The New Morality

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The new morality, as a slogan, gained currency in the first half of the sixties. Its use was always accompanied by a synonym, situation ethics. The idea was that sex, in or out of marriage—or across marriages—was neither good nor bad; only the specific context might be one or the other. “In certain situations,” the Rev. Dr. Joseph Fletcher, Professor of Ethics, Episcopal Theological Seminary, Cambridge, Massachusetts, once said, “unmarried love could be infinitely more normal than married love.” Sex is right or wrong, he added, depending upon what it does for or to the persons involved. Absent wives, husbands, mothers, fathers, and so on, are not among those involved. He does not categorically exclude them; he merely ignores them among the “human beings” whom sex either “helps or hurts.” And apparently just about any little old situation will do. He has said that the “new morality would certainly approve of an Episcopal priest in New York who provides contraceptives for a gang of delinquents he attempts to serve.” When Reverend Doctor Professors of Ethics yearn to improve the Kinsey ratings of young hoods, can sexicare be far behind?

There have been at least three books published with New Morality in the title. Fletcher wrote one of them, and they all deal with sex. The term, of course, is pure inversion: New Morality equals old immorality. And if Fletcher converted everyone to it, and they all acted out his creed, there would be total chaos. Unless most people continue to exercise restraint and self-control with this most explosive of all forces in personal relationships, there can be no continuity of father, mother, son, and daughter roles. True, ever since Potiphar’s wife was left with Joseph’s coat in her grasp, the virtuous male has been an object of ridicule. But the preservation of morality, sexual or otherwise, never depended upon total compliance and surely not upon total commitment—Freud’s advice to a young man was to remain continent, but under protest. On the other hand morality does require, as always, retention of the sense of right and wrong.

Morality is the unchanging mentor of responsibility, which in its turn maintains social cohesion. Without affirmation of mo-
rality, the hippies can never find the “warm community” they crave, must remain isolates in a herd of lollipop suckers. And unless hatred of social order, and expediency, can twist meaning into any counterfeit guise, morality now as ever can refer only to mutual obligation, can only denote principled restrictions to one’s own conduct, restrictions accepted before a decision to act is formed. There will always be backsliding as well as ambiguity in action, but there cannot be in the name of morality any ambiguity about a respect for restrictions which hedge and inhibit the whim and temptation of the moment.

New scholarship has traced the ultimate source of morality in man’s phylogenetic development; religion is an older and more widely accepted explanation. To be sure, there has never been any primitive tribe or civilization which lacked a religious focus. Whether an ordered social life requires religion is for that reason alone unanswerable. It may even be that the religious and moral impulse are singly rooted deep in human nature. When Neanderthal man buried his departed comrades in a ritualistic way, he was obedient to both religion and morality.

On the other hand, from a secular point of view no direct relationship is manifest between the form and practice of religion and moral conduct. One or another church has been “strong” in this or that century when sexual licentiousness, commercial jobbery, and political betrayal of trust were by contemporary report widespread. Historian Crane Brinton insisted that a lifetime of study had failed to reveal to him any connection between the religious beliefs men professed and the way they behaved.

In anticipated rebuttal Auguste Comte said hypocrisy is ubiquitous, and if we study only what men do we will never know how much worse they would behave without the faith and belief to which they give nominal allegiance. No simple answer or formula is forthcoming. The “same religion,” by name, for example, in different epochs can be associated with morality in shifting emphasis. That religion can now primarily be associated with formalistic duties and other-worldly orientation, again become suffused with operating this-worldly standards. The so-called middle-class ethos, or perhaps more narrowly the Protestant Ethic, especially in the Victorian era combined a deep consciousness of God’s presence and judgment in social life with a zeal to prove one’s worthiness of His attention in accomplishment with the material means He had provided.

