resolution of April 2012 on the connection between gender and climate change (try to keep up): it having been decided that the latter clearly exacerbates the former (or possibly vice versa), it was resolved that “the inclusion of gender issues would in its turn provide an opportunity towards a more effective, stronger and fairer fight against climate change”, and that “in order to ensure that climate action does not increase gender inequalities but results in co-benefits to the situation of women”, efforts should be made to “mainstream and integrate gender in every step of climate policies, from

conception to financing, implementation and evaluation". The third is of course Sandra Day O'Connor's famous take on liberty and the 'attributes of personhood' in *Planned Parenthood vs Casey*.

The culture wars are not what they were. True, one does wonder, with the sort of horrified fascination displayed by witnesses to car accidents, what mental contortions could have led the mayor of Strasbourg, the European Parliament and a Supreme Court Judge to such conclusions, and to utter in public statements which sound like a game of Chinese whispers gone wrong; but these examples of doublethink, surreal idiocy and – well, drivel would be a kind word, no longer strain credulity as they would have (and indeed did, in the last case) even 20 years ago; they are just a few among dozens we nowadays encounter every day. In the 1960s, even 20 or 30 years ago, doublethink was not yet so ubiquitous, even on extreme Leftist fringes, not to speak of the mainstream Left. The ideology of identity politics, 'diversity', 'multiculturalism' and 'toleration' had not yet spread its tentacles over every aspect of life and every sphere of activity, public and private. (Indeed, the private, although frequently declared to be public, had not yet actually become so, or not quite.) The Gramscian strategy of subversion through destroying the hegemony of the dominant culture (not that, I imagine, many of those whose vague aim it was thought of it in quite that way) was in the blueprint stage, and 'hegemony' was a word seldom encountered in this context. Daily life – reading the paper, listening to the talk at dinner parties, even reading academic journals – did not yet resemble watching a sci-fi horror movie in which aliens take over people's brains. And drivel was just drivel; it was not seen as dangerous, let alone institutionalized, drivel.

Or so it seems with hindsight. Certainly the counter-culture was no more sympathetic to Christianity in general or Catholicism in particular than it is today, though hysterical forms of militant atheism had not yet surfaced, let alone become mainstream. Certainly Muslims were trendy, to say the least, especially black Muslims who went in for acts of terrorism, though neither multiculturalism nor the victim culture were yet fully established. The condemnation of Israel was not yet automatic and the new antisemitism had not yet become *de rigueur* at trendy dinner parties everywhere, although Israel was attacked as a tool of American imperialism just as it is today. (Jewish parents are not mentioned in the Strasbourg example, but it is fairly safe to assume that kosher food in Strasbourg schools suffers the same fate as fish on Fridays. Not that the matter would ever arise: orthodox Jews do not generally demand that a state school cater to their children's religious dietary requirements; they send them to private religious schools. Nor can one be certain that the Muslim parents actually demanded halal meals. Quite possibly they didn't have to; quite possibly the mayor of Strasbourg, moved by a grotesque mixture of fear, servility and ideological zeal, decided to anticipate their needs.) But even if my hindsight is failing with age, one thing is certain: in the 1960s or the 1970s such things would not have been said by the mayor of Strasbourg. Or by the mayor of any city in Europe or the United States. Or – in the wonderful case of gender and

climate – by any bureaucrat (there being – O blissful days! – no Eurocrats yet). One can imagine something like the mayor's statement being uttered, *mutatis mutandis*, only in the darkest days of the Soviet Union. It seems hard, also, to imagine a Supreme Court Judge, let alone one perceived as conservative, uttering such a sentence – however deplorably judicially active, manipulative of the Constitution, left-liberal-leaning or politically usurpatory one might have thought the Court even at the time of, say, *Roe vs Wade*. And that is one of the things that have changed.

It is hard not to mention, in this context – I mean the general context of things which just a few decades ago you couldn't have made up, and which still strain credulity – this year's Nobel Peace Prize to the EU. For the "advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights". ("Is it too late", asks the London Daily Telegraph, "for Alfred Nobel's heirs to ask for their money back?") Nor the new French President's plans for education, which, according to a recent speech on the subject, appear to involve the (gradual, we're told) abandonment of the system of awarding marks. The scale of the devastation wrought by decades of misguided, ideologically-driven policies is at last beginning to dawn even upon some bureaucrats in the Ministry of Education; and just as Britain is beginning – slowly, rather half-heartedly and to furious opposition from teachers' unions – to try to reverse the damage, France, as if entirely oblivious to what has been going on elsewhere in the world during the past few decades, is eagerly taking up those policies. Both these things – the second perhaps more obviously than the first – are part of the culture wars today.

The point is that, once upon a time, back in the 1960s, even the 1970s, possibly the 1980s, there *was* a counter-culture. Today the counter-culture has become, with some modifications (which make it much more sinister and dangerous than the original), the dominant culture. It has achieved the Gramscian hegemony for which it strove, though of course (this being part of the plan) it continues vociferously to deny this, proclaiming itself the victim of right-wing conspiracies, censorship and discrimination – in a world where the 'establishment', the 'elites', the 'political class' (an entity which until recently did not exist either in the US or in Britain; it designated a phenomenon to be found mainly in France – one of those bizarre things they had on the continent) and the media are overwhelmingly left-liberal and politically correct. It is now the dominant culture which chants: "Which side are you on?" and "Hey ho, hey ho, Western culture's got to go". 'Western Civ', too, has been told it has to go, and indeed it has gone. The positions which characterized what used to be called the dominant culture, or the 'establishment', have now become a sort of counter-culture. And this, chiefly, is the side in the culture wars which speaks in terms of 'culture wars'.

The other side – the side which has now become the dominant culture – does not, for the most part, seem to be aware of any culture wars. It sees, or claims to see, the problem in terms of 'human rights', 'diversity', 'toleration', etc. In other words, the other side of the culture wars, at least its hard core, has to such an extent internalized (that is to say, been brainwashed by) its own ideological slogans and its own

manipulation of language for political ends that it is no longer able to perceive the world in the same basic categories. For them, good and evil, truth and falsity, right and wrong, insofar as these things are admitted to exist at all, have acquired new meaning; 'human rights', 'toleration', 'equality', 'opportunity', 'diversity', 'democracy', 'pluralism', 'consensus', 'inclusion', 'exclusion', 'access' and many other terms indiscriminately flung about daily by politicians, journalists, activists and ideologues of every variety, mean something quite different from what they used to mean, and from what to some of us they still mean. (Insofar, that is, as they have any meaning at all. This, again, is not very far: they are used as slogans and in every case made to mean whatever the speaker would like them to mean, to an extent that would give even Humpty Dumpty pause.) There is no longer any common ground, and therefore no possibility of debate. This, at least, is the situation in Poland, Great Britain and, as far as I can make out, the US.

I speak above of 'sides'. Nothing odd in that, perhaps, since we are speaking of culture wars, in every war there are (at least) two sides. But there is more than just that to this business of "sides". Since the 1960s, attitudes have become so polarized, and at the same time the content over which the culture wars are fought so extensive, that the battlefield now consists of two sides, arrayed in ranks, baying at each other. 'Sides' are all there is; we might as well all be chanting the old American communist song "Which Side Are You On?". This chant is what all debate, all argument, has been reduced to. Again, this is the case in both Britain and the US, but perhaps most strikingly – and dismayingly – in Poland. And this is the second thing that has changed.

A note on the Gramscian strategy (back in fashion at good universities everywhere: at least one well-known trendy post-modernist American professor of literature at an Ivy League college includes the work of Gramsci in his 'Great Books' course). Gramsci's idea was that the working class, if it is to seize power, must first achieve hegemony over the dominant bourgeois culture by creating and imposing its own, a universal culture free of bourgeois superstition. No wonder Gramsci is back in fashion. The word 'hegemony', especially in combination with the word 'culture', crops up with depressing regularity in today's postmodernist, feminist, multiculturalist discourse. Indoctrinating the working class to destroy capitalism and attain cultural hegemony by destroying the dominant culture has a very familiar ring: substitute 'persecuted minority' for 'the working class' and it is exactly what we have today. Destroying the 'bourgeois' culture in order to create a brave new world of universal values is what today's multiculturalist discourse is all about. It is what multiculturalists have in mind as they labour to invent yet more minority groups (defined by ethnicity, religion, race, sex, sexual orientation and whatever else they can come up with) which they can then label as persecuted and squeeze into the straightjacket of group identity. The next step is to demand special privileges for them as 'victims', thereby placing them above the law; to condemn all criticism of their behaviour, religion or culture as racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia etc., and to kindle in them

a sense of grievance, which is then carefully stoked and lovingly nurtured. Whether they have in fact suffered any real injury or discrimination is irrelevant; as minorities they are victims by definition, and the State is expected to atone for the wrongs done to them by the granting of privileges. This is the dominant culture today: a culture of grievance, victimhood and resentment. It is worth noting, in passing, that the destruction of the common culture and increased dependency on the State greatly contribute to the ease with which people can be manipulated – a fact which cannot have escaped Gramsci just as it has not escaped today's ideologues of multiculturalism.

The word 'hegemony' is not a neutral one; it is laden with hatred of Western culture – the culture of imperialism, colonialism, capitalism and oppression. There can in any case be no other kind of hegemony, since hegemony is by definition enjoyed by the oppressors and persecutors, the colonialists, imperialists and capitalists, not forgetting the patriarchy. When we superimpose the Gramscian blueprint on today's culture wars, certain features common to the discourse of the various ideological currents in fashion today – multiculturalism, radical feminism, postmodernism and identity politics – emerge with stark clarity. 'Hegemony', 'patriarchy', 'social construct', 'colonialism' – these are part of a common language which reflects a certain view of the world. And that view of the world seems to be the dominant culture today.

One might object that the Gramscian strategy has worked only up to a point; that achieving cultural hegemony has not so far led to the seizing of power. But has it not, in a way? Western governments have to a large extent submitted to the exigencies of the politically correct, so that today it is not just pious expressions of political correctness but active promotion of PC agendas that is obligatory. And it is obligatory not just in humanities departments and among the chattering classes, but among the 'political class' and among left-liberal elites everywhere. Its mechanism is familiar: if you are so rash as to disagree with one of the tenets which form the hard, unquestionable core of the PC worldview, you are beneath contempt and unfit for human conversation. Whatever you say, on any topic, may be simply dismissed. Just as, back in the days of the cold war, you were automatically condemned as a 'cold warrior' if you claimed, for instance, that such-and-such an organization was a Soviet front, or that the Rosenbergs (on whom more in a moment) were justly convicted, or that it was silly and wrong to claim moral equivalence between the US and the USSR, etc., so today, if you claim, for instance, that children need authority and discipline and competition, or that the learning of facts might not be an entirely evil, oppressive, discriminatory and useless thing, or that Western civilisation is neither wholly to be condemned nor responsible for all the world's evils, or that 'Western Civ' should be taught at universities, or that departments of Comparative or English Literature should not be devoted entirely to 'theory', or that the current bloated form of the welfare state has produced a culture of dependency, or express any other forbidden view on any of a dismayingly vast number of topics, you are labelled a 'fascist'. But more than that. As Leszek Kolakowski wrote long ago in an essay called "The Heritage of the Left", "Since a cold warrior was wrong by definition, it followed logically

that there were no concentration camps in the USSR". In the same way, if today one expresses any of the views listed above, or scepticism about any of the other tenets on the PC agenda, such as gay marriage, quotas for women, the evidence for anthropogenic global warming, equality of outcome, equal representation for every conceivable ethnic, religious or racial group in every conceivable institution, and especially if one then ventures to suggest that such things as equality before the law, equality of opportunity, discipline, authority, national sovereignty etc. might be more useful sorts of things – one is labelled 'extreme right' or 'fascist', and it logically follows from this not only that all one's opinions must be wrong, but also that certain facts about the world which one adduces in support of them cannot really be facts.

So, one might say, what's new, if such logic on the part of the Western Left was standard during the cold war? What is new, perhaps, is not the logic itself, but the frequency with which it is encountered, and most of all the huge range of subjects to which it is applied, where once it was confined mostly to discussions of communism and the Soviet Union. The extreme polarization – the reduction of world opinion to two sides between which there can be no rational debate – marks another change. It is not just that rational debate is not felt to be needed; it is actively rejected. It is no longer acceptable, nowadays, to try to explain that, for example, 'fairness' and 'social justice' are not the same thing as the rule of law, or to argue that the principle of equality of opportunity is superior to that of equality of outcome. It has been tried. It cannot be done. Rational argument itself seems to have become a 'fascist' way of going about things.

It is worth noting in passing that for much of today's Left, the labels 'fascist', 'extreme-right', 'conservative', 'right-wing' and 'evil' have become almost synonymous: to be 'right-wing' is considered morally repugnant, whatever the content of one's supposed right-wingness; and once you are labelled 'right-wing' or 'conservative', 'extreme right' and 'fascist' ineluctably and indiscriminately follow. As a consequence all these labels are bereft of meaning – except, of course, that of being 'on the wrong side'. To label someone as 'right-wing' or 'conservative' is no more than to express disapproval. This, too, seems to mark a change.

A brief digression about the Rosenbergs, since attitudes to them on the Left – attitudes to all appearances quite unchanged for over half a century, in spite of the evidence – mirror certain attitudes today, in a broader context. In September 2008, the startling headline "Rosenbergs guilty!" appeared in the US press. A bit late, you would have thought; there was an odd feeling of *déjà-vu*. For most of us there was never much doubt of the Rosenbergs' guilt, but for large swathes of the American Left their innocence was, as Ronald Radosh writes in his excellent book about the American Left ("Commies: A Journey Through the Old Left, the New Left and the Leftover Left", Encounter Books 2001), an incontrovertible truth: they were innocent progressives, persecuted for their ideals and their devotion to peace; their conviction was an attack on free speech, an attempt to stifle independent thought, the result of anti-communist hysteria, etc., etc. Another book by

Radosh and Joyce Milton (“The Rosenberg File”, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, NY 1983) ought to have put all such doubts to rest, but – predictably, perhaps – it failed to do so. And even now that Morton Sobell has confessed, after more than half a century, that both he and Rosenberg were Soviet spies (which is what those September 2008 headlines were about), the case is unlikely to be closed in the minds of some of the American Left. They will continue, absurdly and irrelevantly, as they did in the case of Alger Hiss, saying: he meant well; he didn’t do any real harm; it was in a good cause.

In the West, among the Left, the two main pillars which supported the edifice of leftist ideology during the cold war are still standing, very much like (to coin a phrase) two vast and trunkless legs of stone in the desert. Despite the decay of that colossal wreck they remain unquestionable principles, but now they support a vastly broader ideology. They are the principle of moral equivalence between the US and the Soviet Union, and the principle that communism and Nazism must never be compared. The idea behind the first of these, undigested, unargued and cheerfully accepted everywhere, like the VISA card, is that both were “empires”, and all empires are evil (although the Soviet Union far less evil than others). The idea behind the second is that fascism was and remains the worst of all possible evils; communism must therefore be a lesser evil. And in any case – all together now – the communists meant well. And of course the Soviet Union – let’s hear it again, nice and loud, yes, you too there at the back – led the fight against fascism. That crude Soviet propaganda tool, the myth which equated anti-fascism with Soviet communism, was extraordinarily successful. It justified everything. It was bolstered by another lie, distinguished by a logical flaw unfortunately characteristic of much leftist ideological thought, past and present, namely that since all those who supported the Soviet Union were against fascism, it followed that all those who were against fascism must support the Soviet Union.

The bizarre resurgence of the second of these principles in Poland, where ‘anti-communism’ has become a word not to be pronounced in polite left-wing society, also brings a sense of déjà-vu, but in reverse. The same people who once, in the 70s and 80s, expended so much effort on combating the thick layers of falsehood in the idea of ‘anti-anti-communism’, to which so much of the American Left was wedded, have now emerged as its defenders. In post-communist Poland, which, from a deep fear of being perceived as backward, primitive and provincial, longs to be – and to be perceived as – modern, cosmopolitan and trendy, the adoption of all Western *idées reçues*, whatever their content, is obligatory. What matters most, in Poland as elsewhere, is being on the right side – the side of light. To be on the wrong side is to be on the side of darkness. Being on the side of light has two further advantages: it procures a pleasant feeling of moral superiority, and it eliminates the need to produce arguments for one’s views or to consider the consequences of whatever one is proposing. Nothing as tedious as thinking is required. Being on the right side is perfectly sufficient (another reason rational debate has become impossible).

A few decades ago opinions were not so polarized, and the PC ideology neither as rigid nor as all-encompassing as it has become. Of course, in the 70s and 80s you were still pilloried as ‘right-wing’ if you ventured to express some support for, say, Thatcher or Reagan; but although ‘right-wing’ was certainly considered a peculiar and somewhat suspicious thing to be, it did not yet automatically mean that you were evil and immoral; it was not yet interchangeable with ‘extreme right’. ‘Fascist’ has of course been around as a term of abuse for a very long time (my husband has just pointed out to me that he was called a fascist in France back in 1967 for reading *Le Figaro*), so here, again, perhaps there is not much of a change. But the way the term is used today does seem both more automatic and more widespread, and the range of attitudes perceived as right-wing to which it is applied is much wider.

One spectacular example of how this has changed was the widely displayed indignation at the announcement a few years ago that the Nobel Prize for literature had gone to Vargas Llosa. “But he’s right-wing!” literary critics spluttered in horror and disbelief. And immediately, predictably, there followed, as the night the day: “A neo-liberal!”, “Extreme right!” – even though the poor man is nothing of the kind; he is a perfectly ordinary free-market liberal. Their incredulity was genuine; they really seemed shocked. And of course what made it worse was that Vargas Llosa was an apostate, a renegade; he had been a socialist and he had renounced socialism. This made him particularly unpalatable. What is striking here is not just this reaction itself, nor just its immediacy, its ferociousness and its global nature, but the fact that it was expressed openly, shamelessly, as something obvious. It really seemed inconceivable to the people who said these things that a right-winger, whatever his literary merits (and in any case his supposed right-wingness meant that he could not possibly have any) could deserve any kind of prize. A decade ago, certainly two, the chattering classes would have limited themselves to expressing their shock at dinner parties, among themselves; their view of the world was not yet universally acknowledged as something that went without saying.

This polarization has been accompanied by two related developments. The first is the increasing circumscription of our freedoms: the narrowing of the space between what is forbidden and what is mandatory. The second is the spread of that ideology to more and more areas of our lives. Both are consequences of the nature – ‘totalitarian’ is not too strong an adjective to describe it – of PC ideology, which naturally aims to be all-encompassing. It contrives, in a way familiar to those acquainted with Marxist dialectics, to connect everything with everything else, wrapping our lives in a closely-knit, stifling blanket of interdependent taboos, impositions, injunctions and bans, many of which have been enshrined in law. There seem very few subjects left on which one is not required to hold the PC view, from global warming (now known as climate change, so that cooling can fit in with the theory of warming – do try to keep up), GM food, quotas for women, books for children, habitats for polar bears and ‘sustainability’ (for just about everything – not surprisin-

gly, given that it generally means impoverishing poor black people and enriching the rich white people who have thought up the sustainability schemes), to homeopathy (on which more below), vaccines, the reasons for hurricanes (see ‘climate change’), university positions for the mentally handicapped, the awfulness of religion (but only Christianity and Judaism), the vileness of Israel, the perfidy of the Jews, Obama’s ability (to include some American examples) to halt the supposed rise of the oceans (see ‘climate change’), the constitutionality of Obamacare (the argument for which, before the Supreme Court saw fit to see it as a tax, will surely go down in history as “the broccoli argument”), and of course (in Europe) the wonderfulness of the EU (the existence of which is the only thing preventing another Holocaust) and the infallibility, incorruptibility and benevolence of Euro-apparatchiks.

A word on homeopathy and why I have included it in the above list. Accompanying all this, and somehow correlated with it, is an alarming rise in the popularity of pseudo-science and new-age gibberish on the one hand and the disinclination for rationality on the other. The causality involved is not (at least to me) entirely clear, but somewhere there is a case to be made for a connection between the abandonment of rationality, indeed the glorification of irrationality, and the abandonment of argument I mentioned earlier: where no debate is possible and views are pre-packaged and oven-ready, argument is neither wanted nor needed, and it would be odd if this were unrelated to the desire – quite visible in PC ideology – to dispense with rationality altogether. The belief in homeopathy is symptomatic of this. And homeopathy does in fact seem – on the basis of anecdotal evidence – to be a PC thing; attempts to ridicule it by appeals to scientific evidence are regularly met with sneers and outrage.

The glorification of irrationality may also be related to the many contradictions inherent in PC ideology. For example: all cultures are equally valuable but Western culture has no value at all; there are no absolute values, but some things – Western culture, capitalism, Israel – are absolute evils; women are vastly superior to men but also entirely equal; women are defined by their biology but at the same time “gender” is no more than a social construct; Marxism must be retained as a guiding principle, but so must ecological concerns about Nature and the Planet (which are no more than a new form of romanticism); the number of ‘human rights’ must continue to increase and the emphasis on human dignity must be maintained, but no such thing as human nature can be conceded to exist; morality and tradition may be dismissed on the dubious basis of evidence from neuropsychology, but scientific evidence in other areas must be selectively rejected; Islam must be defended, but so must the decent treatment of women. This last is, it has often been pointed out, something of a problem for multicultural feminists, although they appear not to have realised the extent of it; quite possibly it will not impinge on their raised consciousness until we are all living under Sharia law. For the moment the contradiction between upholding, on the one hand, the rights of women and homosexuals and, on the other, the principle that all cultures are equal (except of course Western culture, which is worse),

does not seem to bother them. But why should it, since what matters is being on the right side and enjoying the comfortable feeling of moral superiority that being on the right side procures? This, too, seems to be a development – or at least a more salient feature – of this stage of the culture wars. The 1980s were known, fairly or not, as the “me-decade”, but the appellation would suit the 2000s and 2010s very well. Saving the world seems of secondary importance to feeling good about wanting to.

But perhaps the most important development in the culture wars since the 1960s is the gradual institutionalization of PC agendas. In their long march through the institutions, they have now succeeded in shaping government policy. And this – since PC ideology is by nature, like all ideologies, blind to consequences – is perhaps the most dangerous as well as the most striking development. Hence, in defiance of all reason and despite clear evidence of disastrous consequences, the adoption of policies – energy, educational and social policies being the most striking – that have brought wind farms, soaring energy bills and, in Britain over the next few years, ineluctable power shortages, produced two generations of illiterate and innumerate school-leavers, made a mockery of university degrees, stifled private enterprise and initiative, ghettoized minorities, fostered Islamic extremism, antisemitism and discrimination against Christians, drastically weakened the principle of equality before the law, condoned the censorship of some while protecting the privileges of others, and encouraged a culture of dependency, irresponsibility, victimhood and resentment.

One of the more disturbing developments in this sad list is the abandonment, in Britain (and indeed in the US, through manipulation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment), of the principle of equality before the law. There it goes, one feels; wave it goodbye. And once it has gone, it will be hard to re-establish. In Britain it is not just that one has far fewer rights (to free speech, but not only that) as a Christian than one does if one is a Muslim; the penalties for a crime are actually tougher if it is racially or religiously motivated – a ‘hate crime’. Crimes motivated by the victim’s sexual orientation and disability also come into this category. (But not crimes connected with what is known as ‘ageism’, because – as I read in a BBC report from February of this year – “there is no statutory definition of a crime against an older person”.) It comes as no surprise to learn that only a very small percentage of prosecutions for hate crimes involve a white victim. It seems safe to suppose that an equally small percentage involve Christians and Jews. The law on hate crimes is vague and easily manipulated. This, from the point of view of the institutionalized multicultural agenda that gave rise to it, is clearly the point; except for cases of verbal abuse, it is hard to see how such motivation could be reliably established. I must say I don’t much care whether I am murdered as a Jew or an infidel or for my money. The State would care, though – but only if I were black or Muslim.

The consequences of the Gramscian blueprint’s legislative successes – the enshrinement in law of successive tenets of the now dominant PC culture – increasingly make themselves felt in our daily lives, most notably in the form of selective attempts to censor free speech. All are grotesque to varying degrees, but some to such an

extent that they deserve special mention. Here are a few examples – again, picked with difficulty from a long list of excellent candidates.

The first is the trial, earlier this year, of Lars Hedegaard, president of the Danish Free Press Society, accused of violating Denmark's hate speech laws by speaking of some of the less than entirely satisfactory ways in which Muslim women are sometimes treated by their families, with a special mention of rape and honour killings. He was acquitted (the judges having found no evidence of 'intent of public dissemination'). Danish MP Jesper Langballe, however, who had come out in support of his remarks, was convicted. Thus the dissemination of facts can now be prosecuted as hate speech whenever the expression of those facts is deemed by the State to be inconvenient. The case of the Dutch politician Geert Wilders was rather different, involving as it did the expression of opinion – in the form of criticism of Islam – not the dissemination of facts: he was charged with insulting Islam and inciting hatred and discrimination against Muslims. He was eventually acquitted. Whatever the merits of the case against him, two things are worth noting. The first is that, while perhaps not all his actions could be considered the exercise of free speech and on that count deserving of protection, some, perhaps most, undoubtedly could; and in large part he was in fact tried for inciting debate (about taboo subjects such as Muslim immigration), not discrimination. The second is that one of the days of his trial in Amsterdam coincided with a pro-Palestinian demonstration, also in Amsterdam, in the course of which some of the demonstrators chanted "Jews to the gas chambers" and waved banners expressing the same general idea. None of them, as far as I know, stood trial for any offence or was ever accused of hate speech.

Another equally well-known example that deserves mention is a British one: that of the Johns, a husband and wife who for many years have fostered children. The Johns are black, which in this case is immaterial. They are also pious Christians, which is not. They have always been considered excellent foster-parents. Last year a British court ruled that they may no longer foster children because their views were too 'old-fashioned'. More specifically, they refused to indoctrinate the children in their care as to the superiority of homosexuality over heterosexuality. (A new British adoption law now requires local authorities to make sure that foster- and adoptive parents bring up the children in their care in an atmosphere of respect for 'toleration' and 'diversity'. One result of this has been the closure of Catholic adoption agencies in Britain.) The Johns' foster-children are all between five and ten years old. The Johns have never raised the subject of homosexuality with them and very much doubt that they would ever have occasion to do so. Nevertheless, the court found that the right of homosexuals to protection from discrimination trumps the right of Christians to the free expression of their faith and moral values. The court also saw fit to suggest that what was most objectionable, and potentially most harmful to the children in their care, was not so much the John's faith as their moral views.

The fact that the Johns are black no longer counts for much; the gradations in identity politics have changed, and being homosexual now trumps being black. But

one wonders what would have happened had the Johns been Muslim. The court may well have reached a different verdict, if only from fear.

It is also worth mentioning that in Sweden priests have been prosecuted, and in some cases sentenced to terms in prison, for preaching biblical sexual morality in church. Similarly in Canada, where expressions of support for biblical morality, especially those parts of its pertaining to homosexuals, can be prosecuted as hate speech, even when preached in church.

All these things are developments of the past decade or so. Few of us, I think, could have imagined, back in the early days of the culture wars in the 1960s, even the 70s, how much worse things would become.

It is tempting at this point to remark that nostalgia, too, ain't what it used to be – an observation hard to resist, but not entirely gratuitous for all that. We never thought we would look back on the 1960s, even the 1970s, as an age of blithe innocence; all these things were in the future. No wind farms, no global warming industry (in the 1970s the big scare was an imminent new ice age), no radical Islam, multiculturalism not yet institutionalized, universities not yet entirely dedicated to social engineering and ideological indoctrination, humanities departments – even comparative literature – not yet destroyed, science respected, antisemitism not yet mainstream on the Left, religion – even Christianity – still accepted, though frowned upon, postmodernism only just beginning, geography lessons at school still including maps of the world rather than concentrating on the evils of colonialism and anthropogenic global warming, history lessons not yet limited to enumerating the evils of imperialism and the exploitation of minorities, and the famous “Third Way” (aptly described, in a phrase which I wish I had come up with but which I think came from the pen of Mark Steyn, as something between the Second Coming and the fourth dimension) not yet every politician's favourite currency. The failure to profess and teach relativism – cultural, historical, moral and of every other variety – was not yet enough to preclude one from a university position. The word ‘non-judgmental’ was not yet on everyone's lips. The apparently limitless proliferation of ‘rights’ (notably including the right to “define one's own concept of...” etc.), perhaps the most pernicious development of all, and the most pregnant in consequences, was still in the future. So was the European Court of Human Rights and its perverse predilection for restraining, rather than defending, free speech. In the future, too – albeit the very near future – was European terrorism. Now we have come full circle and it is in the (very near) future once again: it seems that the trendy left-wing European intelligentsia is nostalgic for the days of the Baader-Meinhof gang and the Red Brigades, and has apparently decided that maybe it would be fun to have another go. In America, universities are happily engaging in the glorification of ex-terrorists and providing them with professorial posts. And as academic departments go under for lack of funds and local authorities cancel basic services, there never seems to be any shortage of funds for such essentials as diversity officers, outreach enablers, racial equality assessors and lesbian and transgender centres. And courses on the Occupy

Wall Street ‘philosophy’ (courtesy of Oregon State University). And of course gender and queer studies.

Finally, two more fairly recent developments must be mentioned: the new antisemitism of the Left, now mainstream, and the rise of militant atheism, courtesy, to a large extent, of Dawkins & Hitchens. The first is more *de rigeur*, and more dangerous, than the second; the second would not be worth speaking about were it not for a more serious problem which it is doing its best – consciously or not – to aggravate.

