
Social Conservatives of the Left: James Lincoln Collier, Christopher Lasch, and Daniel Bell

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This is the cultural dilemma of capitalist society: it must now acknowledge the triumph (albeit tempered) of an adversary "ideology," the emergence of a new class which sustains this ideology, and the collapse of the older value system which was, ironically, undermined by the structural transformation of capitalism itself. The inimical ideology is not the secular socialism of the working class . . . but the cultural chic of "modernism" which retains its subversive thrust however much it is absorbed by the system. This new class, which dominates the media and the culture, thinks of itself less as radical than "liberal," yet its values, centered on "personal freedom," are profoundly anti-bourgeois. The value system of capitalism repeats the old pieties, but these are now hollow because they contradict the reality, the hedonistic life-styles promoted by the system itself The historic justifications of bourgeois society-in the realm of religion and character-are gone Yet one of the deepest human impulses is to *sanctify* their institutions and beliefs in order to find a meaningful purpose in their lives and to deny the meaninglessness of death This lack of a rooted moral belief system is the cultural contradiction of the society, the deepest challenge to its survival.

Daniel Bell

The moral bottom has dropped out of our culture.

Christopher Lasch

**When the Protestant Ethic Was in Vogue: Tocqueville on
the Nature of the American Character**

European observers who came to the United States in the first half of the 19th century were struck by two contrasting features of American society that seemed to form equally important aspects of

a distinctly American character structure and to contribute to what at least some of these observers saw as the great success of the American experiment in democratic self-government and personal liberty. These observers were impressed by the restless energy and insatiable striving which Americans displayed in their various productive activities-whether in manufacturing, trade or small-scale farming-all of which seemed to be aimed at the single goal of bettering their economic condition and the condition of their families. As a nation containing many immigrants and the first generation offspring of immigrants many of whom had come to the country for the explicit reason of taking advantage of the cheap land and expanded commercial opportunities that the new nation offered, America in the first half of the 19th century appeared to foreign observers to display a distinctly bourgeois work and achievement ethic that was unlike anything to be found on the continent of Europe.

But this emphasis on improving one's standard of living, which in an earlier age churchmen and aristocrats had condemned in the severest of terms, coexisted with another equally prominent feature of American society that foreign observers noticed. This was the deep piety and strong family-centered values, which, no less than the striving to improve one's living standard, seemed to define the general tenor of American life. Reflecting the influence of the heroic age of the early 17th century Puritan settlers, and the several Great Awakenings and religious revivals of the 18th and early 19th centuries, America in the first half of the last century appeared to many observers as a land in which religious observance and religious feelings, no less than a restless desire for wealth, permeated the very heart and soul of the culture.

Our best source for understanding early 19th century America, of course, is still Tocqueville, whose *Democracy in America* makes for a most informative reading today primarily for the light it throws on the dramatic changes that have taken place in this century, particularly over the past three decades, in the nature of the American character. Indeed, a typical college-age student today, who knew

little of American cultural history, and whose knowledge of American life was confined primarily to personal experience and to what could be gleaned from popular magazines, movies, television, and the other institutions of the mass culture, would find much in the America Tocqueville describes, particularly what he says about American family life, strange and incomprehensible.

Alexis de Tocqueville was born and raised as a French Catholic aristocrat, and his overall moral and spiritual sensibilities surely reflected the best that that class had to offer. An astute observer of human nature, he had the unusual ability to be able to look squarely at his own aristocratic predispositions and both develop and modify them in the face of the new democratic spirit of the age, which he saw destined to conquer the entire Western world. Where other aristocratic observers might be tempted to see in the capitalist-commercial society that was then unfolding in North America nothing but decadence, vulgarity, and populist mob-rule, Tocqueville was able to discern in the new democratic order represented by the United States a new form of life, which, while lacking in the grandeur and heroism so prized by men of aristocratic temperament, was nevertheless decent, orderly, and restrained. America, Tocqueville once suggested in a letter to a friend shortly after the publication of Volume I of *Democracy*, though it developed less successfully than other nations the noblest powers of the human mind, had a distinct nobility and character of its own that commanded considerable respect.² "To those for whom the word *democracy* is synonymous with destruction, anarchy, spoliation, and murder," Tocqueville wrote, "I have tried to show that under a democratic government the fortunes and the rights of society may be respected, liberty preserved, and religion honored" (DA, II, 408). While America may be lacking in "poetry and elevation," it was nevertheless a highly decent and moral society, Tocqueville believed, whose people displayed a high degree of moderation and self-control.

Tocqueville was perhaps most impressed by the deep religious streak in the American temper and the great wholesomeness and stability which he saw in the typical American family. The latter characteristic he thought was at least in part a product of the former.

"On my arrival in the United States," Tocqueville wrote, "the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention, and the longer I stayed there, the more I perceived the great political consequences resulting from this new state of things" (*DA*, I, 319). "There is no country in the world," he observed, "where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America" (*DA*, I, 314). "In the United States religion exercises but little influence upon the laws and upon the details of public opinion, but it directs the customs of the community, and, by regulating domestic life, it regulates the state. I do not question that the great austerity of manners that is observable in the United States arises, in the first instance, from religious faith" (*DA*, I, 314-315).

Tocqueville was particularly impressed by the piety and solemnity with which he saw Americans observing the Sunday Sabbath, and one of the most touching passages in *Democracy in America* is his description of the typical American family at Sunday worship. "Nothing strikes a foreigner on his arrival in America more forcibly," Tocqueville wrote, "than the regard paid to the Sabbath" (*DA*, II, 359). "In the United States," he explained, "on the seventh day of every week the trading and working life of the nation seems suspended; all noises cease; a deep tranquillity, say rather the solemn calm of meditation, succeeds the turmoil of the week, and the soul resumes possession and contemplation of itself. On this day the marts of traffic are deserted; every member of the community, accompanied by his children, goes to church where he listens to strange language which would seem unsuited to his ear. He is told of the countless evils caused by pride and covetousness; he is reminded of the necessity of checking his desires, of the finer pleasures that belong to virtue alone, and of the true happiness that attends it. On his return home he does not turn to the ledgers of his business, but he opens the book of Holy Scripture; there he meets with sublime and affecting descriptions of the greatness and goodness of the Creator, of the infinite magnificence of the handiwork of God, and of the lofty destinies of man, his duties, and his immortal privileges. Thus it is that the American at times steals an hour from himself, and, laying aside for a while the petty passions which agitate his life, and

the ephemeral interests which engross it, he strays at once into an ideal world, where all is great, eternal, and pure" (DA, I, 153).