There is a further complication. When literal religious belief wanes and practice falls off, the ideals and habits associated with them can persist for some indeterminate period. But how long in the near future will American youngsters, without having to face the uncompromising demands of a rigid religious code, continue to incorporate what have traditionally been regarded as moral standards? Or is modern America drawing on the accumulated religious capital of previous generations, a process that can lead only to bankruptcy if new funds are not raised? “The problem,” as Irving Babbitt saw it, is to “retain the inner light” while sloughing off the theology, but his student T. S. Eliot argued that you cannot have the fruit without the seeds.

It could be we are hung up on definitions. Perhaps religion-and-morality should be assessed as a unit, and periods in time compared on that basis. In any event, while the ultimate basis of morality may be religion, the means of transmitting morality are not necessarily so grounded. Each individual is inducted into his place in the world by his family, who define behavior appropriate to age and sex. He is taught...
what rights and obligations he has in terms of the rights and duties of specific others. He is taught respect for these rules, and also taught to respect those traditional beliefs which are sacred to his parents. Rebellion or rejection on his part normally results in some form of punishment, mainly the withdrawal of approval by those persons with whom he has come to identify.

The young child is not the controller, he is of necessity the controlled. But gradually this developing social (and thus moral) being assumes control as well as continues to be controlled. With maturity and the assumption of responsibility, he exerts pressure on his associates to maintain at least respect for those standards he has made part of himself.

Order is thus not in “society,” not even in the rules and their subsidiary beliefs, but in the affirmation of what is right by individuals and their resistance to the breaking of common rules and denigration of shared beliefs by others. The moral tone of any group directly manifests not Rousseau’s general will but the effort of each mature individual who is an integral part of that group. When that effort falters, the young are in some measure deprived of that rigorous training which is an ancient birthright, and everyone is in trouble.

The modern fiction that society is a concrete entity, a being (invariably evil) who lives apart from all those individuals who can be located within certain territorial limits, is both cause and result of a spreading moral corruption. If this personified enemy operates at a distance from its self-appointed beautiful souls and privileged victims, they are relieved of personal responsibility. And if they are not a part of what they attack, then they can do so with impunity to themselves. Although called on to confess “its” crimes and provide restitution to them in leisure and irresponsibility, “it” should remain impervious to their disruptions. Not many of even the wildest-eyed SDSers really believe their own inflated rhetoric about destroying society, any more than the petulant child in tantrum-throes expects to revenge himself on his parents.

They both do have one legitimate complaint. The spoiled post-adolescent as well as the spoiled child is driven frantic because papa and mama will not make him be good, will not set the limits for him, will not impose that external restraint without which self-restraint is unattainable. Too many of the mamas and papas are afflicted with a moral paralysis (“We agree with your purposes, but not your tactics”) which is helpless to spank or even withdraw approval, no matter how loud the cry for help.

The predominant style of juvenile revolt is the tipoff. In Anno Domini 1970, it should come as no revelation that any youngster who wants to jump into the sack or smoke pot is more likely to be spied upon by the Rev. Doctor Professor Fletcher than Mother Grundy. College authorities are vastly more concerned about “avoiding publicity” than imposing standards of conduct, and in effect they ask students to be discreet if they won’t go straight. But the main purpose is neither pagan sex nor a drug high. Preferred sex is a public love-in; drugs should be part of a happening. The audience is the purpose, exactly as the tantrum is never launched unless one or both parents are there to observe. The hypocrisy of proclaiming themselves an army with banners who bring freedom to masses enslaved by outmoded puritanical restrictions is fed by the audience, which listens and watches with fearful timidity, subsidizing them emotionally as well as financially. And the audience is hated and despised for its own complicity.

The world’s work, as yet anyway, still gets done, but only because a sufficient number of individuals do not blame “so-
ciety” for their own shortcomings, accept responsibility for their own actions, and retain a modicum of respect for the rules and beliefs with which they govern themselves and attempt to influence their associates. These people do not, in short, surrender to self-indulgence. But enough of them have become confused about their own values and purposes, the worth of their own beliefs as well as accomplishments, to suffer an impairment of will amidst the din of inflated rhetoric. It is the declining faith of these people in themselves, and not the noise made by the spoiled children, that is the danger we all face.