The new antisemitism of the Left, which most often, but unconvincingly, hides – as it did in the old days of the Soviet era – under the cloak of “anti-Zionism”, is not, in fact, new at all. But in the past it was limited to leftist fringes. Today Israel has become indefensible in fashionable society. It is not allowed to defend itself, and any attempt to defend it is considered grossly ill-mannered – like blowing your nose in your napkin, or tearing at a dish on the table with your hands – and merits expulsion from polite society. (At dinner parties, the example to follow if you want to get on is that of the French ambassador to Great Britain, who some years ago famously referred to Israel as “that shitty little country”). The Gaza strip is regularly compared to the Warsaw Ghetto; Israelis are compared to Nazis. NGOs (the great majority of them avowedly biased, some linked to terrorist organisations) and the left-liberal media in the West Bank and Gaza deluge the press with grossly falsified reports and doctored photographs of purported Israeli atrocities. Some of these people may be useful idiots, the innocent dupes of Palestinian propaganda; but many clearly know what they are doing. In France, those who a few years ago were proved in court to have falsified a television documentary knew exactly what they were doing. Academic boycotts are perhaps the new antisemitism’s most visible form – except for isolated incidents like the attempt to stage a new Kristallnacht in Rome a few years ago, or the recent murders of Jews in France; but these may have more to do with the old antisemitism than with the new. In the case of France they also clearly have to do with disaffected French Muslim youths (or just “youths”, are they are spoken of in the press, for to mention that they are Muslim would be racist); and the most recent murders of Jews in France were the work of a jihadist. But it is not just that there are boycotts; it is that people dare not refuse to join them, let alone publicly oppose them. It was never like this with South African grapes. Few academics are brave enough to utter a public condemnation of such boycotts. At UCLA, where a professor’s course page contained a link to a website urging a boycott of Israel, it was the brave students (and some faculty) who dared to protest that were condemned by the university community. That is the situation today. Much has been written in recent years about the rise of the new antisemitism and the reasons for it; among recent articles of interest are Nick Cohen’s “How the Left Turned Against the Jews” (Standpoint, Summer 2012), Ben Cohen’s “The Big Lie Returns” (Commentary, February 2012), Ron Radosh’s “When the American Left Loved Israel” (Commentary, November 2012) and, again by Ron Radosh, a September 2012 column in PJ Media, which contains an unusually clear quote from Judith Butler, that infallible purveyor of impenetrable

prose and regular contributor to the gaiety of nations. But for once she couldn't be clearer. Here it is, for the benefit of those who were in any doubt on the matter: "Understanding Hamas and Hezbollah as social movements that are progressive and that are on the left, that are part of the global left, is extremely important."

As for militant atheism, the problem is not its contribution to the creeping secularization everyone seems to be lamenting: Christianity is doing fine in many parts of the world and the Church of Rome, having survived for two thousand years, may be considered well able to take care of itself. What is disturbing is the artificial polarization between atheists on the one hand and Creationists on the other, as if no one else existed: not agnostics, not mild Church of England clergymen, not ordinary, rational Christians who see no conflict between science and faith and do not take the Bible literally. This is a real problem; and it seems to me that in the culture wars it is this, most of all, that should be addressed. Both Dawkins and Hitchens have proved in their books that their grasp of history in general, and of the history of Christianity more specifically, is, to put it delicately, slight; the trouble is that – in large part because the teaching of Christianity and the Bible has been long abandoned in schools as politically incorrect – the general reader, especially the young general reader, is no better placed. Christianity and the Judeo-Christian tradition, Creationists, 'fundamentalist Christians' of every variety – all are indiscriminately lumped together and together sneered at, reviled and blamed for all the world's ills since the beginning of time. It's just like John Lennon's "Imagine", but less catchy. But the division into atheists on one side and everyone else on the other is false, pernicious and artificial; and alliances with Creationists, which some conservatives seem to be tempted by, far from helping to preserve Christian values, seem to me misguided and dangerous – as alliances with one's enemy's enemy usually are. They should be resisted. (Come to that, any alliance with people who think that Adam and Eve walked the earth together with dinosaurs should probably be avoided.)

A final word, in this context, about Poland, which seems to be composed of two extremes with a yawning abyss in the middle. On the one hand, there is the trendy Left – not merely anticlerical but anti-Christian, increasingly militant in its atheism, and much influenced by fashionable Western PC agendas. It can do post-modernism, diversity, toleration, multiculturalism and radical feminism with the best of them; in its championing of gay rights and its loathing for family values it tries hard not to be outdone. On the other, there is the Catholic right – and that seems to be the only right there is, give or take a handful of people. A large part of it is – to list a few of the things I personally find uncongenial – in favour of a total ban on both abortion and IVF, against civil partnerships and genuinely discriminatory against homosexuals, in the sense that they would quite like to deny them equality before the law if they could (however much one might dislike Gay Pride marches, trying to ban them seems – especially now that they are an accepted spectacle in every European city – strategically unwise; and suggestions that homosexuals should be given therapy to cure them of their homosexuality would, I think, be met with in-

credulity and distaste by most Western liberals, conservative or not). They are, if not actually anti-free-market, certainly not all that concerned with diminishing the role of the state. Unsurprisingly, they do not go out of their way to promote individual responsibility. An alarming amount of succumbing to the temptation to relinquish liberalism to the Left goes on (as it admittedly also does in the US). The gap in the middle seems larger, and the extremes more extreme, than elsewhere in Europe. I doubt whether the Catholic right, if it came to power, would prove strong enough – especially in the face of pressure from the EU – to implement its reforms. The other extreme, however – the anti-Christian PC Left, in favour of big government and uncritical of the EU – has a much better chance, and its influence will increase. Rigid and often illiberal Catholic conservatism does not seem to be the most effective weapon against it.

One thing, however, the Polish Right is emphatically not, and that is antisemitic. Not as a whole, not in its mainstream, and not even all that much on its fringes. This – because of the accusations of antisemitism regularly flung at it by the Left, which is unfortunately the main source of reports about Poland in the Western press – needs to be said very strongly, which is why it gets a paragraph to itself. Pockets of the old variety of antisemitism still exist, of course; but the only accusation that can be fairly made against the Polish Right as a whole – and it is a sufficiently serious one in itself – is that it is reluctant to take firm steps to stifle it when it does appear in its ranks.

All this is depressing to us Jewish agnostic libertarian conservatives with a great deal of respect for the Christian roots of Western culture. (And of course also to all varieties of goyish agnostic ditto.) It is not the manufactured pseudo-gap between religious Christians and non-believers that we should mind, or any of the gaps regularly deplored by the Left in its determination to ignore improvements and concentrate on relative conditions (a determination arising in large degree from the culture of resentment which it does so much to promote), such as the widening gap between rich and poor, or the gap – manufactured by the policies of those whose avowed aim was precisely to prevent it – between the kinds of education they can hope to receive. Of course we should and do mind these gaps, particularly the latter, and particularly since, being a manufactured gap, it would be fairly easily to cure. But those who bemoan this gap *as* a gap – who bemoan the gap itself, rather than the state of affairs occurring on one side of it – respond with cries of outrage to any genuine attempt to eliminate it. This confirms the suspicion that they do not really mind it at all: what matters most to them is the feeling of moral superiority derived from the conviction that they are on the right side – the side of light. To question the means they propose to achieve their aims is to be on the side of darkness. Here, again, is the blindness to consequences and the indifference to results, even if they are patently counter-productive, that are characteristic of ideological thinking. And here, again, is the culture of resentment which leads the gap-bemoaners to concentrate, in their policy proposals, on condemning those on the privileged side of the gap rather than

improving conditions for those on the other. In the case of secondary education, the reigning principle is that of the lowest common denominator: let them all sink, as long as they are equally sunk. This, too, is characteristic. Which brings me to the real gap.

The real gap we should mind is that yawning empty space in the centre of the culture wars: the gap created by the extreme polarization of opinion. It is the gap between the all-encompassing PC ideology that is obligatory today and the too rigidly conservative extremes of what has become, to all intents and purposes, the counter-culture; the gap between those on the atheist Left who contrive simultaneously to embrace irrationality and scientism and those on the religious Right who, in what sometimes seems like a childish fit of pique, reject liberalism altogether rather than attempting to combine it with Christian values. (This, to those of us who think it important to salvage liberalism for the Right, seems like throwing out the baby with the bathwater. But to them it is just bathwater, and some of them heave a sigh of relief as they see it go down the plughole. Their baby is elsewhere.) It is the gap between those who rip up Bibles in public demonstrations of loathing against religion and those who think it more important for schools to teach the catechism of the Church of Rome than the Bible; between those on the religious Right who are tempted towards a new form of Marcionism and those on the Left who, by rejecting the past, embrace a different sort of Marcionism; between those who would force the state to grant privileges to minority groups and those who believe that their faith forbids granting them equality before the law; between two extremes who in different ways reject individual responsibility and favour the murky and ill-defined thing they call 'social justice' over liberty. Between, in other words, two kinds of illiberalism. Perhaps liberalism does ineluctably lead to the situation we have today; but we cannot be certain of this, and the suspicion that it does is not a good enough reason for abandoning it. The alternatives are worse.

Mind the gap: nowe wojny kulturowe

Autorka stawia pytanie, czy możliwe jest zracjonalizowanie dyskursu o wojnach kulturowych w taki sposób, aby krańcowa polaryzacja opinii została zredukowana do zrównoważonego dyskursu akademickiego. Zastanawia się także, czy jest możliwe znalezienie przestrzeni intelektualnej i kulturowej dla powstrzymania totalitarnej doktryny poprawności politycznej oraz ekstremizmu konserwatywnego, który staje się zjawiskiem kontrkulturowym, wykluczającym dyskusję akademicką.

Hieronim Kubiak

THE AMERICAN DILEMMA 70 YEARS LATER

Introductory remarks

I was provoked into writing this essay by the questions asked 70 years ago by Gunnar Myrdal, who delivered the book *An American Dilemma. The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (Harper & Row, Publishers, New York and Evanston 1944) into the hands of readers. This may seem nothing out of the ordinary, as books have been published at least since the time when Johann Guttenberg invented the technology of casting individual types in metal, in a form that allowed combining them into columns, and a press printing practically unlimited numbers of copies from a single galley, making it possible to publish – after years of tedious preparations – the printed Bible in 1455. The “42-verse Bible”. Yet Myrdal’s book enjoys an extraordinary status in the history of contemporary social sciences. It is so, as in many aspects it is reminiscent of a saga, narrated by a Swede, about the process of the American Society’s laborious approach to the message of the creed thus penned in The Declaration of Independence:

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are, Life, Liberty, and Pursuit of Happiness [original spelling].

Against the inclusive nature of this Creed, namely that all people are free by nature, the majority of white residents of the originally British colonies, and later

also of the independent United States did not extend it to the black inhabitants of the same land. Still in 1847, the US Supreme Court thus answered the question of whether “the blacks are also citizens?” in the *Dred Scott v. Stanford* case:

We think they are not, and that they are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word ‘citizens’ in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides and secures for citizens of the United States.¹

Myrdal seeks the answer to the question why a society and the state built from the outset upon the traditions of the Enlightenment and democratic principles refuses, against its constitution, the basic rights and freedom to a significant part of its citizens. Why it is so easy for so many to speak of the fundamental values which are called the “American Creed” not without justification, and at the same time consider a significant part of residents of the same land by nature worse than themselves, ergo, not deserving citizenship and the rights it entails. How can people combine these opposing points of view into a seemingly coherent whole? How did such a status quo arise and can one – and if one actually can, then through what actions – conclusively terminate that vicious circle forcing to choose between two mutually exclusive options?

In many aspects, Gunnar’s adventure with America is reminiscent of two earlier cases, namely those of Alexis de Tocqueville and Max Weber. The first, a lawyer by education living in 1805–1859, was sent to the US in 1831 by the French government to become acquainted with the processes of development of the American penal system. Taken down in the 14 notebooks, the observations from his 10-month-long peregrinations in the territory of the United States – from the East Coast to the frontier of the contemporary settlement in the West – later became the grounds for the four-volume treaty *Democracy in America*, published in 1835–1840 and still read today.

The latter, Max Weber (1864–1920), even though familiar with Protestantism from his own German experience, wrote a book entitled *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (*Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*) under the impulse of a few-months-long (September–December 1904) stay in the US and under the impact of direct observation of Protestant religious communities, their systems of values, and lifestyles. He published it in 1904–1905, in two successive issues of *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaften und Sozialpolitik* magazine (est. in 1903). The direct reason for Weber’s visit to the United States was the nervous illness he contracted in 1898. To this day, the professional sociologist environment believes *The Protestant Ethic* to be among “the ten most influential books published in the 20th century”.²

¹ Quoted after J. J. Macionis, *Sociology*, 10th edition, New Jersey 2005, p. 368; A. P. Blaustein, R. T. Zangrando, *Civil Rights and the Black American*, New York 1968, p. 160.

² See: materials of *ISA World Congress of Sociology held in Montreal 1998*, www.isa-sociology.org/books.

None of the three authors mentioned above intended to become a professional Americanist, be it before setting off to the United States or having returned from there. Yet they all wanted to understand the United States without a Europe-centric bias, as a *sui generis* reality (ethical system, society, and state), not simply “suspended” in time, but dynamically “becoming”.

Gunnar Myrdal’s adventure with America

Gunnar Myrdal lived in 1898–1987. An economist by education, he was interested chiefly in the problems of money and cyclical fluctuations. With time, he also took an interest in the theoretical premises of economic models, economic (including tax) policy, state interventionism (especially during the great economic crisis of 1929–1933), conditions determining effective international cooperation in economies of different countries, and – already in the 1950s – the theory of economic underdevelopment of backward countries and the essence of the phenomenon of poverty. His pioneering studies in the theory of money, cyclical fluctuations, and the thorough analysis of the mutual conditioning of economic, social, and institutional phenomena had Myrdal awarded the Nobel Prize in 1974 (NB: together with F.A. Hayek, who presented views exactly opposing those of Myrdal). The significant stages in his professional career included the position of professor at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva (1931–1932) and at Stockholm University (1960–1967). Moreover, he was a member of the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences (since 1945), the executive secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (1947–1957), and the founder of the Institute for International Economic Studies at Stockholm University (1961). Also worth noting in his political and state activities are, in particular, the position of Member of Parliament (in 1934–1938 and 1942–1947), and the post of Trade Minister in the Swedish government (1945–1947).

Gunnar Myrdal found his way to the United States for the first time in the late 1920s for a year’s stay financed by the Spelman Fund. Yet his true intellectual adventure of living in America did not begin until 10th September 1938, when the Carnegie Corporation invited him to programme, manage, and conduct studies on black US citizens. Why him? Were there, at the time, not enough Americans in the US, excellent academics fascinated with the question, who had significant scientific achievements. Once again, then: why? This is how the question was addressed by Frederick P. Keppel speaking on behalf of the Carnegie Corporation, whose president he was at the time: the questions that we desire to deal with

[...] have been for nearly a hundred years so charged with emotion that it appeared wise to seek as the responsible head of the undertaking someone who could approach his task with a fresh mind, uninfluenced by traditional attitudes or by earlier conclusions, and it was therefore decided to “import” a general director [...] And since the emotional factor affects the Negroes no less than

the whites, the search was limited to countries of high intellectual and scholarly standards, but with no background or traditions of imperialism which might lessen the confidence of the Negroes in the United States as to the complete impartiality of the study and the validity of its findings. Under these limitations, the obvious place to look were Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries, and the search ended in the selection of Dr. Gunnar Myrdal.³

Gunnar Myrdal was invited to become the director “of a comprehensive study of the Negro in the United States, to be undertaken in a wholly objective and dispassionate way as a social phenomenon”.⁴ Myrdal accepted the invitation. After 10th September 1938, together with Richard Sterner from the Royal Social Board, Stockholm, they took their first formal steps required to carry out the project.

Following the advice of President Keppel, Myrdal embarked on his task, not from studies of books, but from travelling the southern states. Every day for two months, he stood face to face with problems that he found new and emotions he had never experienced before. Jackson Davies of the General Education Board became the organiser of the field research, and at the same time his guide, while the contact points were inspired by the State Agents for Negro Education.

We established contact with a great number of white and Negro leaders in various activities; visited universities, colleges, schools, churches, and various state and community agencies as well as factories and plantations; talked to police officers, teachers, preachers, politicians, journalists, agriculturists, workers, sharecroppers, and in fact, all sorts of people, colored and whites.⁵

After additional queries in libraries and archives, the first draft of the intended study was ready in January 1939. Taking part in the discussion of the draft were both eminent American intellectuals – Ruth Benedix, John Dollard, Ralph Linton, Frederic Osborn, Robert E. Park, and William I. Thomas – and people known from civic movements and actions for equal rights for black US citizens, whose number included William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, the author of the well-known book *The Philadelphia Negro. A Social Study*, published in 1899. Moreover, a seven-person-strong permanent body was set up to manage, and a research team was appointed. This was composed of over 70 people dealing with various themes outlined in the general programme. Besides the above, a permanent administrative secretariat was established.

Research work started in the summer and autumn of 1939. In the coordination of the entire project, Gunnar Myrdal was assisted, in particular, by Samuel A. Stouffer. Soon, however, Myrdal and Frederick Keppel, the president of Carnegie Corporation, were faced with another problem to be solved which could not have been envisaged by any party in 1937. War broke out in Europe. After the German invasion of Denmark and Norway in April 1940, friends advised Myrdal

³ See: G. Myrdal, *An American Dilemma. The Negro Problem and modern Democracy*, New York–Evanston 1962, p. xlviii.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. li.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

to return to Sweden. He left in June 1940 yet managed to return to the United States, through a roundabout route in May 1941. Three months later he was joined by Richard Sterne and Arnold Rose. The work on the implementation of the research programme gained momentum.

By September 1940, Samuel A. Stouffer managing the entire programme in Myrdal's absence from the US had managed to collect the preliminary results of the research (written over 15,000 pages!), and preparation of the texts for print began. The matter was not easy, as the entire project had neither resulted from the vision of an individual career nor from the systematic activity of any American institution of higher education or any other academic institution. Two years later, the text was ordered, and was first published in 1944. Besides the prefaces and introduction, the book comprised 11 parts divided into 45 chapters, 10 appendices, a list of 44 tables and charts, a bibliography, numbered footnotes, and an index. Altogether, the work was typed on over 1400 pages.⁶

The titles of all parts and chapters of the book, when taken together, provide the perfect information about its contents. Thus, the first part titled *The Approach* discusses: 1) *American Ideals and the American Conscience*, 2) *Encountering the Negro Problem*, and 3) *Facts of the Negro Problem*. The second part – *Race* – speaks of *Racial Beliefs*, *Race and Ancestry*, and *Racial Characteristics*. The third part is composed of two chapters: the seventh on the population of the black residents of the US, and the eighth on their internal migrations. The fourth part is devoted to economics, and contains an analysis of 1) economic inequalities, 2) the tradition of slavery, 3) the South's plantation economy (including black farmers), 4) the critical position of the South's agriculture in the 1930s, 5) the exodus from the South in search of employment outside agriculture in the 1930s, 6) The Negro in business, the professions, public service and other white collar occupations, 7) The Negro in the public economy, 8) revenues, consumption, and the condition of homes, 9) The mechanics of economy discrimination as a practical problem, 10) Pre-war labor market controls and their consequences for the Negro, and 11) The war boom – and thereafter. The fifth part concentrates on politics, its determinants, southern conservatism and liberalism, policy implementation, and trends and possibilities. The sixth part examines questions related to the state of the system of justice, including inequality of justice, the police and other public contacts, the courts, the judicial quality of sentences and prison services, and violence and intimidation. Part seven of the book describes and analyses the social inequalities, with special attention being paid to the grounds for social inequalities, patterns of segregation and discrimination, and the impact of social inequalities. The eighth part presents the social structure, referring successively to the concepts of social castes and classes, and

⁶ The description of the book's contents is reconstructed from its second edition, printed on the 20th anniversary of completing the work on the text prepared for print in 1942, see: G. Myrdal, *An American Dilemma. The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition, New York–Evanston 1962.

the situation of the blacks in the social structure of the USA. Examined in the ninth part are the characteristics of leadership and *concerted action*, and especially the American: 1) model of individual leadership and mass passiveness, 2) Accomodative leadership, 3) The Negro protest, 4) The protest motive and Negro personality, 5) Compromise leadership, 6) Negro popular theories, 7) Negro improvement and protest organizations, 8) The Negro Church, 9) The Negro School, and 10) The Negro Press. The tenth part renders the specific characteristic constituents of black US communities, including the institutions operating within them and non-institutional aspects of the Negro community. Finally, the eleventh and final part returns to the central problem of the book and seeks an answer to the question about the condition of *an American dilemma* in the early 1940s: whether, as far as the problem of the Blacks is concerned, America is again at a crossroads?

The appendices inform successively about: the methodology of evaluation of human beliefs and events (and also the principle of accumulation, especially in social sciences) used throughout the studies, the semantic fields of the regionalisms used in the book, groups that in various communities experience similar (in certain aspects) problems to those of the black residents of the United States, earnings (before the second world war) of this part of the American population in selected branches of economy, the most frequently performed occupations, the spatial distribution of black Americans in selected cities, studies of castes and classes in black American communities, research on Negro leadership, and quantitative studies of racial attitudes. Altogether, the appendices cover over one hundred pages. Twenty years later: the conflict between the reformers and defenders of the status quo.

In his introduction to the second edition of *An American Dilemma* (1962), Arnold Rose states that the years 1942–1962 brought about not only a significant change in the situation of the coloured US population, but also – to a greater extent as an answer to the success of the reformers – the re-activation of the defenders of the *status quo ante bellum*. The factors reinforcing the abolitionist tendencies mentioned by Rose include the changes entailed by the successive phase of the process of the formation of the American industrial society, technological progress, maturing of the collective awareness of black US citizens, increasing sensitivity of Americans to the image of the country reinforced by global public opinion, and initiatives generated by civil rights supporters both on the federal, and state and local scenes. Tendencies opposing the abolitionist orientation found their expression, primarily in the states of consciousness, and in the movements and organisations of the white residents of the South as well as, to a certain extent, the North.

What was the link between the industrialisation of the country with movements supporting the liberation of America from racism and its various impacts? In the 1790s, racism developed in the agricultural areas of the US, especially under the influence of the demand for a cheap and at the same time constant workforce, after 27-year-old Eli Whitney constructed the cotton gin in 1793. The cotton gin is believed by many interpreters of US history to be “the invention that divided

North and South". When, beginning with the 1930s, the cotton monoculture in the southern states began to deteriorate (influenced by the diminishing demand for cotton, diversification of agriculture, and development of industry), the demand for unskilled labour in the South also decreased, and so did the racist convictions that were once necessary to justify the attitude of the white planters to black slaves. It must, however, be remembered that the ideologies – in this case, racism, motivated with the simplified version of human nature, outlast the conditions that created them. Their eagerness to liberate oneself from discriminating practices and the diminishing demand for simple labour intensified migrations from the traditionally agricultural areas to the cities (first to those situated in the northern states, and after 1840 – also to Midwestern cities).⁷

Until the conclusion of the Civil War, the internal emigration of slaves was illegal, according to the laws of the southern states. Nevertheless, secret smuggling routes were established. An organiser of such escapes from the South, who was to become especially well-known was Harriet Tubman, an illiterate former slave. Her track, years later given the name of the Underground Railroad, made it possible for 300 people – men, women, and children – to move to the North. After 1900, 70% of all the American Blacks already lived in the cities, which resulted in a far-going change of the American social structure.⁸ These changes definitely influenced the improvement of the status of the coloured people of the North and West, which in turn could be (and was!) used in the struggle for the civil rights of the former slaves who remained in the South.

Especially advantageous for the coloured people was the technological progress of 1940–1954, which increased the supply of jobs and options for gainful work. "While measures vary, it has been estimated that the rise of average real income among Negroes since 1940 has been two to three times that among whites".⁹

Nevertheless, the technological progress and, in particular, automation also had negative impacts. The unskilled hired hands with a low level of education, dominant among the black workers, were the first to shift en masse to the ranks of the unemployed (including the "permanently unemployed") category.

Influenced by access to schools (easier in the North and West than in the South), and the constant development of the educated elite, the level of positive collective self-identification grew among black Americans. It became the power stimulating the emancipation movements whose participants also included the

⁷ It is estimated that the successive waves of mass internal migrations, also including those in the first half of the 20th century, consisted of over six million black Americans moving from the South to the industrial cities of the North and Midwest.

⁸ The former caste system based on the master – slave relationship began to be replaced by new imperatives, defining a new place in the class and layer structure of the industrial society to individuals and families. Moreover, in the cities, the newcomers could use their newly acquired civil rights more fully, and not only participate in elections but also, should the need occur, make use of the legal protection they were entitled to and of institutions of education.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. xxiv.

white opponents of racial discrimination. The number of organisations existing earlier (including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP], the Garvey Movement, and the Urban League) was now joined by new ones. Some of them were a spontaneous reaction to the violence and discriminatory behaviours of the whites, while others originated under the influence of intellectual visions of amending social and political systems. Non-violence resistance techniques were taken over from Gandhi (among others, by the Congress on Racial Equality [CORE]) and used in the struggle for the abolition of racial segregation. The technique attracted the attention of the entire country during the bus strike in Montgomery (Alabama) headed by Reverend Martin Luther King. Beginning in 1958, another form of opposition, known as a sit-in, promoted among others, by the Nonviolent Coordinative Committee (SNCC), developed.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, there were certain new abolitionist organisations which reached for means of violence themselves (a philosophy of violence), as was the case with the United African Nationalist Movement led by James Lawson. Still other organisations, already established after the second world war, and under the influence of experiences from the period, decided to oppose the general American assimilation tendencies, and – opposing all the forms of discrimination – fought for the right to maintain their racial and cultural independence. Moreover, all the movements and organisations, both mentioned and not mentioned above, are clear proof that the collective actors representing practically all the milieus and generations of coloured US citizens in public life – both with elementary education and those belonging to the intellectual elites, religious and political ones included – joined the struggle for equal rights against all forms of discrimination and stereotypical racial beliefs in the two decades in question (1940–1960).

Significant changes took place in American opinion-forming circles. Under the influence of events related to the second world war and including a higher number of contacts with citizens of other countries and the role of black soldiers in the American forces, the collapse of the isolationist orientation, and also the reaction to world decolonisation processes, the influential American circles began to pay ever more watchful attention to how the United States is perceived in the international community. In the new circumstances and resultant moods, it was self-evident that racial discrimination – even in an assuaged form – is a negative burden for the US and its role in global politics.

Problems related to civil rights were becoming increasingly visible on the federal scene which triggered far-reaching collaboration (also in legislative institutions) between various civic forces, including ones outside the American mainstream. Thanks to its right to explain the Constitution, the US Supreme Court was exceedingly more and more clearly becoming an independent actor on the political stage. Supporting in its sentences the egalitarian principle, in 1944 the “Court declare[d] unequivocally that the white primary was illegal, and that such subterfuges to prevent Negroes from voting in the South were unconstitutional.”¹⁰

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. xxxiii.

Similarly, subjected to the collective pressure of various organisations representing black citizens, US presidents began to support the elimination of discriminating practices from labour relations and education with increasing consistency.¹¹

The Congress joined the anti-discriminatory activity to a lesser extent, which was most frequently explained with the negative influence of the congressmen and senators representing the South. The decision to award federal authorities with the right to stop local election commissions from rendering the participation of coloured people in elections more difficult, was considered its first decision clearly in support of civil rights since the 1870s.

At the state level, the authorities of New York, together with the related local authorities, became involved in civil rights defence. This entailed primarily the protection of the state's residents against all forms of discrimination due to race, creed or nationality, while leasing (and trading) housing, as well as in labour relations.

Which civil forces of the time opposed the black and white citizens of the United States who strove for equal rights? Predominantly, which is understandable in the light of the initial phase of the economic development of the country, they were the white residents of the South. Beginning with 1954, these were not only spontaneous reactions which grew from the culture of subjugation and segregation, but also organised activities. The role of the animator and representative of the conservative forces was taken over by the White Citizens' Councils. Although in many aspects, these expressed moods analogous to those that in the 1920s accompanied the power-play acts of terror, organised by the second Ku Klux Klan¹² now, the idea was not only the psychological effect of intimidation, but also the defence of the grounds for the current social status quo based on the caste system.

The decision of the US Supreme Court to abolish segregation in public education was considered a profound threat to that status quo. On 17th May 1954, the Supreme Court considered – having investigated the *Brown v. the Board of Education* (in the city of Topeka, Kansas) case – that racial segregation in public education was contradictory to the US Constitution. What mattered here were neither

¹¹ See: the decisions of Franklin D. Roosevelt concerning employment in the federal administration and in companies related to the federal government, and also even more anti-discriminatory activities undertaken by Harry S Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower supporting the sentence of the Supreme Court concerning the segregation of schools, even when – as in the case of Little Rock, Arkansas – this required the support of the military. Similarly significant were the actions undertaken by the Kennedy administration which aimed to curb racial discrimination in public interstate transport, including coaches and railroads.