Religion was particularly important in a commercial republic such as existed in the United States, Tocqueville believed, because the personal freedom which it permitted, the restless striving for wealth that it encouraged³, and the majority-rule principle which formed the foundation of its manner of governance, each were subject to various corruptions and abuses which religion tended to offset. Without the countervailing and restraining forces provided by both religion and family, commercial republics like the United States, Tocqueville believed, would tend to produce masterless citizens who were dominated by their passions for acquisitive gain and were no longer capable of listening to the voice of either reason or conscience. Such men, Tocqueville contended, would succumb to a self-seeking individualism that neglected all obligations to others in the private realm and that produced great instability and intemperance in the political order as well. "It must be acknowledged," Tocqueville wrote, "that equality, which brings great benefits into the world, nevertheless suggests to men . . . some very dangerous propensities. It tends to isolate them from one another, to concentrate every man's attention upon himself, and it lays open the soul to an inordinate love of material gratification" (DA, II, 23). Religion, however, counteracted each of these tendencies:

The greatest advantage of religion is to inspire diametrically contrary principles. There is no religion that does not place the object of man's desires above and beyond the treasures of earth and that does not naturally raise his soul to regions far above those of the senses. Nor is there any which does not impose on man some duties towards his kind and thus draw him at times from the contemplation of himself (DA, II, 23).

The chief concern of religion is to purify, to regulate, and to restrain the excessive taste for well-being that men feel in periods of equality Men cannot be cured of the love of riches, but they may be persuaded to enrich themselves by

none but honest means (*DA*, II, 26).

Religion in America takes no direct part in the government of society, but it must be regarded as the first of their political institutions for if it does not impart a taste for freedom, it facilitates the use of it . . . While the law permits the Americans to do what they please, religion prevents them from conceiving, and forbids them to commit, what is rash or unjust (*DA*, I, 316).

The great utility of religion and religiously-grounded morality in a free democratic society was well understood by the Americans themselves, Tocqueville remarked. Americans, he said, believe that "a people ought to be moral, religious, and temperate in proportion as it is free" (*DA*, I, 434). Even if they are not themselves particularly religious, the supporters of liberty in America, said Tocqueville, "know that liberty cannot be established without morality, nor morality without faith" (*DA*, I, 12). It was the great success of the Americans, Tocqueville believed, to be able to unite successfully each of these elements, which in other nations often tended to draw apart from each other.⁴

Besides the deep piety and religiosity of its people, Tocqueville was most impressed by the stability of the American family and by the great seriousness with which both men and women in America tended to assume their respective family obligations. "There is certainly no country in the world," Tocqueville wrote, "where the tie of marriage is more respected than in America *or* where conjugal happiness is more highly or worthily appreciated" (*DA*, I, 315). Men and women *in* America, he observed, have clearly defined and equally valued roles to perform within the family⁵, and since they usually chose partners on the basis of mutual affection and conformity of tastes, rather than on the basis of social status or financial gain, and since they usually married at a mature age, marriages in America, Tocqueville said, tended to be very stable, enduring and happy (*DA*, II, 213, 225).

Contributing to this stability of the American family, Tocqueville

believed, were the strict standards of marital fidelity and sexual morality that was evident everywhere in America. "In America," he observed, "all those vices that tend to impair the purity of morals and to destroy the conjugal tie are treated with a degree of severity unknown in the rest of the world" (*DA*, II, 249). "Although the travelers who have visited North America differ on many points," he wrote, "they all agree in remarking that morals are far more strict there than elsewhere. It is evident that on this point the Americans are very superior to their progenitors, the English" (*DA*, II, 214). Public opinion in the United States, Tocqueville remarked, "especially condemns that laxity of morals which diverts the human mind from the pursuit of well-being and disturbs the internal order of domestic life." "To earn the esteem of their countrymen, the Americans are therefore forced to adapt themselves to orderly habits; and it may be said in this sense that they make it a matter of honor to live chastely" (*DA*, II, 249). Tocqueville in this context also remarked on the fact that there is no invidious double standard in America as one found in Europe: "among [the Americans] the seducer is as much dishonored as his victim" (*DA*, II, 224). This high standard of marital and sexual ethics Tocqueville attributed both to the impact of religion in America, and to the effect of the general regard for an orderly way of life which commercial and manufacturing classes typically displayed. The "sumptuous depravity and splendid corruption" which one often found among the more decadent members of aristocracies, Tocqueville observed, was not to be found in America.

A quiet, stable, and affectionate family life, Tocqueville held, had important implications not only for the overall happiness and sense of well-being to be found in America, but equally significant, he believed it greatly contributed to the peace and stability of the American political system. In a psychologically penetrating analysis that would anticipate some of Harold Lasswell's later ideas, Tocqueville observed that the tumultuous passions often displayed in European politics could be attributed, at least in part, to the dissatisfaction and disorder to be found in so many European families. The American, by contrast, found peace, order, and fulfillment in his own family life and carried this habit of mind into politics:

In Europe almost all the disturbances of society arise from the irregularities of domestic life Agitated by the tumultuous passions that frequently disturb his dwelling, the European is galled by the obedience which the legislative powers of the state exact. But when the American retires from the turmoil of public life to the bosom of his family, he finds in it the image of order and of peace. There his pleasures are simple and natural, his joys are innocent and calm; and as he finds that an orderly life is the surest path to happiness, he accustoms himself easily to moderate his opinions as well as his tastes. While the European endeavors to forget his domestic troubles by agitating society, the American derives from his own home that love of order which he afterwards carries with him into public affairs (*DA*, I, 315).⁶