Their faith in themselves retreats before a frontal assault mounted by ideologues who are their own contemporaries. James Burnham has said there may be a sort of collective death wish which tempts domestic liberals to deny any significance to the military spread of Communism. Surely some equally arcane motivation is driving the multitude of elder publicists in the pulpit, university, press, and entertainment world who have come to preach, not the forgiveness of sin, but the righteousness of sin.

An “educational panel” on TV recently dealt with pornography—one doubter surrounded by yea sayers. He mildly complained that his children have received in the mail unsolicited advertisements featuring photographs of what at one time were known as unnatural acts. A psychiatrist sneered, “Maybe they’ll learn something.” At about the same time a Protestant minister opened the basement of his church to a drag dance, with the announced intention of helping to destroy the vicious prejudice against a perfectly normal life adjustment.

Anyway, no girl was ever ruined by reading a book, right? Two decades ago the sociologists traveled that route with studies of children’s reactions to violence in the movies. The consensus: no boy ever committed a crime from watching a movie. Both conclusions are disingenuous. No one book and no one movie ever had sovereign effect. But a milieu that is saturated with vicarious crime and sex does have a cumulative effect upon action and more importantly upon imagination and sensibility. Respect for life and the person are cheapened and coarsened, and the argument that statistical proof is lacking shifts priorities in a peculiar way.

By insisting that there is nothing wrong about wrongdoing, the elder statesmen of degradation have violated their own canon of moral relativism. In the relativistic outlook, any way of life is as good as another. If so, what is wrong about denying that wrongdoing is right? It is, after all, their argument that one should respect some other way of life when it happens to differ from one’s own. In full circle, they have no grounds for condemning people who do not share their outlook. When they promote immorality with sermon, church-council edict, and propaganda, on what basis can they deny others the right to resist their effort?

The will to resist focuses on one point. Actually, the urge to play Anthony Comstock was never feebler. An obvious majority of adults aren’t particularly concerned about the private lives of other adults, so long as they remain private. What many of them do resent, bitterly, is a systematic attempt to indoctrinate their children with pornographic and nihilistic values. But they have been informed by 86.1 percent of more than 3,400 psychiatrists and psychologists in a University of Chicago poll that those who try to suppress pornography “are often motivated by unresolved sexual problems in their own characters.”

That majority were never plaster saints. In their religious tradition they were never permitted to deny that they were sinners. Many times in their lives they have vio-
lated the principles they attempt to uphold. They know, if those who posit a solid entity called society do not, that what holds the whole together is the quality of their own lives, and they also know in their own experience how tenuous, how ambivalent, their commitment can become. Now, within less than a decade, they find the notion of right itself under assault. Their main adversary is no longer the old-fashioned liberal preaching toleration of deviance; it is the self-righteous wrecker who accuses them of being the deviants.

The wrecking crew have mounted an attack on restraint, self-discipline, and the living of an orderly life with others. The message is self-indulgence. But self-indulgence, expressed wholesale, will have inevitable consequences that may give pause even to the wreckers—hippies, when all has been said in their favor, still not only smell bad but are a source of danger to their own companions through a mutual renunciation of personal responsibility. Faced with this and other similar dilemmas, the elder statesmen of disorder jazz the tempo of their social criticism. How could anyone question the consequences of unbuttoned hedonism in the light of the vastly greater evils of poverty, racism, and Vietnam? The United States itself is rotten to the core. Among a host of others, so declare Bishop James A. Pike, Herbert Marcuse, Paul Goodman, and Mark Van Doren.

II

Mark van Doren was doing his bit to widen the so-called generation gap when he said that "the young people with beards and long hair" are not the destroyers. Rather, the "clean, well-shaven men in business suits" are the ones who "are literally tearing our world to pieces." These people are businessmen and politicians.