¹² The first Klan, boasting 500,000 members, was established in 1866 by former Confederate soldiers. Its internal structure, built along the lines of the Invisible Empire, covered the entire South. Colloquially, the Klan was known as *Kyklos*. The second, besides the earlier slogan of supremacy of the white race, also preaching militant patriotism, anti-Semitism, and anti-Catholicism consisted of approximately 4.5 million members in the 1920s. It was also active in the states of the North and Midwest. In the 1930s, the number of members of the second Klan dropped below 10,000. Moreover, anti-racist actions were initiated by many other societies, including the Knights of the White Camelia. Some of these organisations were of a clandestine nature.

economic nor political considerations, but primarily those of a symbolic nature. To quote Arnold Rose: "The ideology of racism was no longer a response to a conflict between economic-political forces and the idealism of the American Creed, but rather an expression merely of a traditional psychology."¹³ Yet now, the South was no longer a monolith. Some, much like Bryant Bowles, were still eager to pose as defenders of the white race, which found its expression in the National Association for the Advancement of White People that he organised in 1955. Others, supported, albeit not to the same degree in the Deep South and in the Upper South, the cessation of "fighting the war between the States" and sending the previous convictions of the need to maintain the subjugated status of the Blacks into historical oblivion. This was not done solely for ideological reasons or the conviction of the irreversibility of the process of history, but for more pragmatic reasons, as it was already known that "violence directed against the Negroes can easily spread to white-owned property and other institutions, and so the traditional leaders try to keep excitement in check".¹⁴

In the North, the anti-abolition movement was decidedly weaker, especially in organised forms. It found its expression, amongst others, in the attempts to stop the influx of Blacks to residential districts, the refusal to rent housing to them, barring them from jobs and social clubs, and even a reluctance to maintain personal contacts. Thus, it grew weaker; yet from time to time anti-abolitionism was also visible in the North. This status quo, especially in the realm of public life, resulted partly from the various family ties with the South, and partly from the economic links with southern business.

As the position of Black Americans in the labour market was not sufficiently strongly defended by the AFL-CIO¹⁵ they organised a trade union of their own: the Negro American Labor Council. The position of Black Americans was gradually changing to their benefit, although the direction of the changes was not always of a linear nature. Even though still early in 1940 "Negroes were excluded from most occupations outside of agriculture and services", in 1962 "some Negroes were to be found in nearly every occupation".¹⁶ Moreover, labour relations improved, even though the structural violence (expressed in unequal access to schools caused by the unequal situation of families in the social structure) influenced them negatively. In addition, the unequal access to funds reserved by the federal government for social policy (e.g. to aid for the poor and aged, children and the unemployed, and support of council housing, etc.) was in fact eliminated.

Black Americans could not only participate in elections (local, state, federal) without obstacles,¹⁷ but could also become candidates and be elected by white votes

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. xxxvi.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. xxxvii.

¹⁵ Until 1961, the AFL-CIO would even refrain from open involvement of the union in activities aimed at the elimination of racial discrimination from labour relations.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. xxxviii.

¹⁷ Although still not to the same degree as in the Deep South and the rural areas of the Upper South. Still binding in five states was the poll tax, while literacy and "understanding" tests were practised

(e.g. to school councils). A two-party system also began to develop in the South, and in the presidential election (e.g. in 1960), black votes decided the victory of Democratic Party candidates. In 1916 there were already four black members of the Congress. In the North, seats in the councils of cities and smaller local communities were frequently taken by many representatives of this part of American society, elected from among other representatives in democratic elections. The structures of the Democratic Party also began to be reinforced in the quarters inhabited by “coloured” people. As a result, Afro-Americans gradually became a significant part of the “iron electorate” of the Democrats.

Criminal Law began to be applied more justly, especially when the parties – the aggressor and the victim – were of a different skin colour. Cases of brutal police behaviour towards black participants of conflict situations were less frequent. After 1950 “lynching was a rare event (...) and even murders of Negro prisoners by white policemen and jailers became infrequent. Thus, even while tensions mounted between races in the South, total violence declined.”¹⁸

For years, the problems most difficult to solve and which at the same time left a clear trace of former racial divides, were residential questions. The intensified inflow of coloured people to the cities of the North and West was accompanied by the escape of the white residents to suburban districts. Simultaneously, in the areas inhabited by coloured people, the prices of both buildings and real estate for development dropped. The space used by the new occupants quickly became devastated. Urban districts of poverty began to expand and the cities themselves yielded to transformation. The former residential areas began to develop commercial and office spaces. Rose believes that when the work on the second edition of *The American Dilemma* began, “housing segregation remains as the most serious and least soluble aspect of the race problem, at least in the Northern states”.¹⁹

Segregation in public and private (but open for the public) places, as well as the forced segregation in schools, play areas, restaurants, hotels, and commercial facilities in the North began to visibly disappear, to a large extent as an initiative and under the pressure of the local and state authorities. Nevertheless, it long remained the direct reason for serious tensions, if not riots in the South (especially under the influence of the process of desegregation of schools, public utility areas, and means of transport). Only in 1959–1960, did the abolitionists have to resort to protests based on the sit-in methodology to break down the discrimination practices still used in 200 cities of the South.

Marriage, other than endogamous marriage, has always been a problem, for reasons of both objective nature and subjective, racial, religious, ethnic/national, and legal nature, with their number – much like that of exogamous marriage – by

in others, and paramilitary groups of the White League and Red Shirts type were still active in Louisiana, Mississippi, and the Carolinas.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. xi.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. xii.

providing an important factor of the position assumed by the given group in the social structure, informed about the degree of its internal differentiation, level of openness to the other, dominant beliefs, and eventually the level of traumatic experience from bygone days. In societies such as the American one, i.e. composed of people who originate from various cultural bastions, continuously changing under the influence of the directions of immigration processes, changing with time, the number of marriages concluded outside of the group was and remains an additional marker of the level of social integration, cultural assimilation, and consent to multiculturalism. Moreover, the convictions about comprehensive consent to integration at the meso- and macrostructural level do not need to be accompanied at all by an analogous consent to the establishment of lasting unions at the level of microstructures, interracial marriages included. In the period of time in question, interracial marriages in the South were still illegal, while in the North – both due to the direction of movements of internal American migrants and the beliefs belonging to the internal migrants – their number was slowly growing.

Arnold Rose closes his analysis of the changes in American racial relations during the two decades following the first publication of *The American Dilemma* with two general conclusions.

First, he believes that the changes that took place at the time in the relations between the white and black citizens of the United States and their pace “appeared as one of the most rapid in the history of human relations”.²⁰ Moreover, these changes were “the most rapid and dramatic in world history without violent revolution”.²¹ Although much of the former segregation or practices and convictions seemingly justifying the attitudes discriminating the Blacks remained in the South, and proof for housing segregation continued throughout the country, nevertheless, “the all-encompassing cast system had been broken everywhere. Prejudice as an attitude was still common, but racism as a comprehensive ideology was maintained by only a few.”²²

Secondly, even though in 1962, black Americans

[...] still experience discrimination, insults, segregation, and the threat of violence, and in a sense have become more sensitive and less ‘adjusted’ to these things [...] Schooled as they are by the American Creed, their standard of compromise for the present situation is not what existed in 1940, but what the Constitution and ‘the principles of democracy’ say it should be.²³

In 1962 most sociologists, as Arnold Rose believed, recognised the forecasts of *The American Dilemma*, optimist. Yet has reality really changed in line with these predictions? Gunnar Myrdal himself did not participate in the preparation of

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. xiiii.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. xiiv.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*.

the second edition of his book, referred to as *the Twentieth Anniversary Edition*, limiting his involvement only to the writing of a 5-page long preface. Why? The answer is:

The present book will have to remain my first and my last contribution to the study of the Negro problem in America. As I did not want to express views on a subject on which I could no longer constantly follow the discussion. I have refrained from making further comments on the Negro issue" (Arnold Rose, *Postscript Twenty Years Later*).²⁴

Seventy years later: is *today* isomorphic towards past forecasts? On the eve of proclaiming the declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson was convinced that George III and the British Parliament were guilty of the rebellion of the colonies against the metropolis. And as "people are by nature free, government results from a social contract, and should it fail to fulfil its functions in line with the collective will, the collective has the right to overthrow it with the use of force".²⁵ In this Jeffersonian maxim, only the last element changed after the adoption of the Constitution: America overthrows its governments not with the use of force but following the procedure of free and fair elections. This is how Barack Obama, the 44th US President was elected. Thus, seemingly, one of the many. In fact, he is the first black (in his paternal line; Barack Obama senior came from the African Luo tribe and was born in Kenya) and white (in his maternal line Anna Durham had English, Irish, and Native American roots) leader of the United States. Was then the process of liberation of the American Society from racism and its consequences concluded on 20th January 2009, that is on the day when Barack Obama took over the presidential power in the US?

The question of black American slaves turns up in Polish sources in the first²⁶ version of Tadeusz Kościuszko's testament in 1798. Let us reiterate that Tadeusz Kościuszko first turned to Thomas Jefferson (referred to in the testament as "my friend") to assume the role of the trustee of Kościuszko's testament, authorising him in this way to dispose with, after Kościuszko's death, the estates awarded him by the US Congress for the service in the American Army (\$18,912.03, "disregarding the interest sent [for Kościuszko] to European banks", and 500 acres of land that "was situated by the Scioto in Ohio State").²⁷ Kościuszko wanted Jefferson to use the estate "for buying out Negroes, either his own or others", and for granting them with freedom". On his behalf, for "teaching them profession, instilling them with moral obligations, which may make them good neighbours, good fathers or

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. xxix.

²⁵ P. Zaremba, *Historia Stanów Zjednoczonych*, Paris 1957, p. 72.

²⁶ Altogether, there were four of them: of 1798, 1806, 1816, and 1817. In the first, the trustee was Thomas Jefferson. In the second – on the power of court decision – Benjamin L. Lear, in the third, after B. L. Lear's death, Colonel George Bomford, and in the fourth – after Bomford's death – Lewis Johnson. See: L. Pastusiak, *400 lat stosunków polsko-amerykańskich*, Vol. 1, Warszawa 2010, p. 174–175.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 154 and 175.

good mothers, husbands or wives – teaching them so that as citizens they be the defenders of their liberty, their country and good public order, and for raising them in everything that may make them happy and make them useful”.²⁸

As Kościuszko decreed, such a portion of his estates was to be earmarked to the buyout of the Blacks that the remaining share would also be sufficient to pay for the “good education” of their children. Every bought out slave “should be married and receive 100 acres of land, tools and animals for farming”. Moreover, before being bought out, everyone “should become familiar with the duty of the Citizen in a free State to defend his Country against the alien and internal enemies who would like to change the Constitution for the worse, which as a result would make them (Negroes) slaves again”.²⁹

Yet the further course of action proves that the subsequent three Testaments were not so explicit in this principal area. In 1802, Kościuszko presented the estate by the Scioto in Ohio to Louise Francoise Felix, a French woman who, by the way, was not too satisfied with the quality of land after seeing it. Although, as court documents prove, Kościuszko’s assets continued to grow through the years to the amount of \$40,000, they were significantly squandered by the administrators (especially Colonel George Bomford). In 1852, the case ended with the verdict of the court “ordering the administrators and guarantors to return the missing money” and rendering Kościuszko’s 1798 testament null and void. No slave was bought out. It also remains unknown what happened to the remaining part of Kościuszko’s assets.³⁰

After the second world war at least three generations of Polish sociologists dealt with the questions of racism in the US. In the first generation, these were Jerzy J. Wiatr and Zygmunt Bauman who studied the question the longest, in the second – Ewa Nowicka-Rusek, and in the third: Andrzej Kapiszewski, Jarosław Rokicki, Tadeusz Paleczny, and others.

Jerzy J. Wiatr first encountered the issues of the *Ludzie kolorowi w strukturze społeczeństwa amerykańskiego* (literally: “Coloured people in the structure of American society”) in the first edition of *An American Dilemma* (of 1944) at the University of Warsaw in the 1951/1952 academic year, at a lecture by Stanisław Ossowski. His first book devoted to the subject was an extended version of his doctoral dissertation (defended in the spring of 1957, with the tutor being Julian Hochfeld). The book was published as *Zagadnienia rasowe w socjologii amerykańskiej*.³¹ The following books were already the result of the author’s personal

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 155. L. Pastusiak quotes Kościuszko’s letters to Jefferson and Jefferson’s letters to Kościuszko from Izabella Rusinowa (selection, introduction), *Tadeusz Kościuszko, Thomas Jefferson. Korespondencja [1798–1817]*, Warszawa 1976.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 156.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 175; E. Gomulka, *Dlaczego nie spełniono ostatniej woli Tadeusza Kościuszki*, “Kultura”, 21st March 1976.

³¹ Literally: “Racial questions in American sociology”, Warszawa 1959.

contacts with the deep South (initially, thanks to a scholarship from the Ford Foundation), the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and Emory University in Atlanta. This is how *Naród i rasa w świadomości społecznej* (literally: "Nation and race in society's perception"), his second book³² – making reference both to the questions raised in the first and to the author's later contacts with the United States and the reflections they entailed, and a series of reportages published in *Radar* magazine – originated. Although Wiatr's third book, *Od Lincolna do Nixona: szkice historyczno-socjologiczne*,³³ tackles the question of race, it nevertheless focuses primarily on the general questions in the development of American history, and uses this perspective to look at the characteristics of American racial dilemmas. Finally, the fourth book, published by Wydawnictwo Adama Marszałka in Toruń in 2005, and entitled *Dylemat amerykański po sześćdziesięciu laty* (literally: "The American dilemma 60 years later") provides a peculiar synthesis of J.J. Wiatr's confrontation with the American reality, and the factors determining its dynamism. For many years, Arnold Rose helped Wiatr understand that reality, among others through the studies he published in *The Negro Morale: Group Identification and Protest*,³⁴ and in his later books. Wiatr first met Rose in 1956, during the 3rd World Congress of Sociology, and since that time could count on long disputes with the academic, whenever he needed them for insight.

J.J. Wiatr's cognitive attitude towards American racial dilemmas is well rendered by the last two sentences from his latest book: "Over a decade ago, one could think that the solution to the racial problem in America depends on a change of law and on overcoming the racial prejudice. Today, it is known that something more is needed: a change in the Americans' attitude to the inherited social inequalities."³⁵ Expressing his judgement with full conviction, Wiatr refers to Jeremy Ryfkin, and following him says that – exposing the unbridled rights of an individual to develop their individual's personality and initiatives, and even the unique style of fulfilment of human fate – American society "to a much lesser degree than European society is ready to recognise that the state is obliged to care for the poor. As a consequence, the fate of the Afro-Americans who managed to escape the inherited poverty remains indifferent to the conservative majority of American society."³⁶

Of Zygmunt Bauman's books, the ones to have a long-lasting influence on the circles dealing with the problems of society in the 1960s were the collection of studies published as *Z zagadnień współczesnej socjologii amerykańskiej*.³⁷ One of the studies concerned Myrdal's understanding of valuation in social sciences.³⁸

³² Published by Wydawnictwo Iskry, Warszawa 1962.

³³ Literally "From Lincoln to Nixon: essays in history and sociology", Warszawa 1976.

³⁴ The University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1949.

³⁵ See: *Dylemat amerykański*..., p. 99.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 99; see also: J. Ryfkin, *The European Dream: How Europe's Vision of the Future is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream*, New York 2004.

³⁷ Literally: "From the questions of contemporary American sociology", Warszawa 1961.

³⁸ See: Chapter VI, *Myrdal: Problem wartościowania w naukach społecznych*..., p. 181–197.

Gunnar Myrdal himself described these questions, together with others, in the first and second appendixes to *An American Dilemma*, already mentioned in this essay. In another study, *Values in Social Theory*,³⁹ Myrdal formulated his views in the following manner: "All social sciences have been stimulated by the need to improve society rather than by the sheer curiosity of its mechanism. Social policy was primary, and social theory – secondary." Here, a reader of *An American Dilemma* is certain to easily find an additional key to the understanding of Myrdal's intentions visible in his analysis of the clash of values entered into the American Creed against the reality of racial relations in American society before the outbreak of the second world war.

A cognitively important example of the attitude of the second generation of Polish sociologists to the issues of interracial relations in the United States, including their dynamism (not only under the influence of the evolution of American society itself, but also of the significant changes taking place in Africa as a result of political decolonisation) is Ewa Nowicka's still read book under the telling title of *Afrykanie z wyboru. Afryka w świadomości Murzynów amerykańskich*.⁴⁰ Its uniqueness lies in the fact that, eager to understand her contemporary young black Americans, the author decided to spend a year at Atlanta University and Howard University with them and their academic teachers, a project which became possible thanks to a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies. Doing this, she was interested not as much in the vestigial elements of the former culture, which survived against all the adversities of fate in these milieus – even though they are simply invisible to a person not versed in the complexity of the process – as in the stimulation of a particular "cultural self-awareness of blacks in the US".⁴¹ It is generated by public opinion – of both America and the world – focused on Africa after the second world war, also under the influence of decolonisation processes. Until recently, being a rightful black US citizen meant as much as becoming liberated through your behaviour from the tradition of slavery and racial segregation, and to prove that you are not worse than the whites. Now, it wasn't enough to be similar to the stereotypic white. You simply needed to have something more: the strengthening pride of your African origin; an African collective awareness, which did not provide an alternative for an analogous American collective awareness, but complemented it. With your head raised high, as "black is beautiful". Ewa Nowicka knew that this could not be learnt just so, from outside, yet one needed to reach for Florian Znaniecki's *humanistic coefficient*.⁴² Nowicka decided to take the step. Although she was able to spend a number of months at Harvard University, she chose Howard University.

³⁹ Published in New York in 1958, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Literally: "Africans by choice. Africa in the awareness of American Negroes", Warszawa 1979.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

⁴² In: F. Znaniecki, *The Method of Sociology*, New York 1934, p. 36–37.

The works of the youngest generation of scientists concentrated on stereotypes, auto-stereotypes, and inter-ethnic relations determined by skin colour and anthropological traits, origin, culture, the development of national identity and nationalism, and also on the fear-derived nature of xenophobia. This was the case among others with Andrzej Kapiszewski [See: idem, *Stereotyp Amerykanów polskiego pochodzenia*, (literally: "The stereotype of Americans of Polish origin"), Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, Wrocław–Gdańsk, 1977, and *Asymilacja i konflikt. Z problematyki stosunków etnicznych w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, (literally: "Assimilation and conflict. On the problems of ethnic relations in the United States of America", Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1984), Tadeusz Paleczny,⁴³ and Jarosław Rokicki].⁴⁴

The process of forming contemporary Afro-American society lasted for nearly four centuries and went through a variety of phases, conditioned by numerous factors. As a rule, their impact was that of entire syndromes, although some of them would become more – and others less – important. The consequences of some of these reasons have been present to this day. Others entered a state of dormancy, much like stereotypes, and only became animated in the cases of violently emerging acute social, political, and economic conflicts. Yet others have withered.

The history of the forefathers of today's Afro-Americans begins in August 1619 when, as noted by John Rolfe, one of the first settlers in Jamestown, Virginia "came a Dutch man of War that sold us 20 negroes".⁴⁵ It is estimated that over 400,000 black slaves had been brought to the original 13 colonies, and later to the US, by the date of the legal prohibition of slavery: 1804 in the North, and in the South since the announcement of Abraham Lincoln's preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on 22nd September 1862 (officially published on 1st January 1863), announcing freedom for all the slaves remaining in the territories of the rebelling states of the South from that day forth.⁴⁶

Towards the end of the 1960s, the US Bureau of the Census estimated that of the 200 million US citizens, whites accounted for 87.5%, and blacks for 11%. The remaining 1.5% of the population were counted as Asians, Indians, and other non-whites. According to the same source, in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century (when the number of US residents exceeded 300 million in October

⁴³ *Ewolucja ideologii i przemiany tożsamości narodowej Polonii w Stanach Zjednoczonych w latach 1870–1970*, Warszawa-Kraków 1989.

⁴⁴ *Kolor, pochodzenie, kultura*, Kraków 2002; *Nadzieje i porażki Akcji Afirmatywnej*, „Kra-kowskie Studia Międzynarodowe” 2004, No. 2(1), p. 111–123.

⁴⁵ *The Story of America*, Pleasantville–New York 1975, p. 108.

⁴⁶ The letter of Abraham Lincoln to abolitionist Horace Greeley, publisher of *New York Tribune*, of 22nd August 1862, proves, however, that the president found the question of unity of all the states more important than the very abolition of slavery. To quote his words, "If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do it." Quoted from: *The Story of America...*, p. 149.

2006) the share of whites in the entire population of US residents had dropped by 12.4 percentage points, and amounted to 75.1%. In turn, a growth tendency was visible (mostly due to the greater birth rate in black US families) in the proportion of African Americans (to 12.3%), Mexicans (to 5.4%), and Native Americans (to approximately 1%). Also increasing were the populations of Americans of Asian origin (the Chinese – up to 0.9% of the entire US population, Filipinos – 0.7%, Indians – 0.6%, and the Japanese – 0.3%). According to the criteria assumed, 3.8% of the population could not be counted into any of the groups listed above.⁴⁷ Yet, after subtracting the group of white Hispanics (8.11%) from the group of white Americans, the proportion of this most numerous category drops down to 65.83% of all US residents, parallel to the increase in the number of Hispanics (White Hispanics and Non-White Hispanics counted jointly at approximately 16%), and Americans of Asian or Pacific Island descent (3.8%).

Moreover, and which is important to understand the changes taking place in the structure of the entire US population, it must be noted that:

- the amalgamation factor is growing: as far as there were approximately 3.8 million Americans born from multiracial couples in 2000, nine years later, the number reached 5.4 million, and that

- the population of some cities and states is quickly changing: while the whites are moving out to the suburbs, their place is being taken, apart from African Americans, by the new immigrants from South America, and Asians. The directions of external migrations also result in an intensification of the exchange of the population of the south-western states. According to the US Census from 2000, whites are already a minority in 48 out of the 100 largest American cities (10 years earlier, this was true for 30 cities). In 2000, whites (or to be more precise non-Hispanic Whites) already accounted for only 43.8% of the residents of the cities, while African Americans (non-Hispanic African American) – for 24.1%, Hispanics – for 22.5%, Asians – 4.6%, and others – 3%. The situation in the country's capital, Washington and in the states of California, New Mexico, Hawaii, and Texas is analogous.

If demographers are right and nothing significant stops or changes the course of the current trends, in around 2050, the share of the white population (counted without White Hispanics) in the total number of US residents will drop below 50%. This is possibly how the history of the US will come full circle, and will the United States then be not only multicultural, but also multi-coloured.

Significant changes are visible in the American system of education. In the mid-19th century, nearly every other young person (including a decided majority of those of non-white origin) aged from 5 to 19 remained outside the system of education. The situation underwent a profound change when, beginning in 1918, the states introduced a mandatory education law, extending the school duty over the youth under 16 years of age. With time, legislation was amended in various ways,

⁴⁷ The largest groups within that section were Native Hawaiians – 140,600 and Alaska Natives – 106,600.

also increasing state expenditure on education (e.g. in the school year 2001/2002 to the level of 5.6% of the GDP), and introducing the “no child left behind” principle, envisaging not only an improvement of the school level, but also support for the families unable to cope with the growing expenditure. The system of schools was to become an efficient means of promoting equal opportunity, or in other words, limiting the power of the impact of structural violence. However, in fact, these actions to a greater extent “express our aspirations [...] than our achievement”.⁴⁸ Much as in many other countries, even public schools are not uniform. Moreover, the correlation between school quality and the affluence of the area, teacher earnings, level of income, and the colour of skin of the parents is legible. To oppose the impact of these inequalities, as well as racial segregation remaining in significant relation to those, “some districts have started a policy of busing, transporting students to achieve racial balance and more equal opportunity in all schools”.⁴⁹ The means leading to the equalisation of opportunities was also to be the “Affirmative Action, that is the protection policy towards the black minority, introduced by President Kennedy in 1961” and later developed.⁵⁰ The first steps, reminiscent of the later actions of the Affirmative Action programme were taken towards veterans of the second world war. The federal government decided to finance their studies, independent of their racial affiliation. However, special aid was launched for African Americans in need of material assistance to be able to enrol into colleges on the power of the GI Bill. Until 1960, financial support of studies from federal funds was only granted to 350,000 black men and women. Yet another programme under the name of the Affirmative Action was launched in 1965 by President Johnson’s administration. On its power “employers were instructed to monitor hiring, promotion, and admissions policies to eliminate discrimination – even if unintended – against minorities”.⁵¹

As statistical analyses prove, only 62% of young Americans continue education, and go on to study immediately after graduation from high schools. Continuing their education least frequently are students coming from families whose annual income does not exceed (data for 2001) \$10,000 (only 25.3%). Continuing education most frequently are children of families with revenues of \$72,000 and over (64.7%). The dependency between the race of the parents and the school career of their children is even more visible. Thus, graduating at high school level are 56% of boys and 58% of girls from a Hispanic background, 79% of those from an African American background, and between 88% to 89% from families that belong to the non-Hispanic White category. Analogous data for graduates of four-years

⁴⁸ J. J. Macionis, *Sociology*, 10th edition, New Jersey 2005, p. 521.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 525.

⁵⁰ J. Rokicki, *Nadzieje i porażki akcji afirmatywnej*, “Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe” 2001, No. 2(1), p. 111; see also: J. Coleman, T. Hoffer, S. Kilgore, *Public and Private Schools. An Analysis of Schools and Beyond*, Washington DC 1981.

⁵¹ J. J. Macionis, *op. cit.*, p. 378; NORC, *General Social Surveys 1972–2002: Cumulative Codebook*, National Opinion Research Center, Chicago 2003.

colleges are: 11% in the group of students of Hispanic origin, 17% of male and 18% of female students in the group of African Americans, and 89% and 88% respectively among the non-Hispanic Whites.⁵²

Expenditure incurred by the parents on the non-school education of children casts a clear light on the educational opportunities of the young. As far as 1972 is concerned "the rich spent five times as much as the poor, in 2007, the ratio was already 9:1".⁵³ Sean Reardon of Stanford University complements this information with the conclusion that "in the 1950s and 1960s, race determined to a great degree the results of children at school, and now it is the level of the parents' income which decides about them".⁵⁴

Is the diversification of income of American families of the early second decade of the 21st century actually growing? Yes it is. The structure of income, and consequently the social structure of the United States undergoes (also under the influence of the most recent crisis) a clear polarisation, with the level of wealth currently becoming one of the most clearly visible indications of racial affiliation. "The Golden decades of the 1940s, 1950s, and the 1960s, when the middle class were becoming richer and everyone had their chance of success is now only history."⁵⁵ American studies of stratification of society reach back to the British tradition of Charles Booth and his empirical analyses of the conditions of life and work in London during the last two decades of the 19th century.⁵⁶ The results of his analyses were ordered into eight classes/layers divided into equal halves by the poverty line. The empirical grounds for being counted into one of eight classes included the nature of the occupation performed and the value of income. Situated above the poverty line were, among others, the lower and higher middle class. Terms including social status, types of statuses (granted, inherited, and achieved), social prestige and social distance, and also standards of equality, superiority, and inferiority were made popular by Robert Park (1864–1944) from the Chicago school. The Gallup Institute used the trichotomic stratification distinguishing lower, middle, and upper classes in the late 1930s, and saw those names being taken over by journalists and colloquial language.

They won their place in American sociology with the studies of William Lloyd Warner (1898–1970) and the six-volume book *The Social Life of a Modern Community* by W.L. Warner, and Paul S. Lunt, published in 1941–1959.⁵⁷ They recognised stratification to be a system of layers composed of individuals with similar social status, hierarchically ordered according to standards of superiority

⁵² US Census Bureau 2003.

⁵³ M. Zawadzki, *Amerykański sen pryska w edukacji*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 11th–12th February 2012, p. 7.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ Ch. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People of London*, 17 vols, London 1892–1902.

⁵⁷ Yankee City Series, Vol. 1, New Haven 1941.

and inferiority established in the collective awareness. Most frequent correlates of these standards are: occupation, value of income and the way of earning it, the assets, style of life and customs, functions played in the social division of work and power, and the housing and the district in which it is situated. The basic type of stratification built on these grounds consists of the following six classes/layers (with both terms treated here synonymously) “upper-upper, lower-upper, upper-middle, lower-middle, upper-lower, and lower-lower”. A feature characteristic of stratification and the state of social conflicts is the following dependency: the more the stratification is developed and combined with the patterns of social mobility (upward or downward along the hierarchical social ladder), the more it cushions social conflicts. It operates the other way round too: the more clearly it becomes polarised, the more visible the discrepancy between wealth and poverty becomes visible and generates various forms of unconventional political behaviour, frequently going beyond the binding standards of law.⁵⁸

American wealth and poverty. It goes without saying that they are still correlated with the impact of former caste⁵⁹ and class-strata divisions, and the racial stereotypes reinforced through them. Moreover, both wealth and poverty are inherited. Thus, they also exert a significant impact both on the opportunities and on the life aspirations of successive generations. As the old metaphor says, the colour of the money is the same for whites and blacks, yet the level of wealth they define is not.

According to various sources, the stratification of American society at the threshold of the 21st century was as follows: 5% of the American population belonged to the upper class. The annual income of members of that class ranged from \$164,000 to \$1,640,000, and came from inherited shares, investments, and real estate, etc. This class includes, among others, the 400 richest American families with property, mostly inherited, of the minimum value of \$550 million each. The upper class is divided into:

- The upper class (metaphorically called “blue bloods”, and also “old money”). They account for 1% of the population. One belongs to it by birth. These families live in the exclusive districts of the old towns and stately homes, including ones remaining in the hands of the family. They receive their education at the best private universities, and run various types of foundations. Women from the milieu become involved in charity and also support the development of symbolic culture.
- The lower upper class. This is the subclass that gathers most of the families counted as “upper class”. They are, to use another name, “the working rich”, and draw their assets, not only from inherited wealth, but also from their own professional

⁵⁸ R. J. Dalton, *Protest Politics. Measuring Protest. Prediction of Protest. Participation and Contemporary Democracies*, [in:] R. J. Dalton, *Citizen Politics in Western Democracies. Public Opinion and Political Parties in the United States, Great Britain, West Germany and France*, Chatham 1988, p. 59–73.