From the Protestant Ethic to the Ethic of Self-Gratification

Tocqueville's observations on America have been worth quoting at some length because many of the features of early 19th century American life and culture which he describes in *Democracy* survived well into the 20th century. Indeed, this was one of the main reasons for the great popularity of Tocqueville's writing in this century, and an American coming of age as late as the 1950s or very early 1960s could find much in Tocqueville's description of the family-centered, church-centered, and local community-centered values so prominent in the America of the 1830s an accurate account of the values still dominant in many middle class American suburbs and small towns. The 19th century bourgeois-Christian social order, where such virtues as piety, chastity, frugality, -industriousness, sobriety, moderation, charity, self-control, and dedication to one's children and family formed the center of its moral universe, while it had come under assault even in the latter decades of the 19th century, was one that survived in at least a modified form well into the 1960s.

What has happened in America since the 60s has been a revolution in manners and morals of truly unprecedented proportions and

the full impact of this revolution on the American social and political fabric is now only beginning to be understood. Each of the three authors under review in the present article sees this revolution primarily in negative terms and offers what might be described as a "decline narrative" in which he tries to explain how the older cultural order of a capitalist-commercial economic system that was pervaded by a dominant bourgeois-Christian value system, degenerated into the state of moral corruption and spiritual malaise which we see all about us today. While each of the three narratives is distinct to its author, and while the narratives do not always agree, for the most part they complement and mutually re-enforce one another, and taken together, offer a most thorough and insightful analysis of the dramatic social changes that have taken place in America over the past several decades. Each of the three authors speaks from the perspective of a highly independent-minded left-liberal, and their narratives and analyses will carry added credibility for many readers since none of them is uncritical of the 19th century social order, or thinks it possible to return to that social order, and none would certainly want to reject all of the moral and social developments that have occurred in America in recent years. Like social conservatives of the Right, however, each of the three authors believes that on balance the older bourgeois-Christian value system of the 19th and early 20th century represented a more dignified, more coherent, more meaningful, and, above all, more humane ideal of human life than the value system that has replaced it, which they variously characterize as "anti-bourgeois modernism," a "culture of narcissism," or an "ethic of self-gratification."

James Lincoln Collier on the Revolt Against Victorianism

James Lincoln Collier is a distinguished music historian, who until his most recent work on *The Rise of Selfishness in America* was primarily known for his studies of Duke Ellington and the history of American jazz. Collier's decision to write the present volume, we learn, had an intensely personal character. As he explains it in the Preface to his work, three of his great aunts had been raised in the

Victorian style of the late 19th century, and throughout their very long lives displayed in their home and in all their personal affairs many of the best moral qualities of late 19th century America. Collier was in his 30s when the last of his great aunts died, and while they were alive he was able to come to know them and the style of life which they led with great thoroughness and intimacy. "I was fortunate," he says, "in experiencing at first hand the Victorian culture that our modern world sprang up in reaction to. This was possible because some of my forebears happened to live extremely long lives and carried into the second half of the twentieth century the ideas and attitudes they had been given in their youth" (*RSA*, vi). The home of his great aunts, he explains (they were unmarried and lived together in the same large household), was a home in which the concerns of family were always central. Their large house, he says, "was always there as a refuge for whoever of us needed it." It was a home in which ancestors were talked about a lot, culture, and especially literature, was greatly valued, liquor was not permitted, and sex never mentioned. His aunts, he says, spent much of their free time involved in church and community affairs. They were involved in the local library and local youth organization, and they attended church services two or three times a week. While acknowledging that the lives they led would be considered too constrained for many women today, and while their home was perhaps a bit stuffy for modern tastes, nevertheless, in their Victorian manner his great aunts lived a life which Collier sees as possessing a great dignity, decency, and orderliness. There was, above all, Collier stresses, a caring involvement in the lives of others and a dedication of themselves to the service of their family and community (*RSA*, vii).

What has emerged in recent decades in America, as Collier sees it, is by contrast a triumph of selfishness. This selfishness he sees most conspicuously in the declining commitment to the obligations of child rearing and to the requirements of a stable and enduring marital life. He also sees it in the growth of a self-indulgent hedonism as reflected in the rise of sexual promiscuity and sexual permissiveness, as well as in the enormous increase in the consumption of alcohol and drugs. And finally, he sees selfishness in the

general unwillingness of the public in recent years to bear the sacrifices necessary for such needed social improvements as better roads and bridges, more police and prisons, better schools, a cleaner environment, etc. The development of this selfishness from the 1880s to the 1980s is the subject matter of Collier's book, and without a doubt it is the most comprehensive one-volume treatment of the topic in print. Collier contrasts the ethic of self-gratification and self-indulgence, which he sees as having triumphed in America by the early 1970s, with the older bourgeois-Christian ideals of Victorianism that were so much alive in the household of his great aunts.

Much as Perry Miller sought to rescue 17th century Puritanism from the distorted and one-sided images of it created by its detractors, so Collier tries to rescue 19th century Victorianism from the anti-Victorian caricature of the movement successfully propagated by its enemies. Victorianism, says Collier, was the dominant mode of American life from the early decades of the 19th century until the early decades of the 20th, and should be seen as a genuine reform movement that affected all classes and touched every aspect of American culture. Growing in part as a reaction against what Collier calls (with some exaggeration) the "great debauch" of the late 18th century, Victorianism, he says, "brought with it a rededication to Christian religion, to honor in human relations, [and] to a general decency in manners and expression." "Underlying everything," he writes, "was the idea that human beings could not live solely to gratify themselves, but must in every sphere of life—in politics, in philosophy, in social commerce—take into account the needs of the family, the community, the country, or even the whole of humanity" (RSA, 10).