Elder statesmen of disorder like Van Doren have been the academic makers of college student opinion for the last few decades. Their influence has peaked. Within the last year or so the New Morality slogan has shifted from mere sexual promiscuity to a broad spectrum of personal misbehavior that is licensed by protest against poverty, racism, and Vietnam. Several public opinion polls have shown a growing tolerance among the relatively affluent college-educated young for stealing from department stores, lying, adultery, pot, cheating, abortion, divorce, physical violence, rioting, and the like, accompanied by a growing intolerance not so much for what businessmen and politicians actually do as for the hell-on-earth they are accused of creating, with malice aforethought.

This New Morality is as much a misnomer as the original. It is simply another manifestation of self-indulgence. An adherent in neither case applies any standard to his own behavior. In both cases he promotes misconduct he can envision himself engaging, and in the second case he expresses indignation at the supposed results of actions far removed from his sphere of personal involvement.

Morality has specific reference to an individual who acts in a certain way or refrains from acting; how much credit a critic of someone else's behavior can claim is questionable, especially a critic of an emergent result that does not measure up to his shifting demands for instantaneous perfection. There is something less than praiseworthy in announcing a right to immorality because out there, at some distance from the area of personal knowledge, competence, and assessable responsibility, others have failed to provide utopia.

Utopia supplied by businessmen? We can expect little more than the morality of the trader, actually a tremendous accomplishment the lack of which keeps the so-called underdeveloped countries what they are. Poverty, real poverty, not the fake
charge squeaked by the beautiful souls, persists throughout most of the world mainly because of failure to develop a marketplace ethics, because family, clan, and village morality take economic precedence. When distrust of the stranger and the impulse to cheat him are endemic, capitalism cannot expand, a situation that is complicated by nepotism, the moral rule that close relatives are in all matters to receive special privilege.

Western capitalism could develop only because “a man’s word is his bond” exceeded the letter of legal- contractual arrangements and came to have strongest sanction precisely when the distant stranger was involved. The men who accepted and enforced that sanction created and distributed the material wealth which “solved problems” and relieved a host of ancient fears and miseries which had been the common lot. Persisting individual defalcations among them prove only a common humanity; they cannot wipe out the record.

What is loosely known as the Protestant Ethic supplied much of the subjective dynamic of latter-day capitalism. The motive was never primarily money-making or even power, as David C. McClelland and others have established with extensive empirical research, but a need for self-justification in achievement. The subjective dynamic was further directed by a morality of sexual restraint (repression, if one prefers), a price, Freud claimed, that had to be paid for civilization. A combination of “the calling” and self-restraint formed that powerful drive to build and create in the marketplace, for the future.

In some intellectually respectable circles the argument has been made that while such a life style may befit an economy of scarcity, in an economy of abundance a nonutilitarian emotional-expressive outlook concerned only with the present moment should and must supplant it. Perhaps. But history doesn’t run temporary trends up off the graph paper. Leisure and effortless prosperity are too insecurely based to qualify as eternal verities. Effortless prosperity? Whatever happens on the graph paper, there will always be plenty of work that must be done, and some people, presumably, must be motivated by more than “a consumer life-style” to do it. Meanwhile, who owes what to whom? It was the ones whom the beautiful souls have declared to be their enemies who created the affluence which enabled them to unveil themselves and preen in public. Otherwise, they would have repressed their own vaporings. Only with unprecedented economic surplus can a large class of parasitical nihilists emerge.

Are businessmen inciting the three fabricated hobgoblins, poverty, racism, and Vietnam, to tear our world to pieces? The charge that they have created poverty is contemptible. Presumably they are no more “racist” than anyone else, surely considerably less so than militant blacks. Only businessmen have achieved any success in training as well as employing the “hard-core unemployed”—at a loss. And stocks go down, not up, with the death of each rumor that the North Vietnamese spokesmen are prepared to talk reasonably. So long as any businessman conducts his business in an honorable way, handles the obligations of his business with integrity, he is in his role as businessman invulnerable to charges of immorality.