⁵⁹ Sanctioned among others, by the “so-called Jim Crow laws – classic case of institutional discrimination – [which] segregated US society into two racial casts”; see: J. J. Macionis, *Sociology*, 10th edition..., p. 368.

activity. Some of them are sometimes defined as “the new rich”. This is where the essence of the classical formula of the American dream comes true: to gain so much, so as to get to this subclass.

– The middle class. Until recently, between 40% to 45% of Americans were counted into this class. They are the main purchasers in the American goods and services markets, who set the US economy in motion. This class is believed to be more racially and ethnically diverse than the upper class. It falls into the upper, middle and the lower middle.

– The upper middle class. The annual income of this category of families lies in the range of between \$80,000 to \$160,000. The markers of this class include a large convenient house in an expensive district, multiple cars, and insurance. Two thirds of children in these families received solid higher education. Most frequently practised professions: physicians, lawyers, engineers, financiers, and members of supervisory boards in big corporations. They are major influences of local and state politics.

– The average middle class (sometimes also referred to as “the white-collar class”). The annual revenue of the households in this subclass ranges from \$40,000 to \$80,000. Due to their number and income they assume a significant position in the structure of American society. Professionally they are medium-rung managers, teachers in various schools, traders, and real estate agents. Approximately every other person holds a higher education diploma, as a rule obtained from the state education system. Corroboration of the success achieved is a decent house and a regular income, also after the end of professional activity.

– The working class. (Also defined as the lower-middle class of the “blue collars”). It is estimated that this class accounts for approximately a third of the entire American society. Typical occupations: mostly industrial employees and employees of other major businesses. In the past, a large share of this class were defined as “the industrial proletariat”. Household revenue is in the range of \$25,000–\$40,000 per annum. Problems of the class: low wages, frequently periodical or even permanent unemployment, occupational diseases, low insurance, and low retirement pensions. Every other family in this category has its own house, but probably in a poor district. Approximately only a third of the children from these families graduate from high schools (as a rule, at the level of baccalaureate).

– The lower class. The last 20% of the American population with low income and unstable conditions of life. The US federal government counts approximately 25,000,000 of “the working poor” and approximately 33,000,000 of people considered poor, and also living below the poverty line in this class. About 60% of those counted as the lower class do not own a house but rent accommodation in the poorer city districts (which, *nota bene*, are frequently situated in the former centres of these towns). Education: approximately 50% of the people in this last category of the social structure graduated from high school, and 25% – from college.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ L. A. Keister, *Wealth in America: Trends in Wealth Inequality*, Cambridge 2000.

Polarisation of wealth and poverty is visible even more strongly should we divide the 100% of American families into five equal parts. According to data from the US Census Bureau of 2002, this proves that Americans counted into the first 20% by income (i.e. the poorest) have at their disposal 4.2% of the income (salaries and wages, other revenue, income from invested capital, etc.), and 1% of the accumulated wealth (the total of money and other assets minus the significant debt) of the entire US population. The second 20% has at its disposal 9.7% of the income and 1% of the wealth, the third – 15.4% and 5% respectively, the fourth – 22.9% and 11%, and the fifth 20% (the richest) dispose of 47.7% of the income and 82% of the wealth.⁶¹

As the data and forecasts of the US Census Bureau show, the poverty index (covering both relative and absolute poverty), which in 2010 amounted to 15.1% will grow towards the end of 2012 (mostly due to the high level of unemployment holding, and the level of wages correlated to it) to 15.7%, and will be the highest in nearly 50 years. This means that the processes of polarisation of the American social structure continues to deteriorate. Supporting such a conclusion is, among others, the continuously growing disproportion between the income of the people who belong to the higher and lower social strata. Let us use an example. In 2011, one in six working Americans earned below \$11,200 a year, and the annual income of a family of four did not exceed the level of \$22,300. According to the estimates made by trade unions, at the time, a CEO of a stock exchange listed company earned on average 343 times as much as an average employee (in 1980, the multiple was much lower, and the ratio was 1:42). Influenced by the accumulation of the old wealth with the impacts of the process of the polarisation, the 400 richest Americans currently have at their disposal assets equal to what half of all the US citizens have.⁶²

Despite the better access to schools than in the past, and fuller preparation to occupational roles, in particular for the contemporary information society, African Americans still earn significantly less than whites. The median of the annual revenue of an African American family in the first year of the 21st century amounted to \$33,598, which only accounted for 59% of what non-Hispanic white families earned at the same time. This difference was translated not only at the level of the aspirations of both types of families, but also on the place of residence. While approximately 74% of white families have their own houses, the ratio for African American families, as attested by the data of the US Census Bureau of 2002, did not exceed 48%. Data from the same census leaves no room for doubt that upward mobility depends to a great degree not only on the opportunities that – in the sense of positive law – are equal for all, but also on the volume of material assets providing a *conditio sine qua non* for competing in the race for the accumulation of an appropriate human and social capital. This is why, although a significant number

⁶¹ Ch. Russell, M. Mogelonsky, *Riding High on the Market*, “American Demographics”, Vol. 22, No. 4, p. 44–54.

⁶² I quote this data from: A. Popiołek, I. Sudak, *Amerykanie najbiedniejsi od 1965 r.*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 24th July 2012, p. 21.

of African Americans found themselves among the wealthy in the 1980s and the 1990s, nevertheless, the average income of African American families only grew to a minimum degree during those two decades.

What should not be a reason to wonder, in the light of the information already quoted, is that upward mobility among black women was significantly lower than among black men. In the labour market, if they found gainful employment at all, they played poorly paid roles of cleaners, child minders, receptionists, secretaries, and waitresses. They earned little (in 2001, 76% of what a male was paid for the same working time), were discriminated, and as a rule had no view to promotion. When nearly every other marriage ends in divorce, they lose the basic sustenance together with healthcare and other insurance. Moreover, the number of their dependants includes unemployed children, often already of age. What they find absolutely true is the conclusion that when the earning opportunities are lost, there is always poverty which remains.

Some African American women actively supported feminism. The attention among them also focused on slogans typical of white feminists, for example, "working to increase equality, expanding human choice, eliminating gender stratification, ending sexual violence, promoting sexual freedom".⁶³ A more radical formula of feminism, both white and black, was contained in a report by the Presidential Task Force on Women's Rights, dating back to as early as 1970. It contained eight claims considered basic, seven less emphasised, and one controversial. The first category encompassed the claims of

[...] equal pay for equal work, equal opportunity for on-the-job training and promotion, women's right to obtain credit, a strong legal voice, ratification and implementation of the Equal Rights Amendment by states that have not done so, maternity leave, child care centres publicly founded, recognition of the economic importance of house work and child care, and the right to Social Security benefits and disability insurance.

The second, on the other hand, included

[...] revisions of children's books to portray women and girls in more varied roles than those of wife and mother, a new image in the media, better acknowledgement in the history books of the contribution women have made in many fields, freedom in schools, elimination of quotas that limit the number of women accepted into colleges and graduate schools, and to guidance consulting which advises high school girls to stick to such fields as teaching and nursing, a change in the attitude that housework should rest mainly on women's shoulders.

Considered the most controversial of the 16 claims put forth by the report was the right of women to "unrestricted abortion and freedom from unwanted children".⁶⁴ Speaking in general categories, some of the racist convictions and practices have a background similar to institutional prejudice and discrimination. In

⁶³ J. J. Macionis, *Sociology*., p. 345.

⁶⁴ Quoted from: *The Story of America*, New York 1975, p. 438.

most cases they begin as an externalised expression of ethnocentrism and the lack of knowledge it hides, as well as helplessness towards the reality, as well as as the justification of the economic exploitation. Later they shift into active behaviours, forcing minorities into lower positions in the system of social stratification. This position and its objectively visible symptoms (poorer place of residence, lower level of education, profession and occupational activity which brings lower income, lifestyle and level that do not enjoy social recognition, etc.) become in turn proof justifying the ethnocentric and racist beliefs. This is how the vicious circle emerges. The convictions and actions that were originally based on erroneous assumptions generate the seemingly rational explanation of their essence as a consequence.⁶⁵

An attempt at a conclusion

The 70 years that have passed since submitting the first edition of *An American Dilemma* to print and the half a century which has passed since the second edition prompt a conclusion that the controversy between the leading principles expressed in the Declaration of Independence,⁶⁶ and the situation of the black residents stifling American society for nearly two centuries, named by Gunnar Myrdal in the title, is already gone.

It is certainly so in light of the constitutional law and the later legislation of the Congress. In the case of the Constitution, these are, in particular, the 13th Amendment of 1865, abolishing slavery (Amendment 13, sections 1. "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any subject to their jurisdiction." and 2: "Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation," the 14th Amendment of 1868, which decides about citizenship (Amendment 14, Section 1. "All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws," and the 15th Amendment from 1870 stating that the "right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude" (Section 1). Subsequent Civil Rights Acts were passed in 1957, 1960, 1964, 1965 and 1968, and:

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 363; see also: *Institutional Racism in America*, ed. L. L. Knowles, K. Prewitt, Englewood Cliffs 1969.

⁶⁶ "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness".

- set up a Civil Rights Commission in the Executive Branch to gather information on the deprivation of citizens' voting rights based on color, race, religion or national origin (1957),
- established federal inspection of local voter registration polls and introduced penalties for anyone who obstructed attempts to register to vote (1960),
- guaranteed all citizens equal provisions guaranteeing equal access to public places and facilities, equal employment rights (irrespective of race), and also the right to withhold federal assistance to schools practising or tolerating any forms of discrimination (1964),
- outlawed the practice of requiring voters to pass literacy tests in order to register to vote, and established extensive federal oversight of administration of elections in cases of the proof or probability of refusing voting rights to any category of citizens (1965),
- instituted severe penalties for interfering with the freedom of voting and education, and prohibited discrimination concerning the sale, rental, and financing of housing (1968).

Not insignificant for the new climate were the decisions (1965) expanding the Social Security Act with the Health Insurance Act for the Aged (those who have reached 65; known in short as Medicare) and awarding special federal funds (on the power of another amendment known as Medicaid) designed for state governments for the support of the poor, independent of their age (if the income of these people or families did not exceed the amount set by law). Entitled to that form of benefit were also families with large numbers of children, the blind, and people with a high degree of disability. Even more initiatives were launched in the 1960s as part of the federal programme known under the name of the Great Society, administered by the Office of Economic Opportunity.

Influenced by that process, the procedures of defining and executing Civil Rights found themselves under the control of not only appropriate institutions, but also public opinion and NGOs (non-governmental organisations), whose number included societies and associations founded and managed by African Americans. A very special role among them was played by Marcus Garvey, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, Walter White, Roy Wilkins, Rosa Parks, A. Philip Randolph, Whitney M. Young Jr., César Chávez, Jesse Jackson, and Dr Martin Luther King Jr., initially, some of them (especially Garvey) sought the solution to the problem by "uniting all the Negro peoples of the Word into one great body to establish a country and government absolutely their own," or by "black separatism" (Du Bois). Others, thinking along the lines of Malcolm X, saw their opportunity in the movements of the Black Muslim, and – as Eldridge Cleaver – Black Panther. Yet others sought for non-violent forms of action, as a student leader Stokely Carmichael did.

With the passing of years, it was, however, the tendency which aimed at the full integration of the black community with American society that won over. This was already a new quality expressed not in the opposition towards the US, but in

the activity furthering a lasting change of the American reality, as well as the running of black citizens in local, state, and US Congress elections.

The media also found themselves under the pressure of the new tendencies. It was now demanded, frequently inconclusively, that they reject the language of the former racism – with a characteristic of hatred, and replace the traditional stereotypes with attempts to understand the situation of the minorities. A new compound coinage found its way to the language of public debates and journalists' expressions: political correctness. The change made some radical conservative circles conclude that the media and also film were taken over by the liberal cultural elite, promoting minorities together with their problems and culture, and also the advocates of feminism and gay rights. The Conservative voice also became audible, especially with the Fox Network gaining on popularity.

At the highest level of power, the evolution of social movements was clearly manifested during the victorious electoral campaign of John F. Kennedy, the first Catholic to become a US president. At that time, at the beginning of the 1960s, many Americans found it a cultural shock, not unlike the one that accompanied the election of Barack Obama in the autumn of 2008. Significant signals of a change in the attitude of white Americans towards racial questions have also been the careers of Colin Luther Powell⁶⁷ and Condoleezza Rice.⁶⁸

The events from the period known as the Redemption which began after the Compromise of 1877, together with the racist practices related to the Jim Crow laws, already belong to the infamous past. Yet, at the time when Myrdal's team conducted research and the first edition of his book was being prepared, i.e. in 1937–1941, sitting in the US Congress (of the 75th and 76th term) was only one black American.⁶⁹ When the second, anniversary edition of *An American Dilemma* was published in 1962, there were four African Americans in the House of Representatives. The situation began to change radically after 1969, with 11 Africa Americans in Congress (10 in the House of Representatives and one in the Senate), and in 1983 there were 21 black people elected to the House of Representatives.

⁶⁷ Born in New York's Harlem in 1936 to a family of Jamaican immigrants and a graduate of New York City public schools, C.L. Powell was a four-star general of the American army, Ronald Reagan's National Security Advisor in 1987–1989, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1989–1993, and Secretary of State in the George W. Bush administration, the first black secretary in the 65 years since the establishment of the post.

⁶⁸ C. Rice, born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1954, is a daughter of a Presbyterian minister and a music teacher; Professor of political sciences, first black woman to hold the post of Stanford University Provost in 2001, author of books on the Soviet Union and systemic transformations in post-1989 Europe, in 2001–2005 National Security Advisor in the Cabinet of George W. Bush, and the 66th United States Secretary of State (from 2005 to 2009).

⁶⁹ Although in 1869–1871, there were already three congressmen of black origin: two in the House of Representatives, and one in the Senate, and in 1875–1877, there were as many as eight. Nevertheless, from 1901 to 1929 (that is, from the 57th to the 70th term) no black was elected to the House of Representatives or to the Senate.

From 1993 to 2009, their number ranged from 40 to 43.⁷⁰ Moreover, the first black American women found their way to the ranks of senators and MPs.

Under the influence of the successive waves of migration from South to North, to the Midwest states, and to cities including New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and to the West Coast, constituencies dominated by a black electorate and their opinion forming organisations formed. The collective memory of the experience from the days of the great depression, when Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programmes, also including funds earmarked for assistance to the unemployed, made the black communities ever more aware of their interests and possibility of defending them by participating in voting. These were no longer masses of individuals incapable of resistance, but material segments of civic society. The political force that now expressed them most fully was the Democratic Party.

Not without influence on the course of the changes were the processes taking place in the international community. The status of the white race, formerly a hegemon of the civilisational processes, was significantly traumatised in the early 21st century in the clash against the quickly developing economies of China, Brazil, Mexico and India. For the first time, the *white* United States became a multi-billion debtor of the *yellow* China.

It would, however, be a mistake to believe that the American dilemma contained in the collision of American Creed ideology with the material reality of everyday American life, dominated for centuries by various forms of racism, was already finally solved. The intellectual bankruptcy of racism rhetoric only resulted in an eruption of new questions. Why – if we are all free, and the races, albeit different, are equal by nature, and this equality is moreover safeguarded by law – are the material opportunities of whites and blacks so different? Why, although theoretically everyone has the same opportunities, do they not achieve the same results? To what extent is this status quo influenced by the heritage of the past, while the wealth of some grew at the cost of the unpaid (as it was, slave!) or poorly remunerated work of others? Is it sufficient to expose the principles of individualism (*every man is the architect of his own fortune*) in this case, or is it just the opposite, besides the effort and the ethos of the labour of individuals, is there also a wise policy of the state taking into account the good of everyone necessary?

The dilemma analysed by Gunnar Myrdal in the contemporary United States shifts from the realm of the race to the realm of social policy. In its modern wording it reads as follows: how to combine into a coherent whole the free market with the principles of the welfare state? In its extreme version, the free market only brings riches to some at the cost of others. If the others do not concede to the role of the pariah and at the same time, the costs of their own success cannot be transferred to the shoulders of the communities and states that are still not sufficiently strong

⁷⁰ Still dominant among them were Members of the House of Representatives. In 1993–1999 and in 2005–2009 only one US senator was of Afro-American origin, and there were none in 1999–2005.

enough to be able to defend them efficiently, major social shocks are inevitable. It is true that human values originate from our choices. And it is us, society, who is the sovereign. To equalise the opportunities, state interventionism is necessary. What, however, must be done simultaneously so that the cost of the welfare state is not too great and does not block the market? A question which becomes more important as populist ideologies feed on the lack of rational correlation between the free market and the welfare state. Ideologies that today are not only of leftist origin as they used to be, but also come from the extreme right.

The original version of Myrdal's dilemma meant the removal of racial prejudices and discrimination in the name of humanist, enlightenment values contained in the American Creed. This was successfully achieved. Open racism lost to the American Creed, especially in light of the binding law. However, today's dilemma cannot be solved by the removal of one of its two components: be it wealth or poverty. Both are acutely visible and still bear significant consequences.

Of the members of congress elected in 2009, 44% are millionaires. At the same time, the unemployment rate, the main reason for unemployment amounted to slightly over 9% in the US, and an average American earned approximately \$39,000 per annum on average. The two candidates running for US presidency in the coming election differ significantly, not only in the colour of their skin and programme but also in the level of wealth. The first of them, the Republican Mitt Romney, revealed in his last tax statement an income of \$43 million. He paid 14% tax from that sum, although at the time the rate for Americans who earned the highest income was 35%. The other, Democrat Barack Obama, in an analogous statement proved an income of \$1.8 million. He paid 26% tax, and additionally donated 13% of his income to charity. How does public opinion perceive differences that go so far. The Occupy Wall Street movement, prominent in 2011, subscribes to the opinion that 1% of Americans (the wealthiest) exploit the rest. According to statistics from recent years, while the revenue of the financial elites grows exponentially, in the case of the rest of Americans it has nearly stalled, if not impoverished. As a result, children from many non-affluent European families have a greater opportunity to multiply their human capital than an analogous category of children in American families.

Contemporary developed societies must find other solutions than those proposed so far by extremist ideologies and movements. It is possible, as the knowledge and will, and the social policy built on their foundation are capable of generating mobility going beyond the limits set by the vicious circle.⁷¹ Thus, the key to solving the dilemma in question is most probably contained in a rational combination – subordinated to the idea of public right, of an effective free market with wise state social policy. Is it, nonetheless, possible to combine individualism with collective action? Zbigniew Brzeziński believes it is. The experience of Roosevelt's New Deal is one of the proofs. This is how Brzeziński refers to it.

⁷¹ G. Myrdal, *The American Dilemma*..., p. 75, footnote b.

The genius of the New Deal liberal solution was to fuse the individualism intrinsic in American historical experience – an individualism that has inherently reinforced a conservative reluctance toward collective social action – with a sense of social responsibility as defined through the political process.⁷²

The revolution of the labour market informs convincingly about the directions of change. The employment structure in the United States at the turn of the 21st century did in no way resemble the patterns known from the past. At the time, only 3% of all occupationally active Americans worked in agriculture, with 24% being employed in industry, and no fewer than 73% in services. To be able to exist, such an economy – the Third Wave economy, the super-symbolic economy – must be based not on the physical power and simple manual skills inherited from generation to generation, but on knowledge, and even then it requires continuous provision of new solutions.⁷³ Under these conditions, an opportunity to stand up to the contemporary in an efficient manner is granted only to those communities that treat everyone's open access to the school system – independent of the position in the social structure, wealth of the parents, race, gender, or religion – in the same way as they do equality, freedom, life, and the pursuit of happiness. Under the influence of the processes that set this civilisation in motion, the semantic field of illiteracy is also changing. And so do the grounds for authority. Everyone who is now incapable of, or does not want to participate in lifelong learning will become an illiterate of the 21st century, much like those who could not read and write were counted into this group in the 20th century. Moreover, today, knowledge is “the most universal and fundamental source of power [...], as it makes it possible to turn round the challenges that could require the use of force or wealth. It can frequently be used to convince others that they act in the desired manner, although it does not lie in their interest. Knowledge gives power of the highest quality.”⁷⁴ However, in 2001–2003, the American economy liquidated approximately 3,000,000 jobs.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, unemployment intensified not only under the influence of the rapid civilisational evolution, but also under the impact of the financial crisis and its consequences both for those who lost work and for their dependants. Yet unemployment is not only a lack of means. It is also a growing sense of wrong, and an internal imperative to protest, which forms the substrate not for a rational reflection, but for demagoguery and populism that offer no opportunity to amend the actual reality. A sharp conflict concerning who is guilty of the crisis and who is going to pay for it is intensifying. Immanuel Wallerstein claims, and not without justification, that two questions be-

⁷² *Between Two Ages. America's Role in the Technetronic Era*, New York 1970, p. 235.

⁷³ *Gospodarka oparta na wiedzy. Wyzwania dla Polski XXI wieku*, ed. A. Kukliński, Warszawa 2001.

⁷⁴ A. Toffler, *Zmiana władzy. Wiedza, bogactwo i przemoc u progu XXI stulecia*, Poznań 2003, p. 645.

⁷⁵ L. Uchitell, *Defying Forecast. Job Losses Mount for a 22nd Month*, “New York Times”, 6th September 2003.

come especially controversial today. “The first question are taxes: who pays them and to what amounts; and the other – how much will states invest in education, health, and lifelong guarantee of income.”⁷⁶ How long is that phase of the crisis going to last? Wallerstein believes it may continue for 20, 30, and possibly even for 40 years. That period will feature “chaos and violent shocks in international relations and economy. [...] Details are absolutely unknown [...] the USA held an uncontested hegemony and was the center of the world system from 1945 to the end of the 1960s. Never before or later did it have such an opportunity to control the world economy.” The destabilisation lasting for two or three decades, “is linked to the demise of the power of the previous hegemon”.

Which country or group of countries will replace the United States in this role? Is it possible, at least in general terms, to draw some sensible paths leading beyond the circle of crisis-genic events and processes? Competing here are three visions: 1) “of the Democratic, relatively egalitarian world that has never yet been”, 2) a conservative current that serves “‘let us turn the screw to the maximum’, load them with burdens, and press them down to the ground with the police and the army”, and 3) the liberal current claiming that the method based on force will be insufficient, for which reason “we must buy out the poor and enrol into the system”, and to make “capitalism more egalitarian”.⁷⁷

Which road will the United States take? Following the considerations I present in this essay, I believe it will be the third, if Americans elected Barack Obama the President of the United States for a second term.

The American Dilemma w siedemdziesiąt lat później

Autor ponawia pytania, jakie przed czytelnikami siedemdziesiąt lat temu postawił Gunnar Myrdal, oddając do ich rąk książkę *An American Dilemma. The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York and Evanston 1944). Książka ta osiągnęła w dziejach współczesnych nauk społecznych status niezwykły. Myrdal szuka bowiem odpowiedzi na pytanie, dlaczego społeczeństwo i państwo tworzone od początku na oświeceniowych tradycjach i demokratycznych zasadach odmawia, wbrew konstytucji, istotnej części swych mieszkańców podstawowych praw i wolności. Kolejne istotne pytania brzmią: dlaczego tak wielu tak łatwo jest mówić o fundamentalnych wartościach, nazywanych nie bez racji *the American Creed* i jednocześnie znaczącą część mieszkańców tej samej ziemi uważać za z natury gorszą od siebie, a więc niezasługującą na obywatelstwo i prawa z nim związane. Jak ludzie łączą te przeciwstawne punkty widzenia w pozornie spójną całość? Jak doszło do takiego stanu rzeczy i czy można – a jeśli tak, to poprzez jakie działania – doprowadzić do trwałego unicestwienia tego *the vicious circle*, zmuszającego do wyboru pomiędzy dwoma wzajemnie wykluczającymi się możliwościami?

⁷⁶ From the Polish translation.

⁷⁷ A. Leszczyński, *Koniec świata Ameryki. Rozmowa z prof. Immanuelem Wallersteinem*, “Gazeta Wyborcza”, 28th-29th July 2012, p. 20.

Peter Augustine Lawler

**HERETICAL COMPROMISES:
AMERICA'S ACCIDENTAL THOMISM**

I want to explain why Americans, from the time of the Founding onward, have built better than they knew. Their political choices have often been better than their self-understandings – than their theories and theologies. My case for American moderation is meant to chasten the hope of libertarians that every feature of our lives will be reconstructed according to the principle of maximum feasible autonomy or unfettered personal choice. It's also meant to calm the fear of many conservatives that American liberalism is too purely modern or too purely individualistic to be sustainable over the long term. What sometimes seems to be a fairly intractable American "culture war" has typically been mitigated by compromises – compromises between quite different and, from an orthodox Christian view (say, the account of the Trinitarian personal *logos* of our current philosopher-pope), heretical views of who we are and what we're supposed to do.

Some conservatives say that what distinguishes America is that ours is the most modern and untraditional or unhinged country. Let me give some evidence from that point of view, which certainly ought to be taken seriously.

Certainly there never was a pre-modern America. Americans have no experience of the medieval village that gets Mark Henrie all nostalgic. Americans have no experience of the Aristotelian agrarian polis that Alasdair MacIntyre says is indispensable for human flourishing. Although the agrarian localist Wendell Berry sometimes writes about the unsettling of America, he's also written that America – the country or project – was born unsettled. As Tocqueville explains, America

was founded by those sophisticated, egalitarian idealists, the Puritans, and by those adventurers who ended up in Virginia in pursuit of wealth without doing real work.

What about American religion? Well, most of it has been Christian – that is various forms of Christian heresy. Consider the ridiculous and tyrannical Puritans who wanted to turn every sin into a crime, the hyper-emo and semi-illiterate evangelicals, the Mormons, the incomprehensible tongue-speaking Pentecostals and the holiness snake-handlers. The New Age, Wiccan stuff that's popped up among our sophisticates is hardly any better and is not even in any way Christian. Meanwhile, our mainstream Protestants have made – from the beginning – too many compromises with modern individualism to have served effectively as counterweights to both the extremes of self-expressive pantheism and unhinged enthusiasm that's characterized our beliefs. What about the more orthodox and traditional religion of our immigrants – such as the Catholics and Jews? Lots of conservatives complain that America has changed Catholicism a lot more than Catholicism has changed America. And the Orthodox Jews say the same thing about most American Jews.

Ross Douthat recently published a book called *Bad Religion*. His claim is that American religion has become bad – that is, self-indulgently heretical – lately. Critic after critic has responded: don't you realize American religion has always been heretical and has often been flaky? The self-helpy theology of that silly movie *Eat Pray Love* that Douthat spends so much time deconstructing seems plenty sensible compared to what a lot of those Transcendentalists were thinking and doing.

As Alexis de Tocqueville wrote over 180 years ago, the Americans – having rejected the intellectual and emotional resources of tradition and deference to personal authority – find it hard to think and act reasonably. The Americans are characterized less by reason than by will, and so they are full of exaggerations: at one moment vainly overestimating the significance of who they are and what they do, and in another paralyzed by the perception of the puny insignificance of any particular being.

The Americans, in one mode, really are the imperialist transhumanists those who write for *The American Conservative* hate – attempting to impose themselves and their liberal ideology not only on everyone on this planet but, as we see on *Star Trek*, every being in the cosmos. And they're always in the process of changing nature itself into nothing but a resource to serve their liberated personal convenience. In another mode, the Americans are ready to listen to their scientists who say they're nothing but insignificant specks or conscious rocks or really smart and ultrasocial forms of species fodder.

To show how modern us Americans are, Alexis de Tocqueville called us Cartesianes who've never read a word of Descartes. That means the modern philosophical method – radical doubt of everything but ME – is also the democratic method: the rejection of every claim of personal authority as an undemocratic attempt to rule me. That means American democrats use words like privilege with a frown and words like deconstruct with a smile. They deconstruct the privileged position of pa-

rents, priests, philosophers, preachers, poets and so forth in our society. No personal authority deserves to be privileged over thinking for myself. Thinking otherwise turns me into a sucker.

So the Americans, having rejected all personal authority, lack what it takes to think or act effectively. They end up deferring to impersonal authority of various kinds – such as fashionable opinion, technology, expert self-help theories that begin with “studies show,” and “history.”

That conclusion allows some conservatives to say that America is a consumerist techno-wasteland full of people who lack the resources to govern themselves. We can find that conclusion animating the thought of many followers of MacIntyre, as well as the pessimism of agrarians such as Wendell Berry.

But you know that conclusion is not true. Tocqueville knew that too. He says Americans exempted their religion from their habitual dogmatic doubt, and it's religion that gave them dogmatic confidence to think and act confidently and freely. Even when we admit that American religion is a variety of heresies, we have to remember heresies aren't all bad. Why are heresies not all bad? They highlight something that's been neglected by the tradition. They usually have a Christian *point*. When I watch a low-church movie starring Robert Duvall – *Tender Mercies* or *The Apostle* – I know I'm seeing the portrayal of Christian truth, if far from the whole truth. The murderer on-the-run preacher in *The Apostle* who founds a church where class and status make no difference, a congregation of displaced misfits who are poor and poorer, dumb and dumber, black and white, male and female, and fatter and fatter still is telling people who need to hear (because they can't read) what they most need to know to turn their lives around: they can be saved, despite it all, if they believe in Jesus and “Holy Ghost power.” There's something exceptional about a country that carries the truth about amazing grace in its popular culture and its country music (great point and directly counter to what Bloom argues in *Closing re: pop culture*).