Victorianism, says Collier, sought to control excessive drinking, to limit sex to the institution of marriage, and in general to make people—particularly males—more refined, more family-oriented, and more considerate of the welfare of those around them. It was under the impact of Victorianism, Collier writes, that table manners in the early 19th century began to improve, people began to wash themselves on a daily basis, and to keep their lawns and homes in good repair. Underneath all this, he says, was an understanding that

"good manners were a reflection of an attitude toward others: the person who ate nicely and was courteous was merely demonstrating his concern for the people around him" (*RSA*, 13). By the mid 19th century, he adds, a new emphasis had emerged on family-centered activities such as the family vacation, the family celebration of birthdays and holidays, and the nighttime family readings from books and magazines.

Collier argues that Victorianism sought moral edification and spiritual uplift in all spheres of life and through all instrumental means. Victorian novels often warned against the destructive effects of unbridled passion, condemned pride, and sought to provide people with encouragement to overcome their temptations and weaknesses. Ethical and sacramental values, he says, were often carried in Victorian architecture, and even painting in the Victorian era sometimes carried a moral message. Women in particular were seen as having a critical role to play in the moral advancement of society. Women in the 19th century, Collier maintains, were generally seen as more refined, more spiritual, and more kindly than men, and they were understood to have a most important civilizing role to play both in the nurturing of children and in the uplifting of their coarser husbands. Women were expected in particular to lend warmth, decency, and kindness to the home. Women, too, says Collier, were expected to dress modestly and conduct themselves publicly in a manner appropriate to their sex. A drunken woman was considered much more degrading than a drunken man, and in a number of important ways women were expected to set the tone of morals and manners for the entire society (*RSA*, 17).

Collier is particularly concerned to change the view of Victorianism as a movement primarily concerned with the curtailment of illicit sexual activity. While he acknowledges that Victorians were often obsessed with controlling sex, even going to such ludicrous lengths as producing expurgated versions of Shakespeare and the Bible, 19th century Victorianism, he believes, was about much more than the control of sexual passion. "We must not let the Victorian obsession with the control of sex," he says, "overshadow what Victorianism was really about—order and decency. Decency

meant presenting yourself modestly, cleanly, and politely. It meant keeping a tidy home, however small and impoverished. It meant raising children to respect others, to obey the social strictures, to be polite and mannerly. And it meant, above all, restraining the passions, controlling the expression of the impulses: you did not fling yourself around on the dance floor, did not whoop it up in saloons or experiment with outre forms of sex" (*RSA*, 17).

While decency was private and personal, order, he explains, was its public form: "[Order] meant turning up for work punctually and doing the job properly. It meant using accepted political forms, rather than rioting in the streets or stoning the police. It meant working through organizations-the Victorian period was the great age of the voluntary association-rather than running as a mob. And it meant the elimination of disorderly enterprises like saloons, the rough theater, the bawdy house" (*RSA*, 17).

Most of Collier's book is a narrative which tries to explain through a wealth of facts and illustrative material the major developments in America since the latter part of the 19th century that have tended to erode and undermine this culture which the Victorians created. The major question Collier sets out to answer is this: "How in the course of about the sixty years from 1910 to 1970 did a morality that seemed fixed and permanent get stood on its head? ... How did the United States turn from a social code in which self-restraint was a cardinal virtue to one in which self-gratification is a central idea, indeed ideal? How did we erect a moral code which has at its center the needs of the self-in which self-seeking is not merely condoned but actually urged upon us by philosophers, schools, television pundits, even recent governments?" (*RSA*, 4). Collier sums up the object of his inquiry with a simple question: "What happened?"

At least five major historical developments from the late 19th century to the present were responsible for the destruction of Victorianism, according to Collier. These may be categorized under the headings of a) urbanization and industrialization; b) immigration and ethnic changes; c) the growth of an anti-Victorian literature, art, and philosophy after 1910 and its subsequent impact on important segments of the middle class in the decade of the 1920s; d) the rise

of a mass entertainment industry; and, finally (what he sees as perhaps most important of all), e) the growth of a hedonistic bohemian lifestyle by the Beats of the 1950s and the Hippies of the 1960s and the adoption of many of the elements of that lifestyle by mainstream American culture. The account Collier offers of each of these developments is invariably illuminating and worth considering at greater length.

Like many other writers, Collier sees a major change in American manners and morals as having been brought about in the last decades of the 19th century and the early decades of this century by the development of large industrial cities and the movement of ever larger segments of the population away from small towns and rural areas. "The actual size of the community," Collier observes, "can have a drastic effect on the morality inside it" (*RSA*, 143). In the typical small town community of late 19th and early 20th century America, Collier explains, peoples' lives were embedded within a web of family and community relations that often required the individual to subordinate his wishes to the wishes of the group. Relationships were intimate and personal and there was often very intense pressure to conform to local customs and mores (*RSA*, 22). While this latter feature of small town life was often felt as constraining (and in the 1920s many—including as we learn, Collier's parents—rebelled against it), it nevertheless had many wholesome features as well. Through the close surveillance provided by the family, the local churches, local schools, and the local town population, Collier explains, individuals living in small towns who might be so tempted were often dissuaded from engaging in such potentially destructive activities as alcohol abuse, wife-beating, gambling, and any of a variety of forms of illicit sex.

Within the anonymity and impersonality of the big cities, however, no one cared very much what other people did. Life became more transient, people changed their residencies frequently, and the social surveillance and social control system provided by the small town community broke down. In the industrial city, Collier says, people no longer worked, worshipped and played with the same group of family and friends, and no longer felt strong attachment or

ties to coherent communities such as those that formerly had commanded their allegiance. Youth in particular, says Collier, were confronted by all the corruptions and temptations provided by the big city, and especially after the introduction of the mass-market automobile following World War I, the youth would spend considerable time away from their homes and family where they might seek thrills and excitement through drinking, smoking, and having sex. For some at least, according to Collier's analysis, the movement from rural farm to industrial city was truly a march "Into the City of Destruction," to use the famous phrase of E. Franklin Frazier, whose classic analysis of the effects of urbanization on southern black migrants to the urban north closely parallels Collier's analysis of rural and small town white migration (Collier, however, does not seem to be aware of Frazier's work on this subject).