But the new indictment against them is not for what they do at all; it is that they have failed to provide a perfect world, which is true enough. They have not resolved the big issues. These, however, are results and conditions, conjunctures of innumerable acts, decisions, trends, only a few of which businessmen initiated and without foreknowledge of what in this or that particular would eventuate. For example, especially in a politicalized economy
the separate efforts of businessmen to expand their markets can result in bust as well as boom—a condition none of them wanted and perhaps all of them sought to avoid.

A minority of businessmen have been made to appear vulnerable to charges of resource spoliation, air pollution, and the like. The central fact in this connection is not villainy, individually or collectively assessed, but an early phase of what may turn out to be a major change in national direction. In the traditional American ethos, there is a drive to conquer nature in order to produce and distribute at higher and higher levels. Now, with affluence for all at last (which may or may not be secure), restrictive and conservationist values are encroaching upon older ones. The major difficulty is that the publicists of renewed environment have so far failed to reckon the costs. When they do and persuade enough others to pay the required billions of dollars in higher market prices and increased taxes, businessmen will be enabled to take the lead, as they have in the past.

III

The other men in business suits, the politicians, have always torn the world or tried to manage an ever-tearing world. To get and keep their jobs they must—whatever personal inclination might be—serve as quasi-undercover brokers, must accommodate and compromise a host of conflicting interests and clouded perceptions. They must make promises, and often they must default on them, sometimes to one or another opposed group, at other times to the same group. To cite one example: at the present time many groups are pressing for the political special privilege of “social justice” for this or that interest in this or that situation, while simultaneously demanding that only objective standards be applied, for admission, membership, jobs. Politicians such as the administrators of City College can be hoist on a double petard.

Unlike politics, business deals with pragmatic and uncomplicated goals, for the most part independent of ideology, and the marketplace is devoid of that ultimate power to order and direct which is a governmental monopoly even in nonauthoritarian regimes. Again, in business he who pays also benefits; in politics, he who pays as oftentimes as not benefits others—both the recipient of tax largesse and the politician who gets or claims credit for his own generosity.

Perhaps most important of all, politics like religion is a repository of ultimate loyalties and sentiments. Even in the transaction of regular daily affairs, the politician is under extreme pressure to wrap himself in the flag, point with alarm at what endangers sacred institutions, or perhaps in more semantically confused times, bleed appropriately for guilt-blessed victims. But whether he represents himself as the embodiment of the traditionally sacred, or gingerly tests the air waves to get right with the media instead of Lincoln, to reach and keep his job he believes with some justification that he must endorse whatever abstract sentiments are most frequently pronounced. And the higher his office, the more resounding must be his rhetoric.

This combination—of enforced jobbery in the handling of conflicting interests, and a felt need to portray idealized rectitude—results in a ubiquitous defensiveness on his part to charges of dishonesty and hypocrisy. In his analysis of the politician's dilemma, the German sociologist Max Weber advised him to drop even the pretense of rectitude in favor of competence. He who enters politics "concludes a pact with devilish powers" which have little use for virtue or morality, at least as these have been traditionally known. Weber held Wilhelm
II in contempt as a bumbling, romantic, irresponsible dullard, but the kaiser was strictly honest in all of his dealings and was an exemplary father as well as patriot to boot. Contrariwise, as Peter Ritner has pointed out, although Henry VIII was personally vicious, he served his country well. He inaugurated "that wise and subtle centralist policy which enabled England to steal a march politically on the rest of Europe, and which ultimately saved her from the worst phases of the civil strife that convulsed the continent for three hundred years."

Khosru I was the greatest of Sasanian kings. "The Just" is counted by every Persian chronicler of every succeeding generation to be the ablest monarch in their history, but he put all his brothers to death. There is, on the other hand, only one ruler in all history who is accredited with having tried the golden rule, Amenhotep IV or Ikhnaton, and he thereby ruined Egypt. He wanted to create a world united not through fear and force but by worship of a single god. He interfered with the priests in their honored tradition of fleecing a gullible public; he refused to send out bored and barracks-bound soldiers to kill or be killed; he would not permit his loyal taxgatherers in the provinces and dependencies to force payment of tribute. At the mercy of internal and external enemies he died at thirty, discredited, bereft of power, his queen in exile. Within a generation after his death, his empire was totally shattered.