Conservatives often exaggerate what a techno-wasteland America is by denying that evangelicals and Pentecostals are really Christian. Sure, no other country is plagued so much by warehouse churches, touchy-feely platitudes posing as theology, and the soul-challenged music that's called Christian contemporary, praise music, and so forth. But none of those criticisms get to the question of whether the evangelicals really believe or whether they really practice the virtues – beginning with charity – which flow from love of the personal God. Where would America be without the exceptional fact of their belief? Certainly there has to be room for that free, egalitarian, and virtuous belief – and the whole Christ-haunted South – in an account of who we are.

Not only are heresies not all bad, American heresies – American dogmas – have had the wonderful tendency to kind of balance each other out. Certainly we wouldn't get much done if we were all fervent Pentecostals, but we're not.

America's first and most wonderful and effective theological balancing act is our Declaration of Independence. It gets its greatness by being a legislative compromise between the Deistic and more Calvinist (or residually Puritan) members of Congress. Congress amended Jefferson's Deistic/Lockean draft, "mangling" it, in Jefferson's own opinion, but actually improving it. The compromise is between the unrelational, past-tense God of nature of the modern philosophers – particularly John Locke – and the personal, judgmental, providential Creator of the Puritans. By reconciling the God of nature with the God of the Bible, our Declaration can be called a kind of accidental Thomism – an accidental affirmation of the personal natural law of St. Thomas Aquinas. That result was intended by neither the Calvinist nor Lockean/Deistic parties to the compromise. The Americans, through legislative compromise and the other modes of statesmanship and democratic deliberation built, as John Courtney Murray claims, better than they knew. (In a way this compromise best represents XN doctrine, marrying its heavy emphasis on the transpolitical to the political, completing on modern terms the project of Augustine's City of God. The project, that is, of finding a political domicile for the individual quest for salvation, a thoroughly non-political end.)

Had our Declaration been the exclusive product of the original Puritans, it would have been theocratic – that is, not orthodox Christianity. The Puritans, Alexis de Tocqueville tells us, were heretics in the sense that they were about basing the law of their political community on the law found in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. There's not a word in the New Testament that would justify their effort to criminalize every sin. The heretical Puritans were authentically Christian, though, in their view that every person has a soul that needs to be informed about its origin and destiny with the word of God, and in their political view that under God all sinful persons made in God's image are equal.

The American Founding's balance was achieved through the Deistic or individualistic criticism of the Puritans' idealistic, intrusive, highly personal idea of Christian citizenship, and the Puritanical criticism of the Deistic detachment of one person from another – and, of course, from the personal, relational, judgmentally and providentially intrusive God. The Puritans sometimes fanatically egalitarian idealism balances the Lockean's selfish indifference to anyone's being beyond one's own. The Puritans, from our political view, were overly relational and displayed too much political concern for people's souls. The Deists aimed, in the name of personal freedom, to empty political and even social life of much of its properly relational or participatory content.

Our Declaration suggests that we are free and relational beings by nature – natural persons, without referring at all, of course, to Biblical revelation. Our natural longings as free persons point toward a certain kind of Creator, and we know who we are in that respect even if we don't have particular knowledge of or faith in who that God is. (Part of what accounts for the different views of democracy between Plato and the XN Americans has to do with a different understanding of these

natural longings, or different psycho-phenomenological interpretations of human transcendence. The XN accepts the experience as an anthropological datum but makes the yearning for eternity accessible to all, and therefore moral in character. XN practice can counterbalance Cartesian theory, I think, because it comprehends transcendence in moral and not just theoretical terms.)

The Declaration really is at the core of American identity, and the truth it teaches is universal. Everyone knows Mr. Jefferson thought every human being has natural rights, including, of course, women and blacks. And Tocqueville said that not only the egalitarian political teaching of the Puritans was free from prejudice. The egalitarian and participatory principles of their political founding, they thought, could be applied everywhere. The Puritans believed that any just political order should be informed by the truth that every human being is a citizen of the City of God. (Sometimes occurs to me to ask: what was it about pre-Declaration Americans that made the compromise possible? In other words, that contingent agreement is already capturing something inherent in the American mind, fully articulating it, making Jefferson's faux humble comments about his drafting capturing a zeitgeist truer than he could understand at the time.)

The truth the Declaration teaches is also insistently particular. It's really personal. The bottom line is the unique and irreplaceable significance of every human person. What makes that bottom line so insistent and particular is the combination of Puritanical or Calvinist and Lockean concerns. (So in a way Americans are the most doctrinal but the least ideological people ever.)

The thing that might have amazed Tocqueville the most about our country is the determination that every person be educated to exercise their freedom. No person, the Puritans and Jefferson agree, exists by nature to be dominated by another, and slavery is contrary to the truth about who each of us is. That truth shouldn't be hidden from anyone, because nobody should be suckered by lies – either, the Puritans emphasize, the lies of Satanic deceivers who distort what the Bible says in the service of their own pride, or, the Lockeans emphasize, aristocrats who vainly try to persuade us that the point of our lives is to be of service to them.

From our Lockean Deists, we get the truth that every human being has interests. Nobody is above and nobody is below being a being with interests. We're all free beings who work, we're free to work, and stuck with working for ourselves. The result Tocqueville observed, in America, is universal literacy and universal technical education. But that Lockean view, by itself, is at the expense of higher education, the cultivation of the soul, which is dismissed as a waste of valuable time. That's why when our libertarians criticize our colleges today, it's for charging so much money for all kinds of nonsense – such as philosophy and theology – that just won't help you get a job. (Right, and the more sophisticated ones just want those theories that underwrite hyper-practical libertarianism to be taught.)

It's from the Puritans that we get the idea that education can be for the sake of more than mere work or productivity. Every person has a soul, and so everyone

should be able to read what the Bible says about one's personal destiny and charitable, moral responsibilities for oneself. The Puritans, the neo-Puritanical novelist Marilynne Robinson explains, are a key source of our devotion to liberal education, to education for civilization.

The Jeffersonians, we might say, excel in the pursuit of the means or conditions of freedom, but it's the Puritans who supplied us with our original insight about the personal end or point of our freedom. Most of our best colleges have had a religious inspiration, and they suffer in the most important respects when they lose confidence in what they can do for souls. Robinson calls attention to the neo-Puritanical Oberlin in the 1830s. That college offered everyone – including blacks and women – a liberal education and insisted that everyone on campus, including professors, both do manual labor and have time for leisurely study. (To see how Oberlin has changed, watch the brilliant HBO series *Girls*, which is about a graduate of that school who's absolutely clueless about who she is as a person made to love, work, and know. So she has no idea what's she supposed to do, and college didn't help her out at all.)

For most Americans, the true understanding of our religious liberty has typically depended on public education being completed by Sunday schools. We know technical education and civic education aren't enough, but we forget why without Sunday school.

Sophisticated Americans, from our Founders until those around today, have always resisted the Puritanical correction to their enlightened individualism. One reason that this correction is indispensable is that the devotion to individual rights, by itself doesn't justify the personal sacrifice required to achieve egalitarian political reform. It was the neo-Puritanical abolitionists who produced the relentless egalitarian agitation that made the Civil War inevitable. The Civil Rights movement wouldn't have succeeded without the social reformism based on a kind of residually Puritanical or Biblical conception of citizenship, one also that didn't shrink from the sacrifice of one's own blood for justice.

Then there's the American Puritanical personal morality so criticized by the rest of the highly civilized world. When some European says to you: "The trouble with Americans such as you is that you're too Puritanical," your response should be: "I'm Puritanical and proud of it. You should be too. Look at you!" The typical European criticism of Americans is actually that they're both Puritanical repressive moralists and Lockean workaholic capitalists. The proper response: there's nothing wrong with that – it's civilized to be moral and both necessary and fulfilling to be productive. We're the people who know how to balance love and work. About the Old World and its seemingly decayed-beyond-repair Christianity, Americans can say there's a both a shortage of work and a shortage of love. Thanks to our observant Christians, we can add, the birth dearth – the demographic crisis – that threatens the very future of free government and "Western culture" in Europe is a very manageable problem in ours.

Tocqueville notices, of course, the virtues of chastity and marital fidelity being on display in America like they had never been before. And even today, we can say that Americans, because of their Christianity, take those virtues more seriously than people in comparable countries. To be Puritanical, remember, is to be concerned with the souls of your fellow citizens and fellow human beings. It's easy to overdo that concern, as we Americans did with the piece of Puritanical fanaticism called Prohibition. But don't forget that the opposite of excessively intrusive concern is the yawn of indifference, which could hardly be a virtue. A Puritanical residue Tocqueville praises in America was Sunday closing laws, which gave everyone a leisurely respite from the busyness of commerce to focus through sermons and reading on one's own singular immortal destiny, to focus on one's own soul and its relational needs and duties.

I've probably overdone my praise of the Puritans, and so to restore the balance that is our Declaration I'll go on to explain the many ways in which our country has benefited from the Deism of John Locke. I can't do that without saying a bit more about what Deism is.

Lockean Deists speak of God, but in the past-tense. He's on a permanent vacation. He's not actively engaged in our lives. God made us free or somewhat unnatural persons, who have to institute government to free ourselves from our fearful discontent with our natural existence. The teaching of the source of our freedom is that you're on your own to escape from nature to secure our inalienable rights. We must provide for ourselves because neither God – the author of each of our beings – nor nature cares about any of us in particular.

Locke and Jefferson view us all as free persons, and so as simply a part of nature. The mystery of the personal identity each of us experiences makes room in Locke for belief in a real Creator, and it certainly is a personal refutation of those self-forgetting thinkers who claim that all is necessity. Locke's "Nature's God" is not the God of Aristotle, who is not a personal but a principle or a kind of giant magnet.

The mystery of Christianity, rejected by most philosophers and scientists, is personal, relational monotheism. The most aggressive part of Locke's heresy is the rejection of that mystery – the mystery of the Trinity. For Locke, God is personal, but not relational, just as we are personal, but not deep down relational. God, like each of us, is finally on his own.

Locke's personal, Christian heresy is actually more mysterious than the doctrine of the Trinity. How can God be both personal and not relational and loving? How can each of us be personal but not relational and loving? Can such a lonely and isolated personal identity really be possible? We can say for certain that Locke separates "personal" from "relational" in order to make it clear enough that personal identity and security is the bottom line, the point of all being. Locke, remember, is most justly famous for mocking out of existence the hyper-relational traditional arguments for tyranny, such as Filmer's divine right of kings, which displayed us all as one big family under the personal paternalistic monarch ruling in God's image.

The detaching of “personal” from “relational” to maximize personal liberty also largely explains Locke’s blistering caricature of familial and parental authority. He, for example, advocates freedom, as individuals, from all dependence on men and, if you read carefully, all biological imperatives specific to their sex.

The shared personal focus explains why American Lockeans and more orthodox Christians have allied against every modern effort to reduce particular persons to expendable parts of some civic, natural, or Historical whole. It led the Americans to defeat every form of progressive ideology that would sacrifice real persons living today for some vague perfect tomorrow – for some historically created paradise right here on earth. It’s that personal focus – whether found in orthodox believers or feminist autonomy freaks – that’s kept Americans from really believing for a moment that Mr. Darwin teaches the whole truth about who we are.

We also see the influence of this Lockean/Christian understanding in the determination of James Madison that religion in America not be reduced to a civil theology – to degrading lies about our divine significance as a nation for beings who are citizens and nothing more. Our Constitution is silent on God precisely because it presupposes the person’s freedom from political domination to discover his conscientious duties to his Creator.

The separation of politics, science, and economic life from theocratic domination is the true teaching of the Gospel. The separation of church and state – or the abolition of civil theology – only makes sense in terms of the Christian understanding of who each of us is. That’s why the Italian theorist Marcello Pena, for one, is wrong to say that “cultural Christianity” can be Europe’s “civil theology.” If what the Christians teach about the person is true, then civil theology is a degrading lie. If it’s not true, then there’s no barrier to the state using religion as vehicle of popular control.

We can say that the relative impersonality of the modern state is a radical improvement, on a Christian foundation, over the ancient polis and personal monarchies. The authority of the king is different in kind from that of the personal God. The relatively impersonal authority of the state is circumscribed by the more personal and relational authority of religion as an organized community of thought and action. It goes without saying that a pure Lockean can’t do justice to the purpose of the church in addressing our deepest longings as social and relational persons. But, thanks to our Puritanism or Calvinism, our Lockeanism hasn’t been that pure.

From this view, the “totalitarian democracy” of the French Revolution and its products (say, 1920s Mexico or the Soviet Union) isn’t, most deeply, a Christian heresy, but an attempt to restore the unity that Rousseau imagined was civil theology, a unity that was forever exploded by the Christian revelation of the whole truth about the human person. The American won’t be martyred by civil or ecclesiastical authorities for either refusing to swear allegiance to the state or refusing to swear allegiance to Christ the King. American Christians can be dutifully loyal to both state and church, because neither claims competence over the sphere of the other. Americans resist both political domination of religion and religious domination of politics.

Even, or perhaps especially, the progress of science – liberated in a technological direction by the modern emphasis on serving the needs of the free person – has really been progress from a Christian viewpoint. It is surely Christian to demand that science, politics, and economics have to be justified through the elevation of ordinary lives. Manners and morals, for a long while in our country, were universalized or democratized much more than abolished.

Modern science is also a revelation of who we are as free beings – although not, of course, a complete revelation. Modern science overemphasizes, in its way, our homelessness – our personal contingency – in a sometimes heroic effort to make this world a better home for us. It, of course, fails to abolish our homelessness, because it can't address its deepest cause. Nonetheless, there is something Christian in acknowledging our homelessness – our inability to be fully at home in nature or “the city.” We're right to be concerned that the personal obsessions that fuel the transhumanist aspirations of modern science will be at the cost of living well as relational beings, and that, once again, is why our Deistic heresy has to be balanced by our Puritanical one.

Our admirable friendly critic Solzhenitsyn, remember, called modern technology – with its dislocating effects on, for example, the relations between the generations – another trial of free will. Technology, unguided by the needs of free and relational beings, produces anxious loneliness, and that is why, beneath the surface of American happy-talk pragmatism, Solzhenitsyn heard the howl of existentialism. But there's also no reason not to believe that technological progress couldn't be guided by the one true progress that can occur in each personal life. Our present philosopher-pope added that the technological dimension of human freedom is, in one way, a gift that clarifies who we are. Technology, as the American Thomistic Walker Percy said, can, properly understood, make us more alive than ever to the truth that this life is a pilgrimage – rooted in existential dislocation – for each of us.

So obviously I'm going to conclude that the balance of heresies that is the genius of our Declaration is threatened today. You might well be annoyed at my vanity in thinking that I know what true balance is. All I'm doing is making as deliberate as I can the Thomism – the personal theory of natural law – that can make the most sense of the compromise between Deists and the Calvinists. According to the greatest American Catholic political thinkers ever, Orestes Brownson and John Courtney Murray, the gift American Catholics can offer their country is a theory that is adequate to the great and enduring practical accomplishment of our political Founders. To sustain an accident over time, you really do have to know why it was actually providential.

In my opinion, our legislatures remain capable of striking the appropriate balance. There's no reason our cultural conflict can't generate deliberate compromises on issues such as abortion, gay rights, and the future of our entitlements. The autonomy freaks can be chastened by the relational Christians, and some Christians can be elevated from their fundamentalism through the clash of reasons that produce

democratic compromise. It could be that deliberation on abortion would tilt policy further and further in the direction of life, in the direction of the babies that could alleviate our birth dearth and are indispensable for the future of being relational. The emerging consensus on marriage might be more of a problem for conservatives, but that might be because we don't yet understand that it's possible to balance free personal identity with the imperatives of relationality – and so to accept gays fully as an exception – but only as an exception – to the biological rule of heterosexual normativity that governs our highly social species. This compromise, admittedly, has become tougher than it should be because we've gone too far in thinking about both marriage in parenthood (in the Lockean direction), and in separating “personal” from “relational.” It's also tougher than it should be, because both sides on the gay-marriage dispute deny the good will and solid – if flawed or incomplete – arguments of the other. The Christians, it's too often said, who defend traditional or Biblical marriage “hate gays,” and the gays, it's also said, “hate Christians.”

Our Courts and bureaucrats increasingly tell us that same-sex marriage is a “Civil Rights issue.” Their intention is to silence their opponents as the equivalent of racists, as people with whom compromise is unacceptable, as people who unreasonably deprive persons of their dignity. One reason among many that our controversy over marriage should be decided by legislatures and not Courts is that, we can hope, the losing side, for now, retains the legitimate freedom to persuade the people that they acted in error. The more general problem is, of course, that legislative compromise has been too largely displaced by the high principle that animates judges and bureaucrats.

Our Court – for example, in *Lawrence v. Texas* – understands the word liberty in our Constitution to be nothing more than a weapon to be used by each generation of Americans to expand the realm of individual autonomy over time. That means that purely Lockean theory is to trump what we know through science – even or especially through Darwin – about who we are as social animals. It trumps, in other words, realistic compromise by relational persons oriented by God and nature toward the truth about who we are.

We see that purely Lockean theory, of course, in the HHS interpretation of the healthcare mandate: the right of the autonomous individual trumps the freedom of the church to be governed by relational imperatives that are beyond the competence of government to judge. But how hard could it be to remember that our idea of personal liberty presupposes that our relational longings point us in the direction of shared devotion to a personal God?

So while we American Thomists see plenty of room for concern, there's also plenty of room for hope in who we are as free and relational persons by nature. We're all for judicial restraint, getting employers – including, of course, the churches – and government bureaucrats out of the healthcare business, and for discrediting the idea that high principle should ordinarily displace legislative compromise.

If you think about it, the Court's efforts to displace our legislatures might produce a kind of coherence, but almost never a genuinely decisive and enduring result. Judicial pronouncements are made in the context of particular cases, and they're really not supposed to keep citizens from continuing to think through the meaning of the Constitution and the constitutional solution to particular controversies on their own. But in recent decades, our judges, liberal elites, and bureaucrats have claimed that they make judicial decisions that are more "final" than they conceivably can be. Attempts at judicial imperialism – or the overreaches sometimes called judicial legislation – have become attempts to stifle civic deliberation without producing a genuinely authoritative alternative. The most recent and obvious example here is abortion. *Roe v. Wade* hasn't resolved the constitutional or moral issue for Americans, but it's made real discussion of the issue – and the compromise of reasonable contending claims – impossible until the judicial decision is reversed.

Our "cultural war" can easily be seen to be between dogmatic secularists and dogmatic Christians. My more friendly interpretation is that it's mainly between two forms of Christian heresy – Lockean and Protestant Trinitarian. These two heretical forms – working together – have produced a country in which almost everyone "thinks personally" now. But it's also easy to see that thinking too personally can be at the expense of the relational context in which persons can think clearly, act confidently, find status or significance, find both love and duties, and be happy.

As our Founders discovered in their theoretical compromise called the Declaration, understanding God to be both personal and relational, as well as both the God of nature and the God of the Bible, comes closer to the whole truth about who we are – in that sense less heretical – than the understanding that governed either party to the compromise. Privileging legislative compromise over high principle need not be at the expense of the truth. It's just a realistic recognition that American heresies or American factions all fall short of capturing the whole truth about who we are as persons "hardwired," so to speak, to be free and relational – as well as willing and loving–persons open to the truth.

Heretyckie kompromisy: przypadkowy tomizm Ameryki

Artykuł podejmuje problem tożsamości Amerykanów, jej źródeł, znaczenia kompromisu filozoficznego i politycznego w ramach konstytucjonalizmu amerykańskiego i specyficznej roli pełnionej przez religię w kulturze amerykańskiej. Autor omawia ułożenie tych zjawisk w obecnym dyskursie dotyczącym wojen kulturowych.

Christopher Lazarski

ROUSSEAU AND THE ROOTS OF MODERNITY

The general will is always right, but the judgment that guides it is not always enlightened.¹

Since Machiavelli, man and woman have become the center of political theory as the sole source and the ultimate sanction of political order. The theoretical order – contemplated by classical Greek philosophy and the Judeo-Christian tradition as the origin, the measure and the limit of political order – was rejected, at first as irrelevant and later on as non-existent. During the Enlightenment, theories of progress, the state of nature, and the social contract replaced the transcendent order. Man and woman were to lift themselves by their own bootstraps from misery and despotism, and usher humanity into a secularized paradise.

One summer day in 1749, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, just starting out as a philosopher and contributor to the *French Encyclopedia*, experienced a sudden illumination while walking to Vincennes to visit his incarcerated friend, Denis Diderot (1713–1784). In the *Mercure de France*, he had found an announcement about an essay contest organized by the Academy of Dijon. “Has the restoration of the sciences and the arts helped to purify morals?” ran the prize question. The powerful inspiration prompted by this question became the starting point for the political theory that Jean-Jacques perfected throughout his life. He challenged the idea of progress, so central to the Enlightenment, and succeeded in placing his concept of omnipotent general will among the canons of enlightened teaching.

¹ J.-J. Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, [in:] idem, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality. Discourse on Political Economy*, trans. and ed. D. A. Cress, Indianapolis 1986, p. 38.

Rousseau is a very controversial political thinker. Often named “the Father of the French Revolution,” he is held responsible for the Jacobin terror imposed in the name of “the People.” Condemned by conservatives and liberals alike for his collectivism and authoritarianism, he attracts disciples mostly among various progressives and leftists. Some also defend him by placing his theory within the tradition of individualism and democracy. Lord Acton, for example, explains Rousseau’s collectivism by his first hand experience with the direct democracy of Swiss cantons. The majority, however, find his speculations too inconsistent and difficult to allow for a clear classification. But virtually all agree that he was one of the greatest political philosophers. One of his severest critics, Edmund Burke, branded him an “insane Socrates.” Insane, yet still a Socrates.² Leaving aside the dispute about Rousseau, this essay briefly analyzes his thought as elaborated in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, *On the Social Contract* and *Emile or on Education*.

By origin, Rousseau was a Swiss, a citizen of the city-state of Geneva, where he was born in 1712 into a watchmaker’s family. His mother died a week after his birth, while his father seemed to care little for his son’s upbringing. At fifteen, Jean-Jacques escaped from Geneva and from then on he was on his own. For the next decade or so he lived with Madame de Warence, a lady fourteen years his senior, who, if we are to trust Rousseau’s account in his *Confessions*, became his lover when he was twenty.³ If he can be said to have had lean years until he won the prize of the Dijon Academy in 1750, his life afterwards was that of “celebrity,” of a *philosophe* of the first rank. Revered in French salons, showered with favors and patronage, he remained famous throughout the rest of his life, even if occasionally he got into trouble with France’s authorities.

Despite the friendship of leading French intellectuals and aristocratic patrons, Rousseau claimed to be a victim of international conspiracy. Suffering from persecution and physical pain seemed to be his fate. Moreover, his affliction was not ordinary: “What could your miseries have in common with mine? My situation is unique, unheard of since the beginning of time.” In his own view, he was unique not only in his suffering, but also in his capacity for goodness, friendship and love.

² J. E. Edwards Dalberg-Acton, *Lectures on the French Revolution*, ed. N. Figgis, R. Vere Laurence, London 1910, pp. 14–17; E. Burke, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly, in Answer to some Objections to his Book on French Affairs*, [in:] *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, ed. J. C. Nimmo, 12 vols., London 1887, Vol. 4, p. 26. For an introduction to the problem of controversy surrounding Rousseau, see: *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Authoritarian Libertarian?*, ed. G. H. Dodge, Lexington 1971. In the past Rousseau was admired by Kant, Mill and various literary figures, especially the romantics (e.g. Schiller, Shelley, Hugo, Flaubert, Tolstoy).

³ P. Johnson, *Intellectuals*, New York 1988, p. 18. Johnson claims that Rousseau was a pathological liar and that nothing in his Confession could be trusted unless Jean-Jacques’ account is corroborated by other evidence.

Statements like “show me a better man than me, a heart more loving, more tender [and] more sensitive” or “the person who can love me as I can love is still to be born,” or “I was born to be the best friend that ever existed” are ubiquitous in his writing.⁴ His overflowing love, however, did not extend to his own five children, who were, on his orders, left in an orphanage as soon as they were born. No doubt, in addition to originality and talent, he displayed a huge ego.

Rousseau owed his fame not only to political writing. The romantic novel, *Julie, or the New Héloïse*, published in 1761, became a “bestseller” in the eighteenth century. His *Confessions*, only published posthumously, but read by Rousseau in French salons in 1770’s, contributed to his fame because of its scandalizing content.⁵ He died in 1778. Sixteen years later, the remains of his body were moved to the Pantheon, the temple honoring great Frenchmen.

Rousseau’s political teaching is founded upon a set of fairly standard assumptions for the age of Enlightenment. Man (*l’homme*) is by nature not a political being. Civil society is a historical form, preceded by the “state of nature.” One must therefore study this original state in order to rediscover man’s true nature and the foundation for his first rights. With an arrogance characteristic of enlightened philosophers, these studies were conceived as an exercise in abstract thinking, not as an anthropological investigation.⁶ German thinker Ernst Cassirer explains this problem in such a way:

The true knowledge of man cannot be found in ethnography or ethnology. There is only one living source for this knowledge... the genuine self-examination. And it is to this alone that Rousseau appeals; from this he seeks to derive all proofs of his principles and hypotheses... Everyone carries the true archetype within himself.⁷

The state of nature and man, recreated by Rousseau in his second *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, shares some common features with similar constructs designed by his predecessors in that epoch, as well as including striking differences. In the natural state, there is no authority; nor are there any social arrangements. Men (like other writers of the Enlightenment, Rousseau naturally did not mention women) were equal and free. However, the state of nature was not the Hobbesian “*bellum omnium contra omnes*,” and its inhabitants were not evil even if they knew neither virtue nor morality. Rousseau’s man was self-sufficient and lived like a wild

⁴ Johnson quotes a series of Rousseau’s *dicta* about himself (idem, *Intellectuals*, pp. 9–11, 13).

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 12, 16–19.

⁶ Cf. J.-J. Rousseau, *On the Social Contract. Discourse on the Origin of Inequality. Discourse on Political Economy*, pp. 114–115, hereafter referred to as *Discourse*. Rousseau’s second discourse on inequality is a revised version of the original essay submitted to the Academy of Dijon.

⁷ E. Cassirer, *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. P. Gay, Bloomington 1963, p. 50.

animal, possessing its strength, vigor and full adjustment to nature. His needs were simple and easily satisfied. He did not know continuous work because he did not think in terms of the future. He was idle and happy. "The only goods he knows in the universe are nourishment, a woman and rest. The only evils he fears are pain and hunger." Since nature provided him with plenty of food, he had many occasions for leisure. Sex in these conditions was obtainable just as easily as the rest of his simple needs.⁸

Rousseau asserts that sex was "a purely animal act" in the state of nature. It had no implications for the male and bore little consequence for the female: once their lust "had been satisfied, the two sexes no longer took cognizance of one another." With the arrogance of an abstract thinker, he dispenses with the problem of pregnancy and child rearing. According to him, the mother and child were only briefly with each other, and then they parted as soon as the child had the strength to find its own food. "The child no longer meant anything to the mother once it could do without her."⁹ In line with this narrow perspective, our *philosophe* does not bother to tell us if the child was three, seven or more, when it could survive without maternal care. However, the separation must have taken place very early, for man – and, by extension, we can assume, woman – was fully adjusted to nature, and this could not have been achieved without painful experiences, including the death of weaker individuals. Furthermore, since parents did not pass on their experience to the younger generation (they did not even develop language, and their speech comprised only sounds and gestures), children had to be left alone before they could learn anything.¹⁰

Jean-Jacques maintains that individuals were not naturally hostile toward others of their kind. Contacts were rare and unless a basic conflict of interests was involved (self-preservation), they did no harm to each other. Moreover, natural man "tempers the ardor he has for his own well-being by an innate repugnance to seeing his fellow men suffer." Deprived of any sort of enlightenment, man thus had only two passions that come from the simplest impulses: the desire for self-preservation and a certain pity for the suffering of others of his kind. These qualities made him a noble savage.¹¹ Noble savages were self-sufficient and, therefore, had no use for one another. They had no family or property, and knew no authority or labor. They were equal, free and happy. Rousseau summarizes this powerful vision of the natural individual in the following words:

Wandering in the forest, without speech, without dwelling, without war, without relationships, with no need for his fellow men, and correspondingly with no desire to do them harm... savage man, subject to few passions and self-sufficient, had only the sentiments and enlightenment appropriate to that state; he felt only his true needs, took notice of only what he believed he had an interest in seeing... If by chance he made some discovery, he was all the less able to communicate

⁸ J.-J. Rousseau, *Discourse*, p. 126, 135–138.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 128, 140.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 128–129.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 133, 135, 137–138. The term "noble savage" was never used by Rousseau himself but was coined soon after him, and is commonly applied to his notion of natural man.

it to others because he did not even know his own children. Art perished with its inventor... The species was already old, and man remained ever a child.¹²

Yet the idyllic life of the noble savage ended when “the first person who, having enclosed a plot of land, took it into his head to say *this is mine* and found people simple enough to believe him.” Unlike Locke, who finds private property in the state of nature, our *philosophe* treats it as “the first sin” which terminated the state of nature and, with it, the innocence of humankind. Symbolically, this “first person” became “the true founder of civil society.”¹³ To be precise, though, property only ends the pristine phase of the state of nature; the state itself continues, but in a tainted form, constituting a kind of an intermediate period leading to a social contract and the establishment of civil society. Rousseau seems purposely vague at this point, although his remarks on brutal warfare in international relations – which alone has preserved the rules of the state of nature – do not leave much room for other interpretations.¹⁴ How did this transformation happen?