One of the most original contributions of Collier's analysis of urbanization is his discussion of the effects upon Victorian values of the vice districts that existed in most larger American cities from the last decades of the 19th century to the period of the First World War. With the movement of large numbers of people into the expanding industrial cities at the end of the last century, Collier explains, many vice districts began to spring up in a number of places that would cater to the inclinations and desires of young, unattached males, who were no longer supervised by families and communities. In the 18th and early 19th century, he says, most people lived in communities that were simply too small to conceal a brothel or vice district, and in any event such establishments were usually not permitted. The urban industrial city, however, brought together, he explains, a critical mass of single men who lacked close ties to any community or social system that sought to inculcate a specific code of public morality. In the anonymity of the big city, Collier explains, where people could come and go unobserved and uncared for, many seeking excitement and thrills (sometimes to offset the dull factory jobs they worked at during the day) would gravitate towards the red light districts where a radically different way of life prevailed. While young single men formed the bulk of their clientele, the vice districts, Collier says, were often patronized by married men as well (RSA, 50-

66).

The typical vice district, Collier explains, was usually confined to one specific location in a city, often a run-down or impoverished area, and contained a variety of saloons, dance halls, brothels, gambling houses, and drug dens, as well as a number of cheap hotels, restaurants, and theaters. Alcohol, cocaine, opium, and marijuana were readily available in a number of these establishments, and one could view lewd and obscene entertainment to satisfy even the most depraved of tastes. Live sex shows, where women copulated on stage with animals, or young virgins were auctioned off to the highest bidder, were apparently quite common, Collier suggests. The people who worked in these vice districts (i.e., the pimps, prostitutes, madams, saloon keepers, itinerant musicians, bartenders, waiters, etc.), formed a distinct subculture within the larger urban community, and they often developed a strongly anti-Victorian set of values that looked upon small town America and its mores with ridicule and contempt. Whereas Victorianism condemned sex outside of marriage, sought the abolition of drugs and drink, preached dedication to family and children, opposed pornography and gambling, and tried to instill a sense of duty to one's community and a future-orientation to one's life, the lifestyles and attitudes found in the vice districts, Collier says, ran counter to each of these. Many of the middle class males who patronized these vice districts, Collier explains, came to find in these districts attitudes and practices that they had never before encountered in the small towns in which they had been raised, and some, he suggests, were corrupted by the experience. What many middle class males found in the vice districts, Collier says, "was not just sex; it was a whole style of living, coupled with an attitude that justified the lifestyle." "The vice district . . . institutionalized anti-Victorian attitudes and behaviors," he writes. "In so doing they provided a school for the American middle class in a way of thinking, feeling and behaving that had not been part of the culture they had been raised in" (RSA, 64).

At the same time that the sheer size, anonymity, and institutionalized vice of the large industrialized cities were working to undermine Victorian values, says Collier, waves of new immigrants from

Eastern and Southern Europe were flooding into those same cities with their own cultures and value systems that Collier sees as distinctly anti-Victorian. "Few immigrants," he says, "subscribed to the basic dicta of Victorianism" (*RSA*, 31). Not only did many immigrant groups have a more positive view of public drinking than the Victorian Old Stock, he says, but many also supported public dancing and generally showed much less concern than the Victorians for the traditional American virtues of thrift, sobriety, chastity, and industriousness. The new immigrants, says Collier, were often indifferent to Victorian notions of success, and generally tried to live as gaily and expressively as they could in the dance halls and beer gardens which they created in their neighborhoods. Rejecting the Victorian work ethic, the new immigrants, according to Collier, sought leisure time to drink, gamble, and have fun (*RSA*, 30-33).

Partly in response to the large number of immigrants in the industrialized cities, a new mass entertainment and spectator sport industry began to develop in the last decade of the 19th century, Collier explains, which would have a most profound effect in weaning Americans away from traditional Victorian values. Collier devotes four whole chapters of his book to the influence of the professional entertainment industry in America, and they are in many ways the most illuminating sections of his work as they deal with a subject about which he has considerable knowledge. In the latter half of the 19th century, he explains, many small theaters in the expanding cities began displaying variety shows that often featured ethnic humor, slapstick, scantily clad dancing girls, and crude jokes rich in sexual innuendo. The audiences, however, were generally small, and the crude content of the shows rendered them off-limits to more respectable sorts of people, as well as to families with children. In the 1880s and 1890s, however, many of these variety shows, he explains, began to clean up their acts to some degree in an attempt to attract a larger audience, and during this period they became known collectively as vaudeville. Vaudeville, Collier explains, was to lay the foundation upon which the entire 20th century American entertainment industry was built, as many of the most prominent stars in the early motion picture industry, as well as in

early radio and television, first became known through their vaudeville acts. Vaudeville entertainment, however, while it was less crude than its predecessors, was nevertheless low-brow and in many ways vulgar, and while it often exuded a fast-paced zest and energy, unlike Victorian art and recreational activities (which often sought to foster character and uplift), vaudeville, Collier explains, aimed at nothing more elevating than the idle amusement of a mass audience. The early film, radio, and TV industries would inherit these identical features (*RSA*, 74-104).

Victorians, says Collier, generally did not approve of activities that were not morally uplifting or socially useful. In literature and art, vice was supposed to be punished and virtue rewarded. Similarly in music, great classical music was preferred to popular tunes as a means of moral edification, and a piano in the home was often seen as a symbol of cultivation, refinement, and delicacy of sentiment. With the rise of a mass entertainment industry aimed at a new lower and lower-middle class audience, many of whom were immigrants or the second generation offspring of immigrants, this aspect of Victorian culture was lost, Collier believes. A new popular music began to develop in the early years of this century, he says, that was specifically intended to appeal to the lower tastes of a new mass immigrant working-class culture. This new music industry, Collier explains, was geographically centered in New York City's Tin Pan Alley, and drew upon the jazz and ragtime music that had first developed in the saloons and dance halls of the big city vice districts. While some of these tunes, like vaudeville acts, were cleansed of some of their more offensive erotic components in order to appeal to a wider audience, they clearly reflected a lower class taste in music, Collier says, which differed significantly from the high-brow tastes of the Victorian middle class. With the popularity of the new music, however, many middle class people would be won over to lower class tastes, and in due course, he says, Chopin played on the piano would give way in many a middle class household to Tin Pan Alley tunes played on the gramophone' (*RSA*, 74-104).