These are potentates. Are modern constitutional-parliamentary regimes a different case? In Weber's view, not very much different. Power alone "lies in the hands of the party chiefs and their associates," and theirs alone is the responsibility for its use. Weber dismissed any notion about the power of the people or about how they get the kind of government they deserve. He posed a political ethic of responsibility, which takes into account "the average deficiencies of people," and reckons the consequences of all action initiated.

Responsibility to do what? His only answer, an indirect one: to maintain the state's power and influence. And the ethic of responsibility is for him mainly a negative function of the "absolute ethic of ultimate ends," which will sacrifice any power, any influence, to a higher ideal which scorns anything other than itself. Wir sind ein Machtaat, he wrote his mother in 1885, and who is honestly willing to face the consequences of the state's being conquered, which is inevitable if the Christian (absolute) ethic is substituted for Machtrecht?

He admired what he called the athletes of Christian faith above politicians. What he despised were the copouts. If you insist upon the absolute ethic there must be no reservation, no questioning "of the other's right to strike." Even more important, you must turn your cheek; you must have the decency to pay the price for your non-negotiable stand yourself, instead of asking others to do it for you. The Pharisee (Christian version) in modern guise he found in the German equivalent of the old liberal type who invokes Christ or man's presumed innate goodness in the cause of pacifism but is unwilling to live in a Communist-dominated world, who deplores residual resistance to desegregation but moves out of an "invaded" urban section so that his children may attend an unsegregated (but all-white) public school in the suburbs. Weber would have found the same, somewhat modified, ancient type, in the new protestor, who defiles, blasphemes, runs amok, and simultaneously begs amnesty on grounds of either ideological purity or privileged victimization.

Granted that the absolute ethic, genuine or hypocritical, has little if any place in the
making of political policy, Weber ignored a subsidiary political-moral issue: to reach office, even a good man must first beat his opponents, must engage in more-or-less behind-the-scenes infighting for position. It is in this connection that Weber's rejection of the popular formula, "bad means always result in bad ends," acquires special point.

Most Americans today would surely accept the proposition that Lincoln's election in 1861 was essential to the preservation of the union—a good end. Some of the means he personally employed, though, have been left out of the textbooks. He believed that his nomination required the backing of Simon Cameron, the Republican state boss in Pennsylvania, who wanted to be Secretary of War. Cameron was a known crook, and some of the better element in Philadelphia who had written to Lincoln about him were scandalized, both when the whispered deal surfaced and when Cameron was sworn in. As one direct result of Lincoln's unquestionably reluctant choice, some of those honored dead at Gettysburg were in life issued rotten blankets. This is the kitchen heat Harry Truman was so fond of citing. Staying there can be understood, explained, perhaps even admired, but is it morality in any conceivable sense?

Weber would have argued that it was, since the consequences of Lincoln's defeat would have been worse than Cameron's appointment, and the task of saving the union was justified by the ethics of responsibility. Foreseen consequences justified "bad" means. But for Weber the problem of reckoning consequences was a can of worms.

He admitted that the use of any means, good or bad, can go awry. The result of political action or social reform, he said, more often than not stands in "paradoxical relation to its ultimate meaning." The consequences are quite likely to be both unanticipated and unwanted. American foreign aid outside of Europe? The departure of the British from India? The "defeat of world fascism" in World War II? Integration of the public schools?

Weber handed the politician an impossible task. With or without Florentine intent, he can only dimly reckon the consequences of his actions, and he has little if any control over tricky paradoxes and sudden disasters. In the social as well as more narrowly political realm, prediction veers close to fantasy because the goals and aspirations and relative power of various groups constantly shift, forcing new directions on established trends, and because unforeseen emergent factors persist in combining in unanticipated ways with those same trends. There is simply no knowledge available to the politician that will ensure getting from A to B instead of to C or for getting to B without undesired side effects which in retrospect might lead him to wish he had remained at A. Conversely, he has no way of knowing that a decision to remain at A is the right one. The alternative to American entry in World War II was not peace but German control of Europe and Japanese hegemony over Asia, and quite possibly ultimate war without allies. The reader can draw whatever parallel with Vietnam that he wishes.