The turning point in human history that ended the original conditions and led to those corrupted by property resulted from a series of accidents as well as slow processes. “In proportion as the human race spread, difficulties multiplied with the men. Differences in soils, climates and seasons could force them to inculcate these difficulties in their lifestyles.” For a growing number of individuals, nature could no longer provide plenty of food; therefore, they could not stay idle anymore. They began to fish and hunt, first making primitive tools and, finally, as we can deduce (Rousseau is again unclear in this respect), they took possession of land for their private use. With the emergence of property, they also had to abandon nomad-like life and engage in continuous work. Furthermore, appropriation of various things allowed men and women to form basic terms, such as “‘large,’ ‘small,’ ‘strong,’ ‘weak,’ ‘fast,’ ‘slow’” and others. Thus, humankind gradually developed language as well.¹⁵

The hardships, challenges and dangers of these early conditions made individuals use their two other qualities which distinguish them from animals: free will and accumulation of experience. Man and woman can challenge their instincts while animals cannot.

A pigeon would die of hunger near a bowl filled with choice meats, and so would a cat perched atop of pile of fruit or grain even though both could nourish themselves with the food they

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 137–138.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 140.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 150: “Remaining ... in the state of nature, the bodies politic soon experienced the inconveniences that had forced private individuals to leave it; and that state became even more deadly among these great bodies ... national wars, battles, murders, and reprisals that make nature tremble and offend reason, and all those horrible prejudices that rank the honor of shedding human blood among the virtues.”

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 140–141.

disdain... Nature commands every animal, and beasts obey. Man feels the same impetus, but he knows he is free to go along or to resist.

Furthermore, “the will speaks when nature is silent,” i.e., when there is no instinct to follow.¹⁶

The ability to accept or defy nature – free will – constitutes the first, distinctly human quality. As mentioned, the second human quality is the faculty to accumulate experience and pass it on to others. In order for that to happen, individuals must first lose their original self-sufficiency and abandon their solitary life. Private property, work and sedentary life bring exactly that effect. To overcome natural difficulties, individuals started to cooperate with each other, at first from time to time, later on, permanently. They began to form herds that eventually grew into nations, “united by mores and characteristic features.” Furthermore, men and women, living together in herds, abandoned their animal-like, “free” sex and gradually developed conjugal and parental love. In these new conditions, individual experiences and lessons did not vanish without trace or arts perish with their inventors. On the contrary, they were saved and passed on to children, and, subsequently, to the entire species. As a result, humankind grew in sophistication from generation to generation.¹⁷

Yet life in families and larger communities brought not only benefits for humankind. They lost natural vigor and became soft. Since they differed in skills and talents, some prospered more than others. This, in turn, undermined original equality. Moreover, having daily contact, individuals started to compare themselves with others. Unnatural passions, hitherto nonexistent, awakened among men and women. They became jealous and vain.¹⁸ As a result, they began to fight among themselves and strive for domination over others. “Consuming ambition” inspired “in all men a wicked tendency to harm one another.” Ill-will, rivalry and conflicts – the effects of property and inequality – gradually gained the upper hand. Humankind thus reached the point of “the most horrible state of war,” which Hobbes incorrectly viewed as a state of nature.¹⁹

Rousseau observes that the rich were actually more vulnerable in the state of war than the poor. For, while both could lose life, the former also risked property. Property, according to him, is nothing else but theft, acquired at the cost of the suffering, even the death of fellow men. Furthermore, he sees no justification for it. In direct contradiction to Locke, he dismisses labor as legitimization of property and the source of wealth for the entire community. On the contrary, he implies that the farmer who appropriated land and succeeded in cultivating it, in

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 124–125.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 141–143. Cf. A. Bloom, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, [in:] *History of Political Philosophy*, eds. L. Strauss, J. Cropsey, 3rd edition, Chicago 1987, p. 364.

¹⁸ J.-J. Rousseau, *Discourse*, pp. 143–147.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 148.

fact, aggravated inequality and impoverished his neighbors. These ideas would soon powerfully reverberate among radical Jacobins, such as Jean-Paul Murat, who believed that the poor had the right to take property back from the rich and to severely punish them for the misery which they had inflicted on the destitute. In the state of war that followed the state of nature, the propertied class therefore pressured much harder than the poor to enter into the social contract.²⁰ For while both had to sacrifice their natural liberty in order to gain security, the rich achieved something extra: they legitimized and secured their wealth.

Such was... the origin of society and laws, which gave new fetters to the weak and new forces to the rich, irretrievably destroyed natural liberty, established forever the law of property and of inequality, changed adroit usurpation into an irrevocable right, and for the profit of a few ambitious men henceforth subjected the entire human race to labor, servitude and misery.²¹

Although entry into the social contract that established civil society was tarnished by the first sin – property and its consequences – Rousseau does not believe that it created an arbitrary government, giving the powerful an open right to plunder the weak. Unlike property, which is based on convention, liberty is a gift of nature, just like life, and therefore inalienable. The original authority was thus limited (even if some clauses of the contract seemed to anticipate the future concept of the general will) and had a republican form.²² However, the contract “consisted merely of some general conventions” which could easily be avoided or twisted, and the lawbreakers could go unpunished. Usurpation inherent in the contract was bound to invite corruption and abuse. In addition to property, comparing oneself with others was again the principal reason for growing antagonisms and conflicts. Rousseau the psychologist, so clearly visible in *Emile* and *Confessions*, comes to the fore even in this early essay on inequality. Civil society produces a corrupted man:

the savage lives in himself; the man accustomed to the way of society is always outside himself and knows how to live only in the opinion of others... Everything [is] reduced to appearances, becomes factitious and bogus: honor, friendship, virtues, and often even our vices.

From this disorder of the soul, despotism gradually raises its “hideous head” and establishes itself “on the ruins of the republic.” Under despotic rule and in “the final stage of inequality,” the people achieve equality once more: “Here all private individuals become equals again, because they are nothing.”²³

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 149, 151. Cf. J. E. Edwards Dalberg-Acton, *Lectures on the French Revolution*, pp. 226–227.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 150.

²² *Ibidem*, pp. 152, 154. “The populace has united all its wills into a single one” (p. 155).

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 151, 159, 161.

On the surface, the central idea of the second *Discourse* contradicts the message of *On the Social Contract*.²⁴ The former stresses liberty, the rights of the individual and condemns any form of arbitrary government, while the latter justifies “the chains” which civil society imposes on man and woman, extols the general (collective) will over the individual will and freedom, and seems to outline a totalitarian regime. The nature of this contradiction and its solution requires a broader explanation.

Civil society cannot be justified by nature. Man and woman are self-sufficient and therefore not political beings. Nature only dictates their self-interest to them. Furthermore, the original self-love (*amour de soi*) of the noble savage degenerates in society into an alienated self, dependent on appearances and on the opinions of others (*amour-propre*). Ultimately, this leads to the most debased form of man, the *bourgeois*, who has neither harmless self-love, nor civic virtue and indeed needs leviathan to curb his passions.²⁵ Hence, to avoid tyranny or anarchy, society must create morality that, while not depriving individuals of their freedom, would find grounds for demanding their devotion to the common good.²⁶

Rousseau opens his discourse *On the Social Contract* with a review of various alternatives from human past and present that could serve as the foundation for his theory. First, the original state of nature exists no more, and man and woman have no chance of returning to this happy past. Moreover, his aim and ideal is not to make man and woman beast-like creatures again, but civilized, virtuous individuals who own natural, self-love. Therefore, the state of nature cannot serve as the foundation for authority and morality. Second, the next phase of human history – state of war – is not an alternative either. Anarchy threatens all (even if unequally), and besides, it was that “horrible state” which made people enter into the original social compact in the first place. Third, despotism, or the rule of the strongest that emerged from the degeneration of the social compact, cannot be an option at all. Might does not make right, even if prudence sometimes dictates that we should yield. Slavery is totally illegitimate and cannot justify authority of one individual over others. Each argument in favor of its legitimacy is “absurd and meaningless,” stresses the *philosophe*. Rejecting all these alternatives in the first four chapters of his treatise, Jean-Jacques finally concludes the necessity of returning to the first, original contract, the one that ended the state of war. We should construe a similar convention, yet this time we must avoid mistakes of the past.²⁷

²⁴ J.-J. Rousseau, *On the Social Contract. Discourse on the Origin of Inequality. Discourse on Political Economy*, hereafter referred to as *Social Contract*.

²⁵ The terms *amour de soi*, *amour-propre* and *bourgeois* were not introduced by Rousseau in *On the Social Contract* but were defined in *Emile* (mainly book I and IV), cf. J.-J. Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, trans. A. Bloom, New York 1979, hereafter referred to as *Emile*.

²⁶ Cf. *History of Political Philosophy*, pp. 566–567; J. V. Schall, *Reason, Revelation, and the Foundation of Political Philosophy*, Baton Rouge 1987, pp. 134–135.

²⁷ J.-J. Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, pp. 17–23.

The challenges facing this new convention are daunting. The convention's task is to create a regime that will not only prevent its self-degeneration into despotism, as happened with the original compact, but will also bring all the benefits of civilization without corrupting man's and woman's souls, and without taking away their freedom. Our *philosophe* is more ambitious than Hobbes or Locke, who clearly stated that the compact ends natural rights and begins civil rights. Rousseau describes his task in the following way: "[how to] find a form of association which defends and protects with all common forces the person and goods of each associate, and by means of which each one, while uniting with all, nevertheless obeys only himself and remains as free as before?"²⁸ The solution to this dilemma is a social contract of a singular kind, different from anything hitherto known. This contract requires:

The total alienation of each associate, together with all of his rights, to the entire community... Since each person gives himself whole and entire... and since the condition is equal for everyone, no one has an interest in making it burdensome for the others... Since the alienation is made without reservation, the union is as perfect as possible, and no associate has anything further to demand... In giving himself to all, each person gives himself to no one... If, therefore, one eliminates from the social compact whatever is not essential, one will find... the following terms. Each of us places his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will; and as one we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole.²⁹

The newly created union – we might call it commune or collective – forms a person-like entity that, like any individual, has a will of its own, the general will (*la volonté générale*). The general will differs from an individual will only in that it is a collective will, i.e., it wills what all (everyone) could conceivably will. Yet, it is not the will of all. The latter is merely a sum of all private interests, which could be mutually exclusive and lead to impotence. No, the commune acts for its self-interest, just as any man or woman, and just like them does everything in its power to protect itself and to take care of its needs. Jean-Jacques purposefully omits, however, one more possibility: that the community, like any man or woman, may sacrifice some parts of its body for the good of the whole.³⁰

Our *philosophe* views with extreme suspicion any particular interests – private or, especially, corporate – within the collective. All such partial interests must yield if the general will is to be well articulated: "it is important that there should be no partial society in the state and that each citizen make up his own mind."³¹

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

²⁹ *Ibidem*. The compact formally requires the consensus of all participants, but Rousseau seems strangely equivocal in this respect: "If there were no prior convention, then unless the vote were unanimous, what would become of the minority's obligation to submit to the majority's choice, and where do one hundred who want a master get the right to vote for ten who do not? The law of majority rule is itself an established convention, and presupposes unanimity on at least one occasion" (p. 23).

³⁰ Rousseau is aware of this "option" ("just as a wounded man has his arm amputated to save the rest of his body," *idem*, *Discourse*, p. 150) but "overlooks" it the *On the Social Contract*, p. 23 ff.

³¹ *Idem*, *On the Social Contract*, p. 32.

Where Tocqueville sees remedies for democracy's deficiencies, Rousseau discerns the source of corruption. Each individual is left alone vis-à-vis the general will and acts without a cushion of associations, clubs, parties and self-governments, which Tocqueville views as indispensable for the protection of individual liberty, and for learning citizenship.

As if power belonging to the collective were still insufficient, Jean-Jacques emphasizes that the general will is infallible, inalienable and indivisible. It is either total or non-existent, and that totality also extends to the power over life and property of its participants. He seems unconcerned about the possibility of abuse: sheer participation in the general will and equal treatment of each associate appear to him an adequate shield against the abuse of power. He had no premonition that his concept of general will would some day produce a slogan that the communist party cannot err.³² On the contrary, proud of this design, the *philosophe* audaciously claims that it preserves natural liberty and adds civil liberty to it. Further, it transforms each associate participating in it from "a stupid, limited animal into an intelligent being and a man."³³ And if an individual does not appreciate the design, if he still "refuses to obey the general will... he will be forced to be free."³⁴ No wonder that Robespierre's "republic of virtue" saw in Rousseau its prophet.

Although the general will is indivisible in principle, Rousseau separates the various facets that show what it is and how it operates. Thus, another name for the collective will is a body public or a republic. It is called sovereign when it acts (governs) and state when it does not. The associates who participate in the republic are citizens when they act, and people (subjects) when they obey. However indivisible itself, sovereignty has different "powers," such as legislative, executive, judicial and others (going beyond Montesquieu's division, Rousseau also mentions imposing taxes, making war, internal administration and foreign policy).³⁵ Legislation is the exclusive domain of the citizens. It cannot be delegated to agents or representatives. Thus, for Rousseau, "every state ruled by law [is] a republic, regardless of the form its administration may take."³⁶ The executive authority, in turn, cannot be exercised by all. The government – which does have the executive authority – is, however, not a separate power, but an agent of the sovereign, "an intermediate body between the subjects and the sovereign." It receives orders from the latter and administers it to the former. Individually, those

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 27–32, 35–36. Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* comes to mind when one contemplates Rousseau's thought that the general will cannot err if properly enlightened. A devoted Bolshevik Rubashov, accused of treason during Stalinist purges, is sure of his innocence, yet his resistance vanishes when the interrogator reminds him that the party never errs.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 27. Rousseau admits, however, that each associate of this compact will lose "several of the advantages belonging to him in the state of nature."

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 24–25, 30–31.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 38, 73–76. The parliamentary system does not express the general will.

serving in the government are called magistrates, governors or kings; collectively as a body, they bear the name prince.³⁷

Following well-established tradition in earlier political thought, Rousseau reiterates that smaller states are healthier and stronger. They also enable greater participation in the power of the sovereign. Since one shares sovereignty with others citizens, the larger the number, the smaller the share; while as a subject, each individual must obey as whole, without reducing their obedience by the number of fellow subjects.³⁸ Increasing the number of magistrates and thus the direct participation in government would not help, though. For each individual has three wills: the first – the private and the strongest – which tends to its own advantage; the second – corporate – will of the magistrates, which mainly cares about the interests of the prince; and the third – common to all – will of the people or of the sovereign, which is the weakest. Multiplication of magistrates leads to a slack government, rather than a change in the subject's nature, i.e., one's duty to obey. That is why democracy, in which legislative power coincides with the executive agent (prince), is the worst regime, although in theory it should be the best. When the entire people or the majority participate in the government, their private and corporate will is corrupted, and that corruption affects their common will as the people-sovereign.³⁹ Jean-Jacques deems this corruption as the worst because "the abuse of the laws by the government is a lesser evil than the corruption of the legislator, which is the inevitable outcome of particular perspectives." Virtue, which Montesquieu made the principle for democracy, is beyond the reach of all, and in reality, democracy is the most susceptible to agitations and civil wars. Very pessimistic about this form of government, Rousseau issues the following maxim: "Were there a people of gods, it would govern itself democratically. So perfect a government is not suited to men."⁴⁰

After such a devastating evaluation of democracy, the alternatives to democracy, mentioned by the *philosophe* – monarchy and aristocracy – seem somewhat better. Monarchy, because "all springs" of government are in one pair of hands, is the most active and efficient form of administration. That is why it is the most suitable for large states which need a strong government protecting them from disintegration. However, this is also a form in which the distance between the sovereign and its agent is the greatest. What is more, echoing Machiavelli's teaching on the prince's reliance on fear, rather than love, Rousseau states that because people's love is "precarious and conditional," the king always aims at absolute power, and therefore, it is a dangerous form of rule. Aristocracy, in turn, is treated mildly. Of the three kinds of aristocracy – natural, elective and hereditary – Jean-Jacques chooses the second as his preferable system. It is the best not

³⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 49–50.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 43, 50–51.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 53–56.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 55–56.

only among aristocracies, but, it seems Rousseau's best practical regime, or to use his terminology, the best form of administration. Since the executive cannot be run by all or by the majority (democracy), and is dangerous in the hands of one (monarchy), elective aristocracy, by its very nature, appears the most suitable agent of the sovereign.⁴¹ Rousseau would have probably been shocked, seeing how his concept of an elective aristocracy evolved into a Jacobin dictatorship during the French Revolution and the concept of the vanguard of the proletariat – the Communist party – in the Marx-Engels-Lenin model.

Emile or on Education is a pedagogical treatise on how to raise a child so that it will grow into a man freed from unnatural passions, prejudices and superstitions, i.e., purified of the corruption wrought by history. Deprived of the chance to nurture his own children, Rousseau seems to compensate for this self-inflicted wound with a vision of bringing up an ideal man. The book also gives Jean-Jacques an opportunity to rethink human nature and the relation of an individual to polity.

Even a baby is capable of developing *amour-propre*. Its cry, which initially expresses physical discomfort, is easily transformed into an expression of will, when the baby learns that its tears make things work for it. Tears then become a test of power rather than the communication of real needs. If its wishes are not fulfilled, it becomes angry and resentful. Once the *amour-propre* begins to act, it does not know limits. It expects that others will submit their self-interests to its own. Ultimately, it revolts against nature and, through commands and prayers, seeks control over the entire universe. Gradually, the *bourgeois* is thus born. One has to note at this point a striking difference between Marx and Rousseau. For the former, the *bourgeois* is created exclusively by economic relations, while for the latter, it is a product of all inter-human relations, economic included, and of emotional drives occurring in one's psyche. Rousseau's definition is thus psychological as well as sociological.⁴² The experiment undertaken on Rousseau's pupil, Emile, was meant to show that proper education could prevent this process, and save humankind from the domination of this debased form of individual.

In the course of his education, Emile must learn, right from birth, that everything which happens to him is an inevitable effect of nature. Like the noble savage, he must recognize the necessity and submit to it. The actions of the educator must be hidden, because, if Emile's *amour de soi* is to be preserved, he cannot be confronted with the will of others. According to Rousseau, a child naturally ac-

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 57–62. Cf. J. N. Shklar, *Rousseau's Two Models: Sparta and the Age of Gold*, "Political Science Quarterly" 1966, Vol. 81, No. 1, p. 38.

⁴² J.-J. Rousseau, *Emile*, pp. 64–69. Except for the true philosopher and the noble savage, all men, regardless of the class to which they belong, are bourgeois, cf. A. Bloom, *Introduction*, [in:] J.-J. Rousseau, *Emile*, pp. 3–7.

cepts necessity and would not rebel against the fact that “there is no more” (unless suspecting a lie). It would, however, resent and revolt against the will of others, who would forbid it to enjoy more.⁴³ Emile does not share the company of other children so that he would not compare himself with others. To isolate him further from civilization, he does not even have books, except Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*.⁴⁴ Plutarch’s heroes have virtue but also terrible passions. Emile does not need the former because in his natural state, he has more wisdom than others can achieve through a life of struggle, while the latter (passions) should be unknown to him.

The “Eden” which Jean-Jacques created for Emile shapes his pupil into a noble savage. Although he develops no virtues, he has natural wisdom, which makes him equal to a true philosopher. At the age of fifteen, he is full of energy, healthy, selfish – though with a natural compassion for others, ignorant and self-sufficient. This is not, however, Rousseau’s final aim. He wants to make him a man and a citizen. How then, is the perfectly self-sufficient Emile to be connected to society and the polity? Rousseau finds in sex the power that, if sublimated, could socialize the savage. Emile has become by now a physically mature person. His sexual desire produces in him a need for other human beings.⁴⁵ Hence, Rousseau uses this power to introduce him into society.

The destitute are the first whom Emile meets outside of his “Eden.” Contacts with others always activate the *amour-propre* – one compares oneself with them. Yet, this leads to alienation only if the comparison is unfavorable. A dissatisfied individual becomes envious. Jean-Jacques therefore introduces Emile to the life of the poor, the sick, and the oppressed in order to make him feel good about himself, and, at the same time, to develop his compassion.⁴⁶ Soon, he begins his education, and, finally, may read history. At this stage, he meets Plutarch’s heroes, yet by now he is able to see their suffering, passions and vanity, hence their greatness does not animate his jealousy.⁴⁷

Finally, Emile meets his woman, and his love for Sophie becomes the last motive allowing him to complete his socialization. His sexual tensions, turned into Eros, are used to teach him responsibility toward others. Emile must know how to be a husband and father. The pages on the differences between the sexes are one of the most remarkable in Rousseau’s writing. Jean-Jacques is afraid that in the bourgeois culture the ascending notion of equality will pervert relations between the sexes. In order to form a lasting union, man and woman have to be different by nature. If they were the same and whole, they would not need each other. Like savages, they would only satisfy their sexual appetites and then part.⁴⁸

⁴³ *Ibidem*, pp. 91, 219.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 184.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 214 ff.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 230 ff.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 235–244.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 357–363, 415–416. The full magnitude of this thought can be better com-

Once Emile is aware of his responsibilities, he has good reason to be interested in politics because he and his family will be a part of the polity. He travels to experience different political regimes and confronts his hopes with reality. This confrontation also serves him as a basis for reflection on a just regime. Not surprisingly, he comes to the conclusion that the best regime is that which strikingly resembles the republic depicted in the *Social Contract*.⁴⁹ Having learned his duties as a citizen, he unites with Sophie and lastly consummates the marriage.⁵⁰

Like other men of the Enlightenment, Rousseau rejects the transcendent basis for man's nature and politics. Man has no preordained ends; therefore, the philosopher has to find another foundation for the political order. The state of nature and the general will are Rousseau's first principles that allow him to erect the entire structure of his theory.

Rousseau points in two directions: the happy past and the enlightened future. In the past, man did not have to learn virtue, for he had the natural wisdom that made him equal to the philosopher. The noble savage was simply born outside of the Platonic cave and, therefore, was capable of seeing the true order of things, without knowledge, virtues and heroic efforts. The future will bring another kind of liberty and happiness. The general will terminates the *bourgeois* and creates an intelligent individual and citizen, freed from the prison of false ideals. The body public, erected by the general will, makes people one and powerful, free and happy, building a new, secular Eden. Everything in between is corrupted, degenerated and wicked, and deserves to be destroyed.

Rousseau i korzenie nowoczesności

W artykule przeanalizowano tematykę źródeł współczesnych wojen o kulturę w myśli Jana Jakuba Rousseau. Autor wskazuje, w jaki sposób myśl osiemnastowiecznego Francuza stanowi punkt odniesienia dla współczesnych stron dyskursu na temat wojen kulturowych.

prehended now, two centuries later, for in modern Western society it sounds like a prophesy. Cf. A. Bloom, *Introduction*, [in:] J.-J. Rousseau, *Emile*, pp. 20–25.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 450–471.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 471–480.

Wilfred M. McClay

**SHOULD RELIGION ENJOY SPECIAL PROTECTIONS
IN AMERICAN SOCIETY? FIVE ARGUMENTS
AND A SPECULATION**

The belief in religious freedom used to be one of the unquestioned universals in American culture. But it has lately emerged as one of the fiercest points of contention in the American culture wars. Indeed, during the whole of 2012, the Obama Administration was subjected to strenuous criticism for its perceived hostility, or at best cavalier indifference, to the cause of religious freedom in the United States. First, there was the Supreme Court's unanimous decision against the Administration's position in the *Hosanna-Tabor* case, in which it had sought to deny the applicability of a "ministerial exemption" to the staffing of church-run schools. Then, more famously, came the case of the Department of Health and Human Services mandate that would require all employers, including church-run schools, hospitals, and charities, to provide their employees with health-insurance plans covering contraceptives, abortifacients, and sterilization procedures – a requirement that would necessitate, particularly for the Roman Catholic Church, the violation of some of its core moral teachings.

The opposition to these actions was swift and unequivocal. It produced an unprecedented degree of unity among the often fractious American Catholic bishops, and quickly brought into being a remarkably ecumenical coalition, embracing a broad array of evangelical Protestant leaders, such as the president of Wheaton College, arguably the most eminent evangelical college in the country, as well as eminent figures from across the full spectrum of American religious communi-

ties: Jews, Muslims, Mormons, Sikhs, and so on. Everywhere the rallying cry was directed, not to the support of specific Catholic doctrines, but to the general defense of religious freedom.

Secular supporters of the Obama Administration have been equally vehement in their disagreement, and have seemed both annoyed and mystified by the protests. How, wondered Ed Kilgore, writing in the March 2012 *Washington Monthly*, did “religious freedom” ever come to mean “the right to have one’s particular religious views explicitly reflected in public policy”? What gives Catholic bishops the right to “contend they should be able to operate a wide range of quasi-public services and also enjoy the use of public subsidies, while refusing to comply with laws and regulations that contradict their religious or moral teachings”? Were they not in fact seeking “a sort of unwritten concordat – a broad zone of immunity from laws they choose to regard as offensive”? Were they not seeking “special privileges”?

These are important questions which require a thoughtful and respectful response. Indeed, they go to the heart of the culture war that still rages in American life. Religious believers in America need to prepare themselves to hear such questions asked again and again in the years to come, and contemplate how they will answer them. For beneath the controversy about religious freedom is a deeper controversy, about the nature and status of religion itself in the American legal and political order.

That controversy is nothing new, of course. It runs through much of American history, taking on different guises and embracing different antagonists and issues at different times. But it has achieved a unique importance and potency at this historical moment, when the American legal and political world is more intent than ever upon upholding the principle of neutrality in all things. What is so special about religion, then, that it should receive any such “special privileges”? Why should Americans treat a church or other religious association differently than they treat any other social club or cultural organization, or treat the rights of a religious adherent any differently than they would treat the expressive liberties of any other individual?

Such questions have largely ceased to be asked in Western Europe. But the drive to ask them is a fairly recent development in American history, and perhaps a sign of the growing secularity of so much of its public life. But there is no denying the fact that, in some sense, religion and religious institutions are not treated according to a principle of strict neutrality in the United States. To be sure, the recognition and support of “religion” is something dramatically different from the establishment of a particular religion, a distinction that the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution sought to codify. The fact remains, though, that something like a generic monotheism enjoys a privileged public status in present-day America, even though religious believers often fail to notice it, or complain that it is being steadily eroded.

Examples abound. One still sees the name of God on the American currency, in the Pledge of Allegiance, in the oaths taken in court, in the concluding words of

presidential speeches, and even, it seems, popping up in** the platforms of both major political parties. Chaplains are still employed by the armed services and the Congress, and the latter still duly commences its sessions with the invocation of a prayer. The tax exemption of religious institutions remains intact and seemingly impregnable, at least for the moment. The most solemn observances, such as the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance in the wake of 9/11, are held in the Washington National Cathedral, and are conducted in a manner that draws heavily on the liturgical and musical heritage of Western Christianity. One could compose a long list of similar examples. The United States is a long way from being officially secular, even if it may be tending in that direction. And however much Americans accept, or claim to accept, a principle of church-state separation, a better description of the way they actually have conducted themselves would be *selective interpenetration*.

Secular critics worry whether privileging religion in any way flies in the face of the principle of separation, and represents an illegitimate coercion of conscience. Some religious believers see merit in these contentions, particularly the second one, in a country where the freedom of the individual is so often taken to be the very sum and essence of religious freedom. Georgetown professor Jacques Berlinerblau's lively and valuable new book *How to Be Secular* is subtitled *A Call to Arms for Religious Freedom*, reflecting a freewheeling understanding of religious freedom that is as jealously protective of atheism and "freedom from" religion as it is of belief.¹

In addition, there are respectable *religious* arguments against religion's being granted a privileged status. Some of them are reminiscent of the views of Roger Williams, the great American dissenter, and recall one of the central arguments against any establishment of religion: that installation of a state religion inevitably leads, in the long run, to perfunctoriness, placeseeking, faithlessness, coercion, co-optation, atrophy, and spiritual death. In other words, the establishment of religion is bad for religion. When one looks at the sad and irrelevant state of the empty established churches of Europe today, one sees the power of the argument. The bride of Christ has all too often ended up a kept woman.

By contrast, as Alexis de Tocqueville was able to see as early as the 1830s, the American style of religious freedom, far from diminishing the hold of religion, kept it vital and energetic, precisely by making it voluntary. Indeed, many Christians, particularly those drawing on the Anabaptist tradition, would contend that when churches are cut loose from entanglement in the polity and its civil religion, committed only to being a people set apart, they are freed to be more radical, more sacrificial, and more faithful, a living sign of contradiction – in short, more genuinely Christian.

¹ J. Berlinerblau, *How to Be Secular: A Call to Arms for Religious Freedom*, New York 2012.

But the example of the HHS mandate shows the limits of this approach, when one is dealing with an act of comprehensive public policy that is designed to be universal in character. One does not have the option of declaring one's independence from such an all-embracing policy, or opting out of it, for there is nowhere to go and no place to hide. Hence the significance of Kilgore's mischaracterization of the Catholic bishops, who in fact are not seeking to use public policy to bar Americans from using and paying for contraceptives, or even to bar Catholics from using them, but instead are opposing the use of government's coercive power to compel Catholic organizations to pay for their use. Making even such a seemingly small accommodation to the long-settled and fundamental religious identity of the Catholic Church – an organization that, ironically, has a long and consistent record in support of the policy of universal health care – was apparently deemed impermissible. The American bishops therefore were not the ones insisting that their religious views should dominate public policy.