The Old Stock Victorian middle class, of course, was shocked by what it saw as the raucous pattern of life emerging in the big cities,

which by the 1890s were taking on a distinctly lower-class ethnic tone, and they eventually fought back, Collier explains, through a series of reform initiatives. Here the protesting Victorians were successful, he says, on at least three fronts: national prohibition of alcohol was instituted in 1919 through the adoption of the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution; immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe was severely restricted through legislation passed in the early 1920s; and by the end of the World War I era most of the major vice districts had been closed. The closing of the vice district came as a result of a Victorian "purity crusade," which by the 1890s had become a mass movement. Purity crusaders, he says, sought to put an end to prostitution, to gambling, and to public nudity, as well as to the sport of boxing. Opponents of the purity crusade, however, argued vigorously against the efforts to close the vice districts on the grounds that males had great difficulty controlling their sexual urges and that it would be better for them to patronize prostitutes than to seduce and debauch decent women. Moreover, legalized and properly regulated prostitution, it was argued, could be made more orderly than illegal prostitution and the prostitutes themselves could be checked for disease. Against this reasoning, Collier explains, the purity crusaders argued successfully that males could control their lustful urges if they were willing to make the effort, and that they should be held to the same standards of sexual self-control as women. Double standards, they insisted, would have to be abandoned (RSA, 67-73).

While the Victorian reaction to what it saw as the evils of the industrialized cities scored some important successes, Victorianism, nevertheless, Collier contends, would be all but destroyed over the decade of the 1920s, and what elements of it survived into the post World War II era, he says, would be dealt an even more devastating blow in the decade of the 1970s. It was the one-two punch of the Roaring 20s and Roaring 70s, according to Collier's analysis, which delivered a knockout blow to the seemingly uncontested moral system that 20th century America had inherited from its 19th century past. The pattern of anti-Victorian development in these two decades was remarkably similar, Collier believes. In each case, he says, many

of the attitudes, ideas, and styles of living first developed by a relatively small intellectual and bohemian subculture were subsequently adopted by much larger segments of mainstream, middle class society.

In the case of the Roaring 20s, says Collier, the vanguard of the anti-Victorian movement came in the form of a new literature, a new philosophy, and a new art, as well as a new style of feminism, that saw in the small town, bourgeois-Christian values of an earlier America a mode of living that was narrow, repressive, and destructive to the flowering of individual personality development, and individual pleasure. This new philosophy, literature, and art borrowed heavily from Europe, and sought to comprehend "real life," which it saw more in the slums, the brothels, and the lower-class ethnic bars and neighborhoods than in the staid homes and quiet streets of small-town America. The carriers of this new philosophical and artistic movement, Collier says, were young adults who had become alienated from their Victorian upbringing, and who after 1910 began to congregate in urban bohemian enclaves in such cities as San Francisco, Chicago, and New York. Greenwich Village, which had previously been a conventional residential area, was eventually established as the center of this new anti-Victorian movement, he explains. The young anti-Victorians, Collier says, rejected their Protestant past insofar as it demanded an emphasis on self-denial as a path towards individual salvation; they revolted against the Victorian emphasis on restraint of the passions, which they came to see as productive of warped, unhappy, neurotic personalities that could not live spontaneously or enjoy life; and they rejected the Victorian emphasis on service to family, church, and local community organizations, which they came to see as impeding their own drive towards self-expression, self-development, and self-fulfillment. The young bohemian intellectuals, moreover, Collier explains, rejected the Victorian view that art should primarily seek to uplift people, and replaced it instead with the view that art should try to reflect all of life, particularly those darker, fiercer, more unruly, brutal, and violent passions, which Victorians had often sought to ignore or suppress. A new spontaneity and a new openness to diverse aspects of life and

personal experience, it was believed, should be substituted for the Victorian emphasis on orderliness, decency, and self-restraint (RSA, 105-125).

The new feminism that came into existence after 1910, Collier explains, was also anti-Victorian. While women previously had taken an active part in the many state-wide movements to restrict or prohibit the sale of alcohol, as well as the movement to end prostitution, gambling, and other activities carried out in the big city vice districts, the new feminism that arose in Greenwich Village and other bohemian enclaves after 1910, rather than seeking to purify public morals, sought to give women the freedom to indulge in all the liberties, practices, and vices of men. Instead of trying to raise men, as previous female reformers had tried to do, to what was seen as the superior moral level of women in regard to such matters as church attendance, chastity before marriage, and abstaining from drink and smoke, the new feminists, Collier says, sought to free women from the moral and social constraints in which they had been raised. Since men could drink, smoke, tell dirty jokes, and (though greatly frowned upon) have sex outside of marriage, woman, the new feminists believed, should be permitted to do these very same things. All double standards would be eliminated by rejecting the stricter standard that previously had applied only to women. Under the impact of the new feminism, says Collier, *avant-garde* women began to drink and smoke in public, as well as to flaunt their contempt for the Victorian ideal of modesty by dressing in a more sexually provocative manner. And they also began to indulge in sexual activity outside of marital relationships, he says, something that previously had been strictly prohibited.