There is absolutely no advice in this connection that the scholar-historian has to offer the politician. There was one clear act of political intervention in Weber's career and, reminiscent of Plato's mission as advisor to Dionysius II of Syracuse, it affords sad comment on the intellectual who would play philosopher-king. Article 41 of the Weimar Constitution ("The President of the Reich is elected by the whole German people") was, according to J. P. Mayer, "mainly due to Weber's influence."

Before Hitler became chancellor, the Nazis were never more than a minority in
It is possible that he would have made it without article 41. On the other hand, for reasons which would lead too far afield, the Reichstag very probably would never have elected Hindenburg president. The people did. And article 41 in conjunction with the presidential power to appoint all officers, including the chancellor, made the Nazi takeover both easy and legitimate. At the insistence of idiotic-crafty Papen, Hindenburg was conned into handing Germany over to Hitler by thoroughly constitutional means.

Weber's intervention reflects a permanent dilemma for his type of intellectual. Politics is too important to be left in the hands of politicians, but too much trust in the average deficiencies of people is misplaced. His uneasy choice was a "German romantic" one: the charismatic leader, holding a mandate directly from the people without parliamentary interference, would bypass Kuhhandel, clean up the mess of chicanery and bureaucratic muddling, carry all to greatness.

His description of the charismatic leader has the aroma of a burning pine knot held aloft in the Black Forest. Such a leader has "specific gifts of the body and spirit; and these gifts have been believed to be supernatural, not accessible to everybody." He is, in the Nietzschean sense, an Above-man who "knows only inner determination and inner restraint." Such a leader "seizes the task that is adequate for him and demands obedience and a following by virtue of his mission." He tends to reject "all rational economic conduct." He must stand "outside of routine occupations as well as outside the routine obligations of family life." The legitimacy of such leadership flows from a "divine mission" that "knows of no abstract legal codes and of no 'formal' way of adjudication."

In the years immediately following World War I, there was no intellectual in Germany who had more influence than Max Weber. By at least a circuitous route, then, Hitler's description of the inspired leader in _Mein Kampf_ owes much to Weber. The phraseology as well as the ideas fit neatly. There can be noted the same emphasis upon personal authority, the mystic union of love and will between leader and people, the almost mindless cry for heroic virtue that will rescue history from habit, legalism, and bourgeois decadence.

Being the man he was, a "good European," a courageous stoic of ramrod integrity, Weber could not share Hitler's open contempt for "the masses." Nor could he repudiate morality—the respect for principled restriction to conduct, restriction accepted before a so-called responsible decision is made. How, then, tame the free spirit of the charismatic leader? With his own conscience.

"One cannot prescribe to anyone whether he should follow an ethic of absolute ends or an ethic of responsibility," Weber said, "or when the one and when the other." What the man who "has the calling for politics" must not do is "crumble when the world from his point of view is too stupid or base for what he wants to offer." A man who feels "responsibility with heart and soul" will ultimately find . . . his own flattering self-image: "He somewhere reaches the point where he says: 'Here I stand; I can do no other.' That is something genuinely human and moving."

This echo of Luther at Worms is also quite admirable. To thine own self be true. But exactly whose interests are best served by the heroic posture? The past is crowded with men of power who were true to themselves. Those millions who have been sacrificed to the ego needs of the great have probably as often fared ill when the great were being true to themselves as when the great knew they were fulfilling the will of God—the two, in fact, have usually been
synonymous. There is, in short, as much
danger to others in the decision, “I can do
no other,” as there is in the insistence upon
pure and abstract principles. Perhaps there
is more, for an absolute ethic can at least
be debated whereas a battered ego at bay
may be protected from examination by
high office. The electorate of any nation
who are exhorted to follow someone being
ture to himself might better follow Carlyle’s
advice and look to themselves.