They *are*, however, insisting upon being dealt with separately, with respect shown for their particular commitments. They are doing so in a way that presumes religious freedom means not merely do-what-you-want neutrality, but a kind of deference paid to religion *per se*. And that is precisely the point here at issue. What's so special about religion, that it should be granted such deferential attention? Can arguments for that proposition be adduced that will be compelling, or at least plausible, not only to those who need no persuasion, but to those who do?

Let me offer five such arguments in what follows. These surely do not exhaust all the possibilities, but begin to suggest some of the reasons why the discussion about religious freedom needs to be placed in a larger and richer context than the sterile logic of abstract neutrality can allow.

First there is what I will call the *foundational* argument, which points back to our historical roots, and to the animating spirit of the American Founders and the Constitutional order that they devised and instituted. The Founders had diverse views about a variety of matters, very much including their own personal religious convictions, but they were in complete and emphatic agreement about one thing: the inescapable importance of religion, and of the active encouragement of religious belief, for the success of the American experiment. Examples of this view are plentiful. John Adams insisted that "Man is constitutionally, essentially and unchangeably a religious animal. Neither philosophers or politicians can ever govern him any other way." And the universally respected George Washington was a particularly eloquent exponent of the view that religion was essential to the maintenance of public morality, without which a republican government could not survive. The familiar words of his Farewell Address in 1796 – "of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable

supports” – can be made to stand in for countless others, from John Adams, Benjamin Rush, John Jay, and so on, as an indicative example. That this high regard extended to religious institutions as well as individual religious beliefs is made clear by Washington’s remark, in 1789, that “If I could have entertained the slightest apprehension that the Constitution framed in the Convention, where I had the honor to preside, might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical Society, certainly I would never have placed my signature to it.” If we are looking for a plausible grounding for our deference paid to religion, we can begin with the testimony of the Founders of the American constitutional order itself.

Very well, you may respond, but that was then and this is now. Why should present-day Americans feel bound by the Founders’ beliefs or their eighteenth-century mentalities? None of the Founders could possibly have envisioned the cultural and religious diversity of America in the 21st century. Their vision assumed a degree of cultural uniformity that would be beyond the present’s power to restore, even if it wanted to.

True enough. But the very fact of that diversity itself leads to a second argument for deference to religion, a *pluralistic* argument which would seek to protect religion all the more zealously as a source of moral order and social cohesion.

There is a reason why accounts of the history of American immigration and of the history of American religion so often end up relating the very same history. From the mid-nineteenth century on, every new wave of immigration to America brought peoples for whom a set of distinctive religious beliefs and practices formed the core of their identity. Some of the worst examples of religious prejudice in American history come out of the cultural clashes and anxieties of these years; but so too did the idea of pluralism as a central feature of American life. As Richard John Neuhaus and Peter Berger came to formulate it, “This nation is constituted as an exercise in pluralism, as the *unum* within which myriad *plures* are sustained.” The persistence of regional, religious, ethnic, and other differences, so long as they are not invidious in character or dependent upon unjust or illegal segregation or restriction, is something to be desired, because it means that the moral communities within which consciences are formed – churches, synagogues, mosques, and the like – remain healthy. Hence in America, as Neuhaus and Berger understood it, the national purpose rightly understood ought to seek, not to undermine particular affinities or purposes, but to strengthen them.²

Hence it is essential that religious freedom be understood not only as an individual liberty but also as a *corporate* liberty, a liberty that applies to and inheres in *groups*, and defends the integrity and self-governance of such groups. How could it be otherwise, since a religion, like a language, is an inherently social thing, quintessentially an activity of groups rather than the property of isolated individuals? Religious freedom must be understood in this dual aspect, protecting not only the liber-

² P. L. Berger, R. J. Neuhaus, *To Empower People: From State to Civil Society*, Washington 1996, pp. 202–208.

ty of individuals, but also the liberty of churches and other religious institutions and communities: protecting their freedom to define what they are and what they are not, to control the meaning and terms of their membership, to freely exercise their faith by the way they choose to raise their children and order their community life, seeking to embody their religion's moral self-understanding in lived experience.

There are, of course, limits to this autonomy, as there must be to all liberties and all forms of pluralism. Religious liberty is not a *carte blanche*, or an all-purpose get-out-of-jail-card, and its limits cannot be established once and for all by the invocation of some pristine abstract principle. But its essential place in the healthy life of the *plures* should ensure for it a high degree of respect, and set the bar very high for any government action that would have the effect of burdening religion's free exercise. That respect and that high bar have generally been affirmed by the Federal courts and the Congress.

A third argument for religion's special place might be called an *anthropological* one. Human beings are theotropic by their nature, inclined toward religion, and driven to relate their understanding of the highest things to their lives as lived in the community together, both metaphysically and morally. Whether this characteristic can be attributed to in-built endowment, evolutionary adaptation, or some other source, it would seem to be a good thing for the secular order to affirm our theotropic impulses rather than seek to proscribe them or inhibit their expression. Indeed, the vote of public confidence implied by such affirmation naturally engenders a sense of general loyalty to the polity, and binds religious believers affectionately to the secular political project far more effectively than would an insistence upon a rigorously secularist public square. Indeed, the latter course would present the very real danger of producing alienated subcultures of religious believers whose sectarian disaffection with the mainstream could become so profound as to represent a threat to the very cohesion of the nation. Secularists who worry about religion's taking an outsized role in public life would be better advised to give some strategic ground on that issue, and acknowledge the theotropic dimension in our makeup, even if they believe it to be a weakness or debility.

Such acknowledgement has the added benefit of promoting the development of a healthy civil religion, which is nothing more than an expression of our incorrigible need to relate secular things to ultimate purposes. Civil religion promotes political and social cohesion, while serving as a visible embodiment, of sorts, of the generalized thing we call "religion." But there are better and worse ways of doing this. Civil religion can, of course, be extremely dangerous, a form of playing with fire, and is viewed with understandable suspicion from all quarters. It borrows from the energy of specific faiths, but always carries with it the danger of usurping and displacing them, and underwriting a pernicious idolatry of the state or the nation. Hence it needs to be kept on a short leash.

But properly understood, the American civil religion also draws upon sources of moral authority that transcend the state, and are capable of holding the state

accountable to a standard higher than itself. A civil religion can be, as Yale sociologist Philip Gorski recently argued, “a mediating tradition that allows room for both religious and political values.” And the more that the activity of specific religions is accorded respect in the public sphere, the less likely it is that a civil religion will be successful in displacing them.

A fourth argument might be called the *meliorist* argument, which would acknowledge religion’s special place in American life because of the extensive social good that religious institutions have done, and continue to do, in the world; and because the doing of such good works is an essential part of the free exercise of religion. This argument follows in the footsteps of the Founders’ emphasis on moral formation of citizens, and also embraces the role of religious groups in abolishing slavery, promoting civil rights, running orphanages, caring for the indigent, and the like. But has taken on a weight of its own today, given the vast scale and scope of charitable, medical, and educational activities still undertaken by religious groups today. Let the Catholic church stand as a powerful example of this. The HHS mandate is so consequential because the Catholic church is so heavily involved in precisely these three areas, as the operator of nearly 7,500 primary and secondary schools, enrolling 2.5 million students, and some 600 hospitals (comprising nearly 13% of American hospitals and 15% of hospital beds), 400 health centers, and 1,500 specialized homes, making it the operator of the largest private educational and health-care systems in the country. In addition, Catholic Charities USA is, as of 2011, the seventh-largest charity in the nation (the second largest being the religiously oriented Salvation Army).

And, looking at the matter of religion’s life-improving qualities from another angle, one can point to a growing body of social-scientific evidence, appearing in the work of writers as diverse as Byron Johnson, Arthur Brooks, Jonathan Haidt, and Robert Putnam, indicating that religious belief correlates very reliably with the fostering of generosity, law-abidingness, helpfulness to others, civic engagement, social trust, and many other traits that are essential to a peaceful, productive, and harmonious society. One must, of course, stipulate that there will always be hypocrites, charlatans, fakes and abusers in religious organizations, as in all walks of life. But it would appear that, far from religion being a poison, as the late Christopher Hitchens liked to argue, it has, at least in America, been an antidote. It seems counterproductive to downplay its many benefits.

Last but not least, there is an argument that I will call *metaphysical*. It is often said that religious freedom is the first freedom, since it is grounded in the dignity and integrity of the human person, which requires that each of us be permitted to fulfill our right, and duty, to seek and embrace the truth about our existence, and live out our lives in accordance with our understanding of that truth. This is, or should be, a universal freedom, because the great questions of human existence are not the exclusive province of professors and savants, but belong to us all. Any good society, committed to the flourishing of its members, should recognize and encourage

and support that search. To acknowledge that fact in a public way, with an explicit recognition of the valuable place of religion, is an important declaration about the value a society places on the spiritual and moral life of its members.

But there is far more to the metaphysical argument than that. Indeed, there is a growing recognition that, in a postmodern world dominated by immense bureaucratic governments and sprawling transnational business corporations (entities that increasingly seem to operate in tandem – behemoths that are neither responsive to the tools of democratic governance nor accountable to national law nor answerable to any well-established code of behavior), religion serves as an indispensable counterweight. It is an essential resource for the upholding of human dignity and moral order, for speaking truth to power, for giving support to the concept of human rights, and for insisting that a voice of moral urgency – whether celebrating, exhorting, or rebuking – never becomes banished from the cold logic of instrumental rationality.

It has played this role before in history, and done so heroically. Evangelical religious conviction provided the animating force behind what was arguably the greatest reform movement in American history, the nineteenth-century movement to abolish slavery. The moral leadership of Pope John Paul II played a key role in bringing about the end of Soviet tyranny in Eastern Europe. Such countervailing force will almost certainly be required of it again. As the sociologist Jose Casanova eloquently argued in his 1994 book *Public Religions in the Modern World*, the modern world runs the risk of being “devoured by the inflexible, inhuman logic of its own creations,” unless it restores a “creative dialogue” with the very religious traditions it has eviscerated or abandoned. That dialogue will not be fruitful unless we sustain and protect the special public standing that religion has hitherto enjoyed.

And now, having given my five arguments, let me offer my final speculation. For there is an even deeper question here, the question of whether our concept of freedom itself, and more generally the liberal individualism we have come to embrace in the modern West, is sustainable in the absence of the Judeo-Christian religious assumptions that have hitherto accompanied and upheld it. There are a number of thoughtful atheist writers who, perhaps surprisingly, see great merit in this idea. The Italian writer Marcello Pera, for example, has argued that it is a dangerous illusion to believe that such ideas as the dignity of the human person can be sustained for long without some ultimate grounding in the deep normative orientation of the Christian faith. Ironically, the very possibility of a “secular” realm of politics, which we embrace in the West as a good thing (and which is the necessary basis for any robust understanding of religious freedom), may depend upon the presence of certain specifically Christian distinctives, embodied in culture as much as in doctrine.³

³ M. Pera, *Why We Should Call Ourselves Christians: The Religious Roots of Free Societies*, trans. L. B. Lappin, New York 2008.

This is an assertion that thoughtful secularists ought to find at least plausible. Indeed, Pera's concerns had been precisely anticipated by one of the most religiously heterodox figures of early American history, Thomas Jefferson. On one of the panels decorating the walls of the Jefferson Memorial in Washington appear these searing words: "God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that His justice cannot sleep forever."

Jefferson was speaking in that passage of the moral scourge of slavery, and asking, rhetorically, whether there could be any moral justification for the failure to extend the blessings of liberty to all men. But there is a larger implicit point. Jefferson was saying that the very possibility of human liberty itself, the liberty of every man and woman, was dependent upon our prior willingness to understand liberty as a gift of God, rather than a dispensation of man. The name of God serves as far more than a mere rhetorical device in this context. Even a world-class skeptic like Jefferson understood that erasing the name of God from the foundations of American public life could lead to fearful consequences. Which provides yet another reason why defending the special status of religion in American life is not merely a reasonable and defensible path, but one of fundamental importance.

**Czy religia powinna cieszyć się szczególną ochroną w społeczeństwie amerykańskim?
Pięć argumentów i hipoteza**

Artykuł podejmuje kluczowy dla zrozumienia współczesnych wojen o kulturę temat obecności religii w przestrzeni publicznej w Stanach Zjednoczonych. Pokazuje niezbędny kulturotwórczy charakter doświadczenia religijnego w USA w budowaniu stabilnego porządku politycznego. Autor uważa, że publiczna obecność religii jest warunkiem koniecznym do nadania dyspacji na temat celów wspólnoty amerykańskiej wymiaru pluralistycznego i obywatelskiego.

Jeremy Rabkin

**THE “CULTURE WAR” WILL CONTINUE
– BECAUSE IT ISN’T A WAR**

“Culture war” returned to American politics over the past year – at least that expression did. It seemed a throw-back to another time. In the late 1990s, prominent activists on the right acknowledged that the “culture war” of that era had ended. “We probably have lost the culture war,” a prominent cultural conservative concluded, after the Senate rejected impeachment charges against President Clinton.¹

The term had come to prominence in 1992, when political commentator Patrick J. Buchanan used it in a speech to the Republican National Convention. One liberal commentator remarked at the time that Buchanan’s speech “would have sounded better in the original German.” That was unfair, of course – but there was something to it.²

¹ Paul Weyrich, who helped organize the Heritage Foundation and the Free Congress Foundation in the 1970s – mainstays of conservative advocacy – said this in a February 1999 letter to supporters. It received a good deal of publicity at the time and was interpreted (by many liberal commentators, at least) as a semi-official concession statement, of the sort that candidates make after losing an election. Weyrich died in 2008.

² The quip is attributed to Molly Ivins, a Texas-based liberal columnist with a particularly sharp tongue. She seems not to have intended any reference to Bismarck – who launched the term *kulturkampf* in the 1870s – but to the murderous Germans of a later era. Mario Cuomo, liberal Catholic governor of New York at the time, offered the same anachronistic response when he denounced Buchanan’s speech with the remark, “What do you mean by ‘culture?’ That’s a word they used in Nazi Germany.” It was not, in fact, a word “they” used as a term of respect: Reichsmarschall Goering popularized the saying, “When I hear the word ‘culture,’ I reach for my revolver.”

Buchanan had started his political career as a speech writer for Richard Nixon in 1968, stayed with Nixon through the agonies of the Watergate scandal, then launched a successful career as a newspaper columnist and television commentator. He is certainly a gifted polemicist. He has earned the title – regularly conferred by talk radio hosts – “a great American.” But as a political actor, even as a political strategist, he has displayed many flaws. When he sought the Republican nomination for president in 1992, he did not win a single state primary.

The term “culture war” – as a metaphor – has obvious attraction if you are, like Buchanan, of a pugnacious disposition (or, as one might say, inclined to be culturally belligerent). In “war,” you must choose sides. In “war,” you must submit to the commanders on your side, lest your enemies prevail. “War” polarizes commitments, reducing all choices to “friend” or “enemy.”³ Still, “war” is an odd word to join with “culture,” a term usually associated with dialogue and reflection, with immersion in the teachings of deep thinkers and inspiring artists of past times and distant places. Buchanan’s 1992 speech actually offered “culture war” as a synonym for “religious war.” Most Americans shudder at “religious war” – conceiving America as a place of refuge from the horrors inflicted by persecuting zealots in the Old World.

I should say at the outset that I side with the bulk of my fellow Americans – I don’t like the implications of the term “culture war.” But I sympathize with most of the positions advocated by social conservatives. There is still a lot of dispute and division in today’s America about “social issues” – abortion, gay marriage, multiculturalism and others. Some commentators insist that the Republican Party must abandon these issues and get back to “fundamentals” – by which they mean, economic issues. I don’t agree with that. The social issues are also fundamental. Vast numbers of people care very intensely about them. Vastly more people will be affected by how they are resolved. In the 2012 elections, only a minority of voters described themselves as “conservative” (35%) – but significantly fewer as “liberal” (25%).⁴ There is plenty of room for continuing debate on social issues. In a longer view of American history, moreover, there is nothing new about debate on social issues. But I wouldn’t

³ That is, at any rate, supposed to be the logic of taking war as the ultimate political act. Many belligerent characters are so ready to take offense that they lack the political discipline to stay focused on the main enemy. The problem is as old as Homer’s Achilles. And still evident in Buchanan’s career as a polemicist. Even in 1992, in the midst of the election, he gave a speech defending the honor of Confederate troops in the Civil War. Some years later, he published an entire book devoted to attacking the strategic visions of Churchill and Roosevelt, in order to defend the honor of their American isolationist critics in 1940–1941. It is grossly unfair to characterize Buchanan as either a racist or a fascist sympathizer. But his impulse to continue brawling over long-ago battles did not help him win supporters for the contemporary causes he sought to champion.

⁴ These and other references to 2012 election surveys are from the so-called “exit polls” conducted by a consortium of news organizations of voters leaving polling stations on election day. The survey did not sample voters in all states and did not, of course, sample potential voters who chose not to vote in 2012, which may have slightly skewed results toward the left, as the Obama campaign seems to have done better at getting its voters to the polls in 2012 than Republicans did.

call such debates “culture war.” My term would be “politics.” A democracy needs serious, even intense internal debate – but not conflicts so heated that they seem like a “war.” The United States had a genuine civil war in the nineteenth century. What makes it possible to continue intense debates is that everyone (or almost everyone) realizes the American public has no longing to repeat that experience.

Why Talk of Culture War Revived in 2012

Three factors in the immediate background helped to bring talk of “culture war” back into political debate in 2012. The first was that the Obama campaign – and a host of supportive liberal commentators – thought such talk would help mobilize its own supporters.

Obama had come to office on a wave of optimism – “hope and change,” his seemingly vacuous campaign slogan, seemed genuinely to inspire supporters in 2008. The very fact that Obama would be the first African-American president inspired hope of transcending past divisions. By 2012, a stagnating economy and an unpopular (and intimidatingly complex) health reform law had left even Democrats somewhat dispirited. The Obama strategy, therefore, turned on discrediting the Republican challenger, Mitt Romney, by depicting him as an “out of touch” investment banker who had tied himself to extreme social conservatives.

So, for example, when Republicans criticized the Obama administration for requiring even Catholic universities to provide contraceptives to students, as part of the health care program, Democrats insinuated that Romney and Republicans might seek to prohibit the sale of birth control pills and devices altogether. Liberal commentators gleefully talked about “the return of the culture wars.” And that part of the campaign may have proved effective. Contrary to Republican expectations, unmarried women gave the same lop-sided majorities to Obama in 2012 as they had in 2008. Meanwhile, on the Republican side, the opposite challenge to Romney encouraged the same result. Romney had been elected governor of liberal Massachusetts in 2002, by reassuring voters that he was an experienced businessman but not a social conservative. He was emphatic in his support of existing liberal laws on abortion. When the state supreme court in Massachusetts ruled that same sex couples must be allowed to marry – on the basis of a rather strained reading of the state constitution, originally drafted by John Adams in 1780 – Romney criticized the result but did not do much to mobilize opposition. In seeking the Republican nomination in 2012, he was challenged by rival candidates who accused him of “flip-flopping” and having “no real convictions.” Romney made efforts to reassure voters in Republican primaries by calling himself “severely conservative” and embracing the right-to-life cause, as well as demanding stronger enforcement of immigration laws.⁵

⁵ There is no inherent reason why demand for tougher enforcement of immigration laws should be coupled with opposition to abortion or with conservative stands on other issues. Catholic bishops have urged sympathetic accommodations for illegal aliens (that is, those who entered

One other factor helped to exacerbate the political strains sometimes characterized as “culture war.” Ronald Reagan’s elections in 1980 and 1984 seemed to promise (or, from the Democratic perspective, to threaten) a long term realignment of American politics, which had been dominated by the Democratic party since the 1930s. Instead, the decades since then have regularly generated closely matched party contests. So, for example, in the two decades preceding 2012, majority control in the House of Representatives changed hands in four elections. In the four decades preceding 1994, elections had delivered a continuous Democratic majority. Clinton had won narrow majorities in his campaigns for president in the 1990s (only a plurality, in fact, in the 1992 race, where independent candidate Ross Perot did surprisingly well) and George Bush won election in 2000 with fewer overall votes than Democrat Al Gore (though Bush carried majorities in more states).

With the 2008 elections generally discounted as a fluke, both sides in 2012 tried to mobilize supporters by warning about extreme consequences from a victory of the other. Both sides tried to raise alarms about hidden agendas and secret aims among opponents, urging the need for a rallying of the party faithful on behalf of core values. Conservatives talked about the need to “take back America” – from scheming progressives. On the left, there were warnings that Republicans wanted “not only to repeal the New Deal, but to repeal the Enlightenment.”

But the rhetoric of partisans does not always reflect the opinions of the general run of voters. Morris Fiorina, one of the leading scholars of American politics, published a book a few years ago, debunking the idea that the American electorate has actually been riven by a “culture war.”⁶ He argues that a *closely* divided electorate need not be *intensely* divided or *culturally* polarized. He offers a great deal of evidence from opinion surveys indicating that the bulk of American voters tend toward compromise, embracing middle positions on intense social controversies such as abortion and same-sex marriage. Nor is it true, he shows, that social issues have eclipsed disputes about economic policy or more conventional scrambles over government spending, taxes and regulatory priorities. In Fiorina’s view, the rhetoric of “culture war” reflects the priorities of politicians and political activists rather than the concerns of most ordinary citizens.

the country, usually from Mexico or Central America, in non-legal ways), without lessening their public opposition to abortion. In the past, labor unions urged tougher enforcement of restrictions on immigration without committing to conservative positions on other social issues. Calls for tighter controls on immigration have found more support from social conservatives in recent decades partly from broader concerns about multiculturalism and partly from fear that, once able to vote, immigrants would be recruited as reliable supporters of liberal candidates.

⁶ P. Morris Fiorina, S. Abrams, J. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, Longman 2011. The book also offers convincing evidence (from surveys) that opinion on a range of controversial social issues – such as stricter gun control, capital punishment, racial preferences, adoption by homosexual couples – is roughly the same in reliable Republican voting states as in reliable Democratic states (Ch. 3: “Red and Blue State People are Not That Different”).

If opinion polls can be trusted, there is much truth in these claims. In 2012 exit polls, for example, a majority of voters endorsed the view that abortion should be legal in some but not all cases. Only 29% endorsed access to abortion "in all cases"; only 13% favored making abortion "illegal in all cases."

Fiorina's assessment accords with my own perception, living and working in the Washington metropolitan area, where there are plenty of partisans on both sides. People avoid touchy subjects when they sense they will provoke a heated exchange, preferring to cooperate on the business at hand rather than bicker over national controversies. But people don't seem to feel the need to disguise their political positions, either.⁷ It is common for people to have relatives who hold to opposing views on social issues. Even husbands and wives sometimes take opposing sides (the sort of marriage I would not recommend, but a number of my younger colleagues have thought to undertake – evidently for love). These are not separate worlds confronting each other across a yawning gulf of ignorance and suspicion.

When he conceded defeat on election night, Romney asked his supporters at a hotel in Boston to applaud President Obama for running a successful race. They did so (on national television). An hour later, at a hotel in Chicago, President Obama asked his supporters to offer a round of applause for Romney's campaign. They also did so (on national television). No one seemed to think this display of good sportsmanship on each side was particularly notable.

Still, it's notable that Americans continue to debate social issues as much as they do. It is the one western country where social issues do remain a recurrent theme in national politics, because advocates of conservative views are not discouraged or marginalized. A certain form of populist conservatism remains an ongoing factor in American political life, not something that simply pops up at moments of extreme stress (as in much of post-war Europe, where respectable parties respond at such moments by joining together to squelch such outbursts of populist anger on the right).

There are two ways of explaining this aspect of "American exceptionalism." The United States has exceptional institutional structures that allow a broader range of issues to enter into political debate. But the United States also has a somewhat exceptional political culture, which permits a wider portion of the electorate to respond sympathetically (or at least tolerantly) to appeals from social conservatives. Both these factors, I think, help explain the persistence of debate on social issues.

⁷ Nor did there seem to be any significant degree of racial tension in Washington. Whites, blacks and Hispanics seemed to interact in public places without any tension, as much during the election season as before. In the same election that saw Barack Obama regain the presidency, voters in Washington D.C. replaced a scandal-ridden incumbent city councilman who was black with a white reformist challenger. No one seemed to give much attention to the racial element in the local race, though it was one of the council seats chosen on an at-large basis (potentially pitting blacks in the whole city against whites in the whole city).

How the Constitution Promotes Competition on Social Issues

Issues can be agitated in American politics even when party leaders would prefer that they be disregarded, even when a majority of voters might so prefer. I am not sure that makes the American system more democratic. But compared with other Western countries, power and authority is more diffused. There are several structural features of the system which promote that result.

First is the strength of the two party system. All systems where the president is directly elected encourage broad coalition parties, since a contender will either gain the presidency or fail to do so and there is no consolation for coming in second, let alone third or fourth. In the American system, that is also true for elections to the legislature, where candidates are chosen from individual districts (for the House of Representatives) and individual states (for the Senate) and again there is no consolation prize for coming in second. All fifty states have very similar systems, with directly elected governors and legislatures chosen by single member districts.

In consequence, it seems futile in America to try to organize distinct political constituencies (or highlight particular, narrow issues) with separate parties. It is not unlawful and it is not unheard of – New York State has long had a separate “Right-to-Life” party running its own candidates (or endorsing those fielded by major parties). Various parties of the extreme left have also tried to field candidates. But such parties rarely affect the results.

Groups with focused agendas therefore try to press them through the major parties, somewhat blurring the issue profile of each party. In Germany, support for the Green Party or the Free Democrats indicates how much priority voters really give to environmental concerns or business concerns. In America, it is easy for these groups to imagine that their priorities are more widely shared, since they are embedded in parties that win far more support than these groups could claim in their own parties. Since candidates are not chosen by a central party organization but by local primary elections, groups with local strength can mobilize support for candidates who share their priorities in states or districts where their numbers are greatest. Thus, right to life advocates have more strength in Congress than they might, if chosen by central party organizations catering to national majority sentiment.

The strong separation of powers in the American system also provides many openings for groups with more focused agendas. The president and members of Congress serve for fixed terms, regardless of whether a majority in either house agrees to support presidential priorities. That makes it hard to assert party discipline on individual legislators. And a great deal of legislative activity is actually the work of committees, because the American version of separation of powers means bills are actually crafted by legislative committees rather than executive specialists. Legislative oversight of executive policies can be quite active and probing.

On committees, the priorities of the committee chairman can loom much larger than the concerns of party leaders, even in the same chamber.⁸

So Congress has repeatedly been embroiled in seemingly secondary questions like what sorts of federal health spending (as for members of the military) can cover abortion, whether homosexuals can be excluded from the armed forces and how such a ban should be interpreted and applied. As the political scientist James Q. Wilson summed it up, in European parliamentary systems, policy disputes are like prize fights, with fixed rules and usually with clear winners. In America, "policy making ... is more like a barroom brawl: Anybody can join in, the combatants fight all comers and sometimes change sides, no referee is in charge and the fight lasts not for a fixed number of rounds but indefinitely or until everybody drops from exhaustion."⁹

Meanwhile, the existence of fifty states, with wide political autonomy, gives much scope for political activism at lower levels. Each state has its own criminal law. Each state has its own laws for regulating education, health care, marriage and family relations – not to mention its own tax law and laws on regulation of natural resources. In the late nineteenth century, advocates for banning the sale of alcoholic beverages started their efforts at the state level and the strength of different constituencies in different parts of the country then helped them to win enough support from both parties at the national level to entrench a national ban in the Constitution in 1919. Without federalism, the movement might never have achieved national success, since it encountered strong opposition in major states.¹⁰

⁸ Here are two examples from my own experience. In the summer of 2008 (when Democrats controlled the House), critics of the Iraq war persuaded the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee to hold hearings on whether George Bush should be impeached for tricking the country into war. Democratic leaders did not want to pursue this distracting claim but activists insisted there must be hearings. And activists seemed to pay close attention. When I said in my testimony that advocates for impeaching the president sounded "demented," my cell phone began to buzz within minutes – as angry citizens sent angry emails to protest my comments, which they had seen on the cable television channel devoted to congressional hearings. They immediately tracked down my email from the Internet, then blasted out their messages of rebuke. In 2011 (when the House had reverted to Republican control), the Judiciary Committee held hearings on whether to enact legislation banning references to foreign law and Sharia law in American court rulings – something even the most conservative justices of the Supreme Court had questioned (as a legislative measure) and the American Bar Association (the professional organization for lawyers) had strongly opposed. Democrats on the Committee invoked statements of conservative Supreme Court justices to show that it was wrong to legislate restraints on judicial reasoning. Republicans on the committee dismissed such appeals to legal propriety (usually of more concern to Republicans), noting that polls showed support for confining American court rulings to American sources of law. In neither case did these hearings generate actual legislation, but in neither case was that the point: they served the purpose of reassuring activists on each side that "their" representatives were heeding their concerns.

⁹ J. Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy*, Basic Books 2000, pp. 299–300.

¹⁰ For recent accounts stressing the local roots of the Prohibition Amendment (the 18th) and the importance of earlier control ventures in the states, see: A.-M. Szymanski, *Pathways to Prohibition: Radicals, Moderates and Social Movement Outcomes*, Duke University Press 2003; R. Hamm, *Shaping the Eighteenth Amendment: temperance reform, legal culture and the polity*,

The pattern has been repeated in recent times on controversial social issues, like same-sex marriage. Activists seeking approval for same-sex marriages have pursued their efforts on a state-by-state basis. A few state legislatures have embraced the idea (and a few state courts) but opponents have organized effective counter movements. Advocates for same sex marriage were defeated in some thirty state-wide ballots over the previous decade, but in 2012 they won state referenda in Maryland, Maine and Washington (the state in the Pacific Northwest). Defenders of traditional marriage defeated a same-sex marriage proposal in Minnesota. In 2010, they won a state referendum, entrenching the traditional definition even in California, a strongly Democratic state.