Although the new feminism and the anti-Victorian attitudes reflected in the new art, philosophy, and literature, were originally confined to small bohemian enclaves, by the early *1920s*, says Collier, these attitudes and beliefs had quickly spread to large segments of the mainstream culture. "Looked at as a whole," Collier writes, "it is clear that the *1920s* was the time when the new freedoms, developed earlier by an *avant-garde*, spread through the culture as a whole. It was the period when the middle class began to drink, when women

began to smoke, have sex, and dress in revealing clothes; when families were splintering, women and children becoming more independent, and everybody was gaining more leisure time." "What happened in the 1920s," he says, "was that the attitudes and behaviors developed by the avant-garde in their Bohemias spread through the population at large: what had been done by the few was now being done by the many" (*RSA*, 159-161). "Behavior patterns which only a generation or so earlier would have marked a woman a prostitute were now being adopted by the teen-aged daughters of middle-class families; costumes that would once have only been seen in brothels were now being worn to church" (*RSA*, 159).

Collier has little sympathy for the changes in America which took place in the 1920s, and, indeed, he sees the decade as little more than a nation-wide binge of self-indulgence. Americans in the 1920s, he says, turned more and more to having fun and pursuing pleasure, and turned their back upon the older ideals of delayed gratification, self-restraint, and sacrifice for one's family and children. To those who had come of age in an earlier period all this was truly shocking, but the older ideals of Victorianism, Collier contends, were dealt a severe blow in the 1920s from which they were never fully to recover.

The Depression era of the 30s did not see the revolt against the excesses of the 20s that many have supposed, Collier contends. On the contrary, Americans in the 30s, he says, consumed more liquor per capita, had more sex outside of marriage, divorced more, smoked more, and even gambled more on the stock market. "The Great Depression," says Collier, "brought no reaction to what some had seen as the moral laxness of the Jazz Age Flappers." "Everything that was being done in the Jazz Age was being done in the 1930s a little more, and a little more frequently" (*RSA*, 166, 167). Collier offers a variety of statistics to back up his contention on this matter.

If the Depression era saw no slowing down in the erosion of Victorian values, this was not true of the period from the end of the Second World War to the late 60s, Collier acknowledges. The immediate post-war period saw an emphasis on home and family, and the long-term trend toward self-indulgent hedonism, so evident in the 20s, was for a while stopped. Even in the relatively conservative

50s, however, Collier contends, powerful forces were at work undermining Victorianism. It was in the 50s, Collier points out, that *Playboy* magazine was launched, which combined slick, soft core porn with mainstream advertising and a sophisticated appeal to the upwardly mobile. It would soon have many imitators, he says, and together with the popularization of the Kinsey report and the growing strength of the sex education movement, it would provoke a new openness about the discussion of sexual matters that would soon be followed by a new permissiveness as well.

One development of the 50s, Collier says, that few at the time would have thought important as far as influencing future cultural trends was the emergence of the so-called Beat Generation. The Beats, Collier explains, were a small group of bohemian writers and poets who had gathered together in New York City during the 40s and 50s. Like the Greenwich Village bohemians of the previous generation, the Beats, he says, led by such figures as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, and Neal Cassady, attacked what they saw as the narrowness and smugness of bourgeois life in America and proclaimed the need for liberation from most of the restraints imposed by bourgeois society. A new spontaneity and new consciousness was to be achieved, Beat writers held, through abandonment of traditional sexual inhibitions and through experimentation with drugs and alcohol. Beat writers, Collier explains, represented a very small and alienated outsider-group that might not have had much of a lasting impact on American society were it not for the fact that their practices and ideas were taken over directly by the much larger Hippie movement of the following decade. Virtually everything the 60s Hippies did that their parent's generation found so shocking or bizarre, including the use of psychedelic drugs, communal love-ins, the study of Eastern mysticism, etc., the Beat writers had done previously in the 50s.

The counter-culture movement of the 1960s is often portrayed as a communitarian and pacifist reaction against the competitiveness of market capitalism and the military aspects of the Cold War. Collier does not dispute such an interpretation, but the Hippies, in his view like the Flappers of the 20s and the Beats of the 50s, must be seen

as self-indulgent hedonists who were oblivious to the lessons of history in (regard to the requirements of community-building, and who were incapable of making the sorts of sacrifices that are necessary to maintain any stable community life. Moreover, whatever their wishes or their hopes, the truly lasting impact of the Flower Children, Collier asserts, was not a new social ethic or a new communal spirit in America, but the popularization of drugs, an increase in sexual promiscuity and sexual irresponsibility, a decline in the work ethic, and, in general, a passion for every manner of gratifying the self through whatever means available. "Their desire for the unlimited self," he says, "made effective group action impossible" (*RSA*, 214). By extolling the virtues of drugs, sex, and dropping out of mainstream society, the actual legacy of the 60s counter-culture, Collier believes, was almost wholly negative, and served only to enhance that very selfishness which the Hippies themselves had proclaimed as the great vice of bourgeois-capitalist society.

The Hippies, who could be found on most college campuses during the latter half of the 60s, constituted a much larger segment of the population, Collier points out, than either the Beats of the 50s or the urban bohemians of the 20s. However, their impact upon the general American culture in the 60s, Collier believes, was much less than commonly assumed. Many Americans in the 60s, Collier says, were appalled by the Hippie lifestyle, and contrary to popular belief, there was no dramatic Hippie-initiated sexual revolution during this period. What sexual revolution took place during the 60s, Collier says, was primarily confined to certain segments of the college-age population, and he quotes from a number of surveys that confirm this general observation. Commenting on one of these surveys, he writes: "The fact that some half of Americans still believed that premarital sex was wrong under virtually any circumstances as late as 1970, and larger percentages disapproved of it for people who were not in love, suggests that the sexual morality of America at the time was essentially conservative" (*RSA*, 220).