IV

To summarize: whether first or second
dispensation the New Morality is sheer
self-indulgence, the first of the senses, the
second of the emotions. Both in fact reject
morality: in individual terms morality is
self-discipline and restraint; in social terms
it is maintenance of respect for principled
restrictions to one’s own actions and hold-
ing like expectations of one’s associates.
The second dispensation of the New Morali-
ty is the more dangerous. It encourages ir-
responsibility and then nihilism in the
case of purity of intention, an insidious
temptation more luring than sexual promis-
cuity.

It shifts “the blame” all too handily on
those evil men in business suits. But the
beer cans and other litter on the highway
wasn’t tossed there by the fictive establish-
ment. The impersonality of the urban uni-
versity resulted not from bureaucratic ma-
chination but a popular determination that
all-too-many students must be admitted to
“receive an education,” many of them en-
tirely at taxpayer expense and most of them
totally bereft of intellectual curiosity. Care-
less drivers, not “Detroit,” cause that im-
pressive number of traffic deaths—and so
it goes.

It arrests development of mind and
imagination. Those who insist that others
immediately create for them literal equali-
ty, pure air, individualism unhampered by
authority, an end to war, an end to person-
al responsibility and other putative desid-
erata, are surely unwilling to pay the re-
quired price for them—a pastoral world be-
low the margin of subsistence, in which
there would be no pill, no effortless leisure,
and none of the other subsidies and per-
quises they also, as their right, demand.

It unfits the young for “participatory
democracy” in any real meaning of a
favored neologism, despite the fact that the
above discussion of politics makes the best
apparent case for the New Morality. In a
world where politics takes precedence,
where politicians by inclination as well as
by some of the necessities of their job make
a farce of rectitude, and where they are un-
able to take the country to whatever
destination they promise, isn’t it pre-
sumptuous to dwell upon the lapses of or-
dinary citizens?

Traditional morality, especially that
morality grounded in the Christian tradi-
tion, never excused anyone for the mote he
could point to in his neighbor’s eye, or even
that in Caesar’s. The obligation was also
laid upon each individual to maintain lim-
its beyond which his associates would not
be allowed to go. In specifically political
terms, only when the electorate abandon
their support of such limits can the su-
preme political danger, the charismatic
leader, emerge.

According to Eric Hoffer, only intellectu-
als, women, and juveniles need charismatic
leaders, and the ability to get along without
one is “a mark of social vigor.” Perhaps
surprisingly, Max Weber would have
agreed with him. In other parts of his work
than that already cited, he indirectly dem-
onstrated how the charismatic leader,
about whom he was thoroughly ambivalent,
could be circumvented.

He viewed the inevitable clash of inter-
est as a counter to attempts at manipula-
tion. All men, even political leaders, are restricted in what they can do so long as other men, within a commonly-accepted framework of authority, disagree about what the fictive common interest, the public interest, is, in terms of their private interests—and those private interests include self-other moral limits.

Weber had nothing like the eighteenth century American constitutionalist’s devotion to freedom, but he did have a similar respect for the institutional preservation of tension: a people are best served when opposed interests and loyalties within the body politic are held in balance and not resolved with any combination of myth and force. As Weber pointed out, those who wield power can be contained by law, convention, and usage; above all, such people can be kept in line by their own “self-interest in the continuation of a certain agreed action as such.”

Those who are ruled by an entrenched potentate can only hope for the best. In modern constitutional-parliamentary regimes, however, the morality of politics rests much less with politicians than with the electorate. Enough of that electorate must preserve a balance of their own: a respect for authority combined with restive determination that “certain agreed actions” shall not be violated or countermanded. The politician will maintain respect for principled restrictions to his own actions only in response to the expectations and demands of his associates, be they close or distant. Otherwise the charismatic leader, that dreadful father-substitute the abandoned children of the New Morality are so desperately seeking.