Finally, standing at a remove from electoral politics, the federal judiciary (along with some state judiciaries¹¹) has scope for quite activist interventions in policy debates. Federal judges serve during “good behavior” – in practice, that means for as long as they like. Individuals can be appointed even to the Supreme Court with no previous judicial experience (as was true of the most recent appointee, Elena Kagan, previously a legal advisor to President Clinton). The fragmented political system has few means of imposing brakes on the judges, particularly when they invoke broad phrases in the U.S. Constitution (which is extremely cumbersome to amend).

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Supreme Court launched a whole series of initiatives that imposed national standards in areas previously left to the states – starting with prohibitions on racial segregation in southern schools, moving on to state “entanglements” with religion (such as Bible reading or prayers in public schools or financial aid to parochial schools) and culminating in the rulings against restrictions on abortion. Because of the Supreme Court, the United States has the most permissive laws on access to abortion of any Western country. It also has among the most restrictive rules on state funding for religious education and state sponsorship of religious symbols – partly for the same reason. The Supreme Court imposed policies which neither party at the time would have embraced, nor have had the strength to impose against inevitable opposition. Neither the European Court of

1880–1920, University of North Carolina Press 1995. It is notable that the battles over Prohibition did not simply pit conservatives against liberals – the majority of self-identified “Progressives” (adhering to Theodore Roosevelt’s “Progressive Party” in 1912) voted in favor of the Prohibition Amendment, which received broad support from social reformers at the time, even as control of narcotics was supported by most liberals later in the Twentieth Century. Nor was it a dispute between the parties. President Wilson (a Democrat) endorsed the amendment when it was put to the states for ratification in 1917, as did the subsequent Republican candidate for President (in 1920), Warren Harding. The national Democratic party platform did not oppose Prohibition until 1928, when the party nominated New York Governor Al Smith – who went on to a crushing defeat in the subsequent election.

¹¹ In many states, judges are elected for limited terms. In others, they are subject to recall if enough citizens sign petitions demanding such a test of voter support. Many states also provide that the state constitution can be amended by direct vote of the citizens. These factors exert some constraint on activist rulings by state judges, but they don’t apply in all states.

Human Rights nor any national constitutional court in any Western country has taken such extreme stands on these issues.

The Court overestimated public support for its liberalizing ventures in the 1960s and early 1970s. It had seen massive resistance to its earlier rulings against racial segregation in southern schools, then seen that resistance ebb, finally seen it almost entirely vanish, as overwhelming national majorities gave emphatic support to the general line of the Court's rulings. Liberal activist groups had organized litigation campaigns on new issues – on behalf of women, immigrants and poor people – and it seemed plausible that opposition could be overcome on new controversies, as well. Instead, the Supreme Court became an issue in national politics.

Republican presidents (Nixon, Ford, Reagan, both Bushes) made a point of selecting more conservative (or at least, more cautious) judges. Conservatives organized their own advocacy groups to urge competing positions (or advocate for their positions on new issues). Courts have, in fact, shown sympathy for a range of conservative claims since the 1980s – such as imposing new restrictions on racial preferences for affirmative action, requiring equal access to funding for religious groups at universities, and requiring that religious groups be allowed equal access to public school facilities in after-school programs.

Where the majority was strongly with them, conservatives gained more substantial and resonant victories. In the early 1970s, for example, the Supreme Court questioned the validity of capital punishment, on the grounds that juries seemed increasingly disinclined to impose this ultimate punishment. In the midst of larger debates about rising crime, advocates for reinstating the death penalty rallied state legislatures in most states and persuaded the Supreme Court to accept the practice with some procedural adjustments in jury deliberations. The United States is now the only Western country that still has capital punishment – because determined majorities are not easily sidetracked in America, as they have been in most other Western countries.

On some issues, however, advocates who once had majority support, at least within their own states, have been decisively repudiated. Advocates for racial segregation of schools abandoned their efforts by the late 1960s, as voters, even in the Deep South, recognized that the matter had already been settled against them by national law and wasn't going to change. Advocates for extreme measures to achieve statistical integration of public schools – who had demanded busing of students from different neighborhoods so that schools would reflect a level of racial diversity not found in individual neighborhoods – largely gave up on their efforts in the 1980s, recognizing that the tide of national opinion (as of Supreme Court rulings) was running strongly and irrevocably against them.

One might have expected intense social issues, like abortion, to fade from active political debate in a similar way. That is probably what liberals on the Supreme Court expected in 1973, when they first brought the issue to national politics by announcing a right to abortion in the federal Constitution. That is certainly what

liberals in 1992 hoped, when the Supreme Court insisted that the 1973 precedent must stand, but should be interpreted to allow more scope for state regulation. In fact, a quite active debate continues and polls suggest young people are today somewhat more sympathetic to restraints on abortion than their counterparts twenty years ago. There is still much room for debate at the state level on protective measures and at the federal level, on whether (or in what circumstances) abortion will be funded by federal health programs. Issues which were almost invisible twenty years ago – such as the definition of marriage – have stirred new debates.

These debates seem to be much more prominent in American politics than in other western countries. To put the point more simply, advocates for cultural conservative positions seem to have more opportunity in America than in other western countries.¹² Some of this difference may be explained by different institutional arrangements. But some of it seems to reflect a different background culture.

How American Culture Supports Political Conflict on Social Issues

Three “cultural” factors (in this sense) seem particularly important in explaining why American politics is able to sustain these conflicts. First, religion has a different status in the United States than in other Western countries. That makes it hard to isolate and stigmatize advocates for culturally conservative views as agents of a threatening religious authority, angling to oppress the suspicious or distrustful majority.

America has always been a religiously diverse nation – more so than any other Western country. Before the American revolution, there were religious establishments in many American states, but they were different and somewhat distrustful of each other (Calvinists in New England, Anglicans in the South – churches which had been on opposite sides of the English Civil War in the 17th Century). There were many smaller groups which loomed large in particular colonies, like Quakers in Pennsylvania and Catholics in Maryland. No one thought the United States could sustain a national church.

While Protestants have remained the majority since the founding, they have become more and more splintered among competing denominations. The majority of American Protestants are now affiliated denominations which were never established churches, even in Europe. Catholics and Jews were added to the mix in the 19th and early 20th Centuries, which did generate some tensions but never to the point of challenging the claims of new minorities to participate in public life. America is therefore accustomed to religious competition. That makes it hard to

¹² For a recent work emphasizing American distinctiveness on this score – and lauding it as a contribution to American political health – see: J. Bell, *The Case for Polarized Politics: Why America Needs Social Conservatism*, Encounter 2012, esp. ch. 9 on smothering of patriotic and religious expression in European politics since the 1960s.

stigmatize conservatives as frightening avatars of oppression. It's not that the left doesn't try to depict conservatives as oppressive, but that the majority of voters are not easily spooked by such warning. The majority does not find religion inherently threatening.

Religion is not associated with an oppressive former regime. It is associated with the founding regime – certainly, in the principle of respect for religious freedom. There are churches or religious communities that tend toward conservative views – and many that emphasize concerns (peace, support for the poor, equality) more associated with the left. Religious leaders have been prominent in current debates about abortion and same-sex marriage, but religious leaders also played prominent roles in the civil rights movements of the 1960s and the peace movements of the 1970s and 1980s.

The country does not seem to be intensely polarized around religion. In exit polls during the 2012 elections, only 17% of voters claimed they “never” attend religious services, while 55% claimed to attend at least a few times each month, 42% at least once a week. The more church-going, the more likely to support Romney – but even among once-a-week church-goers, 42% voted Obama (while even among those claiming “never” to attend religious services, 34% supported Romney).

It is hard in America, even today, to make a successful career in national politics on a platform of open hostility to religion. Republicans arranged for Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York to give a public benediction at their national convention in 2012. After a bit of hesitation, Democrats decided they must accept his offer to do the same at their convention. The Democrats were criticized for offering a party platform in 2012 omitting any mention of God or of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, as past platforms had. These defects were promptly rectified – in full view of television audiences by open vote of the members.¹³

In the second place, America is a country that welcomes entrepreneurial energy – by simultaneously promoting respect for individual judgment and populist distrust of authority. That has often been an advantage for start-up business. Henry Ford and the Wright Brothers had no special training and no ties to established industrialists. That did not stop them from launching whole new industries. They had many counterparts in their day – as Steve Jobs (Apple) and Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook) have had in ours.

¹³ Those who watched the moment on television could doubt that the required majority supported the change, since the decision was taken by voice vote in a crowded hall. The chairman, Antonio Villaraigosa, asked for a second vote when the relative strength of ayes and nays seemed inconclusive. When shouts on each side seemed as evenly matched on the second call, he simply ruled from the chair in favor of the changes – clearly the preferred result for Obama strategists. Activists who influenced the text of the platform might have been disappointed. They did not make a fuss. A Gallup Poll released a few months earlier (Mar. 2) found favorable views toward Israel among 80% of Republican voters, 65% of Democrats; favorable views of the Palestinian Authority among 15% of Republicans, 22% of Democrats. Whatever the spiritual, cultural or moral implications of support for Israel, it is not an issue that divides the two main parties in today's America.

The openness to individual or local initiative appears in the political realm. In the early 19th Century, Tocqueville marveled at how quick Americans were to form voluntary associations to advocate for public projects or to organize them privately.¹⁴ In the 20th Century, local groups have mobilized to advocate for a vast range of causes. Not endorsed by government? Not sponsored by or affiliated with a major political party? Not a problem. So the left gets advocates more extreme or more shrill than Democratic party leaders might like – evident in some of the extreme rhetoric, for example, of the anti-war movement (jeering at the highly respected General David Petraeus as “General Betray-us,” while opposing his plan for a “surge” of additional troops to Iraq in 2007). Conservative activists who wanted to displace incumbents (or otherwise leading contenders) with more hard-edged advocates got their chance in a number of Senate races in 2010 and 2012 – and often lost general election races in consequence.¹⁵

One of the most notable things about social conservative movements in the United States in recent decades is how protean they have been. Catholics have taken the lead in protesting against abortion, but have done well in drawing Evangelicals into such groups as Americans United for Life. In the 1980s, a Baptist minister formed “the Moral Majority” to campaign for conservative causes – making a special point of trying to recruit conservative Catholics and religious Jews to gather under the same tent. The failure of that effort led to a different effort in the 1990s, “the Christian Coalition,” whose director candidly conceded, “We know that we are *not* the majority.”¹⁶ In many states, religious conservatives were drawn into politics to participate in focused campaigns on specific social issues, but then continued to be engaged in political campaigns, even when their initial organizations (like the Christian Coalition) faded.¹⁷ That seems to have helped the latest broad-based

¹⁴ *Democracy in America*, Vol. 2, Part 2, Ch. 5.

¹⁵ Candidates backed by the Tea Party (against more moderate or established opponents in Republican primaries) went down to defeat in Delaware and Nevada in 2010 and in Missouri and Indiana in 2012 – all states where Republicans had good prospects to hold or retake seats. But conservative insurgents who captured nominations against candidates supported by national Republican support groups) went on to win notable Republican races in Florida (Marco Rubio), New Hampshire (Kelly Ayotte) and Kentucky (Rand Paul) in 2010, then in Arizona (Jeff Flake) and Texas (Ted Cruz) in 2012.

¹⁶ Statement attributed to Ralph Reed, first Executive Director of the Christian Coalition (1989–1997), associated with the Evangelical broadcaster, Pat Robertson. Robertson failed to win a single primary when he sought the Republican presidential nomination in 1988. Reed was rejected by Republican voters in Georgia in 2006, when he sought their nomination to run for Lieutenant Governor. In 2009, he organized the “Faith and Freedom Coalition,” which was active, in 2012, in trying to mobilize Evangelical support for the Romney campaign.

¹⁷ See: J. A. Shields, *The Democratic Virtues of the Christian Right*, Princeton University Press 2009, esp. Ch. 5, for an account of how the experience of political advocacy for particular issues helped many Evangelical Christians to embrace more conventional forms of participation in election campaigns. One regular survey, for example, found that between 1972 and 2004, the percentage of conservative Evangelicals who claimed they had engaged in efforts to persuade others to vote climbed from 23% to 49%. By 2004, conservative Evangelicals had the same level of participation in campaigns as other Americans. Three decades earlier they had been much less likely to participate in campaign efforts (as by displaying signs, buttons or bumper stickers) (at p. 126).

conservative movement, the so-called “Tea Party.” The Tea Party – not, in fact, a party but a loose network of local advocacy groups – arose quite spontaneously in 2010 in opposition to Obama spending and borrowing policies and the new health care law. Though the Tea Party groups emphasized economic concerns, quite a lot of energy from earlier social conservative efforts flowed into Tea Party groups, particularly at local levels and in mobilizations for local primary races in the spring of 2012. Many of their candidates failed. But the energy behind them will probably find new outlets. It may have been a net help to Romney in 2012. While exit polls found only 21% of voters described themselves as “supporters” of the Tea Party, compared with 30% who said they opposed it, the plurality (42%) described themselves as “neutral” and they went decisively (57%) for Romney (along with 87% of self-described Tea Party supporters).

Finally, it seems helpful that America has an unusual level of constitutional continuity. The Constitution is generally revered and very rarely amended.¹⁸ It is nearly impossible to sell voters on major constitutional changes, such as tampering with the electoral college scheme for electing the president (where votes are counted by state, in proportion to population, rather than by direct national aggregates) or varying the equal representation of states in the Senate.

In a somewhat paradoxical way, the background of constitutional stability may be somewhat liberating for advocacy groups – no groups bear the burden of challenging the whole system (to be “extremist” one must be genuinely extreme) and most groups can claim some portion of the country’s constitutional heritage to enhance the status of their own agenda. President Obama started his 2012 campaign in a Kansas town where Theodore Roosevelt launched his own campaign a century earlier. Right-to-life groups often try to associate their cause with heroes of the civil rights movement of the 1960s or opponents of slavery in the nineteenth century. It is notable – though rarely noted, in fact – that the most broad-based conservative movement in the 2012 election cycle associated itself with revolutiona-

¹⁸ Republicans in the House decided to commemorate their recapturing the majority in 2010 by undertaking a line-by-line public reading of the Constitution, with successive provisions read by different individual members. The point may have been to indicate sympathy for Tea Party concerns about a federal government exceeding the powers originally allocated to it in the Constitution. But almost all House Democrats took part in the ceremony. In the 1980s, conservatives organized a society of law students and lawyers, named for the party that sponsored the Constitution in 1787 – “The Federalist Society.” It has chapters in over 300 law schools (including every major law school) in all large cities and regularly recruits Supreme Court justices and other distinguished jurists to speak at its conferences. Liberals eventually organized a left-leaning counterpart. Refusing to cede the prestige of the national charter, they called their rival organization “the American Constitution Society.” The Federalist Society (like a number of conservative groups) distributes pocket-sized editions of the Constitution. The ACS distributes its own pocket-sized edition of the Constitution, but adds to it Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. Someone perhaps imagined that this would be seen as a rebuke to extreme states-rights advocates (or Confederate sympathizers) on the right. But no Republican ever got in trouble for quoting the first president elected from the Republican party – Abraham Lincoln.

ries.¹⁹ A stable constitutional system has great tolerance for the rhetoric of populist revolt. That can be helpful to populists of both parties.

Prospects in Historical Perspective

Liberal commentators in America saw the 2012 election as a vindication of their hopes – that a changing America was changing their way. Democrats won solid majorities of women voters, young voters and overwhelming majorities of black and Hispanic voters. Republicans won the votes of older white males – a declining share of the electorate. Their shrill complaints against Obama could not deliver them a majority even after four years of high unemployment and continuing economic stagnation. So, according to this view, Republicans must repudiate (or muzzle) social conservative voices in their midst, if they hope to make themselves competitive in future elections.

I am skeptical of this view. Romney proved to be a poor candidate for the conditions of 2012. As a former Republican governor in the very Democratic state of Massachusetts, he was inclined to conciliatory, vague rhetoric – which he sometimes abandoned in his Republican primary contests in the spring of 2012 (against more conservative candidates) and then sounded unconvincing when he returned to such rhetoric in the general election. Having made a career in investment banking, he was an all too easy target for Democratic warnings that reckless and greedy bankers were the cause of the country's economic problems. Having sponsored a state law requiring citizens to buy health insurance, he was not in a good position to attack Obama's national health care law, though it remained unpopular.²⁰

Apart from Romney's personal flaws, turning out an incumbent president is hard to do. Only three presidents have lost bids for reelection in the past century. Hoover (1932) and Carter (1976) presided over much more severe economic distress and George H.W. Bush (1992) faced the challenge of the first serious third-party candidate in decades. Obama won re-election in 2012 by about the same margin as George W. Bush in 2004. Some Democrats worried in 2004 that they would never reclaim the White House if they couldn't defeat an inarticulate bumbler who had led the country into two unpopular wars. Predictions about Republi-

¹⁹ Participants in the original Tea Party in 1773 seized shipments of tea from the British East India Company and threw them into Boston Harbor. They organized this "reception" (it was a "party" in the sense of a social occasion, not an electoral mobilization) to protest the British Parliament's effort to impose a tax on tea, without the consent of American colonists. It was one of the celebrated incidents that helped to set off the American Revolution. It was condemned at the time by such leading patriots as George Washington – since it started with an attack on private property. It was certainly criminal. The participants dressed as Indians and painted their faces to avoid being identified. They would not be the last renegades to be celebrated in American lore.

²⁰ Accordingly to exit polls, 49% of voters wanted to "repeal some" or "all" of the Obama health care law; 44% wanted to "expand it or leave it as is."

can prospects in 2016 (when there will be no incumbent in the race) are no better grounded.

The long-term demographic trends may now seem to favor Democrats but not to an extent that prevents Republicans from competing. Today's young voters will grow up – and probably trend toward the right as older voters do now. A lot of unmarried women will eventually marry and married women trend Republican. Neither young people nor unmarried women are, per se, a growing portion of the electorate. Hispanic voters are the fastest growing portion of the electorate and they gave 70 per cent of their votes to the Obama campaign in 2012. The Democrats have been better at recruiting immigrant voters since large waves of Irish immigrants started appearing in the United States in the 1830s. But some Republicans have done better at appealing to Hispanics – George Bush, both in races for governor in Texas and in his presidential races, is a notable example.

And historic patterns change over time. Immigrants and their children and grandchildren voted overwhelmingly for Democrats in the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth. Since the 1980s, the (non-Hispanic) Catholic vote has been trending toward Republicans and Romney continued the trend, winning a solid majority of that category. Meanwhile, voters in southern states, reliable Democrats for over a century after the Civil War, have become reliable Republican voters in the past generation (apart from black voters and voters in states like Florida and Virginia, with many migrants from outside). What keeps the parties competitive is that in the Northeast and Midwest, historic Republican voters (from older Protestant denominations) have shifted their allegiance to Democrats. People can change their priorities and allegiances over time.

There are certainly long-term trends that are worrisome for a conservative party. In America, as in other Western countries, young people are delaying or abandoning marriage. There are more children born outside of marriage but fewer children overall. These are worrying trends for a party that has emphasized "family values." But the trends are not good news for the party that emphasizes government assistance to the poor. Family breakdown is a well established path to poverty, while low birthrates spell fewer future taxpayers to finance government assistance programs in the future.

There are, of course, ongoing disputes about the role of government in the economy. And disputes about social issues don't map neatly onto disputes about economic policy. You might be strongly opposed to abortion and same sex marriage but favor higher taxes on business and more generous government spending to help the poor and the middle class. Of voters who favor restrictions on abortion in all or most cases, fully a fifth voted for Obama in 2012 (according to exit polls). As recently as the 1980s, the Catholic Bishops Conference in the United States seemed more a critic than an ally to the Reagan administration (which the bishops criticized for deploying a new generation of nuclear missiles while constraining spending for

the poor).²¹ Many Hispanic voters – and many black voters, for that matter – embrace conservative views on social issues, while still voting for liberal Democrats based on economic policy.

The conflicts can work in both directions. Voters who sympathize with the aims of large government programs don't necessarily sympathize with all their consequences. When the Obama administration tried to extend the obligation of employers to cover contraceptives in their health insurance plans, Catholic bishops protested – and gained enough public sympathy that the Obama administration announced a compromise, designed to allow employers (such as Catholic hospitals or Catholic universities) to claim that insurance companies were actually paying for such benefits rather than the entities purchasing their insurance policies. The Church did not accept this compromise and the matter will go to the courts. It will certainly not be the only issue to find its way into courts – or into public debate.

The nightmare of conservatives is that as the central state takes on more and more responsibilities, it will use its authority to crush the independence of religious institutions. That was the aim of the original *kulturkampf* – the one launched by German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck in the 1870s. Among other things, Bismarck's "reforms" (in Prussia, with its Protestant majority) prohibited Catholic priests from administering the sacraments without certification from the government and approved training in German universities. The Liberal party was among the strongest backers of the project, though it was also supported by conservative Lutherans in Prussia. The idea was not to convert Catholics into Protestants or free-thinkers, but to prevent them from forming a separate party in German political life.

This project was not so alien to American thinking as people now assume. The capital of an American state (North Dakota) was named for the Iron Chancellor at the very moment when the *kulturkampf* was getting under way in Germany. In 1876, while the political battles continued in Germany, U.S. President Grant proposed a constitutional amendment requiring taxes to be imposed on church property and forbidding public money to be allocated to religious schools – measures aimed squarely at limiting the resources available to the Catholic Church, at a time when Protestants and liberals feared the Church would form immigrant children into separate voting blocks. The proposal for a federal constitutional amendment failed, but a number of states (including New York) did entrench similar provisions (regarding aid to parochial schools) in their state constitutions.²²

²¹ D. W. Hudson, *Onward Christian Soldiers: The Growing Political Power of Catholics and Evangelicals in the United States*, Threshold 2008, esp. pp. 238–241 (subchapter entitled, "Not the Bishops' President," concluding: "By pursuing agendas directly opposed to Reagan, who had the visible support of John Paul II, the Bishops Conference and the Catholic Conference made it obvious that they were closely aligned with the left wing of the Democratic Party. The Catholics who identified with the emerging movement of religious conservatives had found their leadership and it wasn't at the Catholic Conference. He was in the White House." – **at 241**).

²² P. Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State*, Harvard University Press 2002, Ch. 11.

But even Bismarck, who owed office to the Kaiser rather than the Reichstag, abandoned most of the *kulturkampf* policies within a few years. They failed to thwart the emergence of a strong Catholic party in German politics and had meanwhile begun to disturb many Protestants. Bismarck preferred to court Catholic support for his tariff policy than continue to rely on priorities of doctrinaire liberals.²³ Contemporary America, a more tolerant and diverse country, with a much stronger tradition of religious freedom, offers far less potential for a successful culture war. American politicians would be even quicker than Bismarck to defect from projects that put them in direct, bitter confrontation with religious conservatives, even if the latter remain a distinct minority.

There are, among other things, too many ways for conservatives to challenge government policies. Last year, the Obama Justice Department pursued a case to the Supreme Court on behalf of a teacher at a Lutheran school, who claimed her dismissal was contrary to federal employment law. A conservative advocacy group (Beckett Fund – named for the medieval English martyr for the Church's independence) invoked the First Amendment guarantee of religious liberty in defense of the school. All nine of the Court's justices ended up endorsing the religious liberty claim, including the two justices appointed by President Obama.²⁴ The ruling generated satisfaction among religious conservatives but not much complaint on the left. Today's American "progressives" do not have much appetite for direct confrontations with religion. It is bad politics.

This does not mean there will not be future collisions between state authorities and religious (or social or cultural or independent-minded) conservatives. Certainly there will be, so long as conservatives do not become too demoralized to keep up their end in these battles – and I see no reason to expect that will happen. Conservatives retain regional strongholds and a districting system that allowed Republicans to retain control of the House in 2012, despite an adverse electoral tide, overall.²⁵

Conservatives may lose important battles and have to settle for painful (or confused) compromises. But the trend in the past generation has not been relentlessly adverse to conservative positions. Advocates for the right of citizens to own

²³ R. Ross, *The Failure of Bismarck's Kulturkampf*, Catholic University of America Press 1998, documents another difficulty which earlier historians had overlooked: Prussian administration did not have the organizational capacity to enforce such ambitious control measures at local levels, so the campaign against Catholic authority did more to offend and provoke than actually to coerce local churches – though many bishops and prominent priests were, for a time, driven into exile. I do not think today's U.S. federal administration could be (particularly on touchy social issues) at all more effective than Prussian officialdom.

²⁴ *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission* (2012).

²⁵ Slightly more votes were cast for Democratic than Republican candidates in House races in 2012, but advantageous drawing of district lines helped Republicans to hold on to seats in close contests. Republicans now control governorships in 30 of 50 states. The party will not fade into irrelevance any time soon and many constituencies will keep pressing it to embrace conservative stands, even on social issues.

guns have won two important decisions from the Supreme Court, acknowledging that gun rights are protected by the federal Constitution.²⁶ Advocates for home schooling have had continued success in gaining legal recognition in most states. They have nurtured a supportive network to assist parents who want to educate their children at home.²⁷ Nor has the trend always been toward allowing the more permissive position in disputed social policies. In the 1990s, physician-assisted suicide seemed to many observers likely to gain momentum with or even without endorsement from courts. It has not been endorsed by courts and amidst much debate has been rejected by most state legislatures.

Some confrontations might be defused by allowing different states to adopt different policies, as we currently do on such issues as same-sex marriage and assisted suicide and on many aspects of policy on abortion. The more conservative justices of the Supreme Court have shown more sympathy for federalism in the past decade. Most recently, in the ruling on the Obama health care law, five justices endorsed limits on the power of Congress to “regulate commerce” and seven justices endorsed limits on the power of Congress to force states to comply with costly new mandates on existing programs.²⁸

It seems to me quite unlikely that a tyrannical majority – or a relentless federal bureaucracy – could disregard all concerns of religious conservatives in a heedless rush to force conformity with centralized agendas. A big, diverse country, with traditions of tolerance and personal independence and still a great deal of background respect for religion, is not going in that direction. There will be many opportunities for conservatives to fight back. And to win important battles and renew their strength in future elections. But they won’t be engaged in war. They will have more success persuading fellow citizens if they don’t indulge in overly belligerent rhetoric.

„Wojna kulturowa” będzie się toczyć – bo nie jest wojną

Autor dowodzi, że tzw. wojny kulturowe mają w istocie charakter zwykłych konfliktów na temat definiowania istoty i celów wspólnoty politycznej. Nie stanowią więc konfliktu, który wyróżniałby się na tle wielu podobnych konfliktów w amerykańskiej historii.

²⁶ *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008, holding Second Amendment established a personal right to own guns against federal controls); *McDonald v. City of Chicago* (2010, holding Fourteenth Amendment made the same right applicable against state and local controls).

²⁷ In 2007, when the most recent national survey was conducted, over 1.5 million students were being educated at home – with the majority of parents involved saying they had chosen this option to provide religious and moral instruction of a kind not found in public schools. That number was nearly twice what it had been a decade earlier. It is still only about 3% of the school-age population but no longer an isolated or freakish phenomenon. Home schoolers have gone on to secure advanced degrees at many leading universities.

²⁸ *National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius* (2012).

ABOUT AUTHORS

Andrzej Bryk, professor at the Jagiellonian University; visiting professor at Harvard University and other various American universities; author of several books on constitutional history and history of ideas

Stephen Barr, professor of physics at the Bartol Research Institute at the University of Delaware; his field of research is theoretical particle physics and the cosmology of the early universe

Christopher S. Dadak, J.D. associate attorney at Johnson, Ayers & Matthews in Roanoke, VA; he practices civil litigation, specializing in insurance defense and corporate and commercial litigation; in 2011–2012 Editor-in-Chief of the *University of Richmond Law Review*; research interests: international business, mergers and acquisitions, and American domestic politics

Kazimierz Dadak, professor of finance and economics at Hollins University, Roanoke, VA; research interests: the economic transformation of East-Central European countries, European and American comparative macroeconomics, European monetary integration, economic history of Poland; he has published in: *The Wall Street Journal Europe*, *The Independent Review*, *Warsaw East European Review*, *Review of Business*, and *Arcana*

Lawrence Grossman, co-editor of the “American Jewish Year Book” and Associate Director of Research at the American Jewish Committee

Hieronim Kubiak, sociologist, professor at the Jagiellonian University and The Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski University

Agnieszka Kolakowska, Polish philosopher and classical philologist, translator and journalist

Peter Augustine Lawler, Dana professor of government and former chair of the Department of Government and International Studies at Berry College; chair of the politics and literature section of the American Political Science Association; he serves as President of the President Bush's Council on Bioethics since 2004

Christopher Lazarski, historian, Ph.D. at Georgetown University, Washington D.C., present at Lazarski University, Warsaw; he teaches European history and political thought; current scholarly interest: political philosophy in general and Lord Acton's thought in particular

Jeremy Rabkin, professor of law at George Mason University School of Law, he teaches constitutional law and international law; a board member of the United States Institute of Peace and of the Council of Academic Advisers at the American Enterprise Institute; his interests include national security law and early constitutional history

Wilfred M. McClay, he has been SunTrust Bank Chair of Excellence in Humanities at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, where he is also professor of history, since 1999; he is author of *The Masterless: Self and Society in Modern America*, which won the Merle Curti Award of the Organization of American Historians for the best book in American intellectual history