The dramatic changes in American sexual morality, Collier demonstrates, came only in the early 1970s, when the mainstream culture, repeating the earlier pattern of the 1920s, took up the most

hedonistic and self-indulgent aspects of the 60s counter-culture, and did so in a truly extremist fashion that would make the decade of the Roaring 20s pale in comparison. "The change in American sexual morality of the 1970s," he says, "surpassed in kind and extent anything that had gone before. The sex revolution of the 1920s was, by comparison, about as bold as a church social" (*RSA*, 229). It was in the 1970s, Collier points out, that cohabitation arrangements, once limited to a bohemian fringe and to those segments of the poorer classes that respectable people had generally seen as "trash," became commonplace among the non-bohemian middle class. He quotes from one survey of college students carried out in 1974 where 71% of the males and 43% of the females said they would engage in a cohabitation arrangement if the occasion arose. "What had been a rare, even scandalous lifestyle in 1960," Collier writes, "was by the 1970s commonplace" (*RSA*, 226).

The 1970s, says Collier, also saw a dramatic increase in the sale of pornography. So-called "adult bookstores" proliferated in many areas, porn magazines, which had usually avoided the grosser sorts of frontal nudity in the 50s and 60s, began featuring close-up shots of female genitalia, and sex manuals began to make *The New York Times* Bestseller List. Surveys indicated that ever larger percentages of the population in the 70s were engaging in-and approving of-not only premarital sex, but adultery and casual sex as well. "For large numbers of Americans [during the 1970s]," Collier writes, "there were no longer any rules in regard to sex" (*RSA*, 228). "There is little doubt," he says, "that the new sexual freedom being advanced by the hippie generation and put into practice by their younger siblings sent a shock wave through the society. The older generation had by and large accepted the more conservative morality which permitted sex only in the context of a relationship, and then preferably when there was the expectation of marriage. Probably the majority of older women and a considerable percentage of older men had never had sex with anybody but their spouses; and suddenly, as they found themselves in their late thirties, forties, and fifties, they discovered that the old rules no longer applied. Many of them felt that somehow they had been cheated, and quite a few of them set out to rectify

matters" (*RSA*, 228).

Middle class Americans in the 1970s, says Collier, were not only having appreciably more sex outside of marriage than they were in earlier generations, they were also divorcing more often, and taking more illegal drugs. The divorce rate, Collier explains, was relatively stable in the post-war years 1945-1965, but then rose some 40% in the last half of the 60s, another 37% in the first half of the 70s, and continued to rise through the later years of the 70s until by the end of the decade it was double what it had been in the 1950-1969 period (*RSA*, 229). While the divorce rate was soaring, the use of illegal drugs such as cocaine and marijuana was displaying an equally dramatic rise. "The most spectacular growth industry of the 1970s," Collier writes, "was drugs" (*RSA*, 224). The high-school students and Yuppies of the 70s had learned a great lesson from the previous Hippie generation not only in regard to sexual activity but in regard to drug taking as well. Moreover, the vast increase in the consumption of illegal drugs, says Collier, was not reducing the consumption of the one intoxicant that was legal in America. On the contrary, per capita alcohol consumption actually rose during the 70s, though the degree of increase was modest (*RSA*, 225).

The social changes that came to fruition in the 1970s, Collier believes, had the effect of turning the Victorian code of conduct upside down. "What had begun as a struggle to free the self from the constraints of the Victorian code," Collier writes, "had evolved into a new social code, a conscious philosophy with the self at the heart of it" (*RSA*, 229). Many people were appalled at this development he says, and some hoped that the election of a conservative president in 1980 would help to turn things around. The 80s, however, in Collier's view, saw no significant return to an older morality. While there was a modest reduction in the intake of drugs and alcohol, he says, there was no real return to the older morality centered around family, church, community, self-sacrifice, and self-control (*RSA*, 225). On the contrary, he points out, divorce rates continued to rise throughout the 80s, pornography continued to proliferate (now with the addition of hard core porn videos that could be played on the VCR in the privacy of one's home), children continued to be neglected,

out-of-wedlock births continued their upward trend, and a new corporate raider and junk-bond mentality took hold of the business and financial communities. In the 70s and 80s, Collier contends, America truly witnessed, on a scale never before seen in its history, an "end of morality" and an "institutionalization of selfishness."

The Consequences of Selfishness in America

The erosion over the past thirty years of what remained of 19th century Victorian morality, has had many fateful consequences, Collier believes, as the ethic of self-gratification, he says, has come to pervade almost every aspect of American life. Love, work, child-rearing, sex, religion, politics—each of these areas, Collier contends, has in one way or another been corrupted by the cult of the self. In no other area, however, has the erosion of Victorian moral norms wreaked greater havoc and caused more pain and anguish, Collier believes, than in the area of child-rearing. It is the children, he says, who have been the greatest victims of our national preoccupation with the self, and the children who have suffered most from the rising divorce rates, rising out-of-wedlock birth rates, and rising dependance on government agencies. "I believe," he says, "that the abandonment of the children is the worst of the consequences of the culture of selfishness" "Raising children," he explains, "is not easy. It is often physically tough, and always emotionally demanding. But raising children is the most important thing any social system does, for if it does not produce a competent, concerned new generation, it will shortly cease to exist" (*RSA*, 255). "Between the high divorce rates, the rising number of children born to unwed mothers, and the widespread institutionalizing of young children," Collier writes, "we have seen in America an abandonment of parental responsibility which is unmatched in human history" (*RSA*, 252).

Collier, who himself was once a single parent, summarizes the results of a number of studies indicating how harmful divorce can be on the development of children. There are numerous studies, he says, all of which lead to the conclusion that children of both sexes do better in intact husband-wife families where both parents are ac-

tively involved in their rearing than in single parent families. Much research, he says, has shown that children in father-absent families are more delinquency-prone, score lower on aptitude tests, and have more difficulty with gender identity than those in two parent families. Despite claims to the contrary, it is usually better Collier says, for children to grow up in a two parent home, even one where there may be considerable tension and bickering and where the marriage may be far from perfect, than in a divorced home. For most parents, Collier observes "the old and today discredited idea of staying together for the sake of the children is worth thinking about" (*RSA*, 249).

While the abandonment of the children is the worst consequence of the culture of selfishness in America, according to Collier, not far behind, he believes, is the neglect of needed public sector goods, which, in our addiction to private consumer spending, he says, we refuse to pay for. Taking his cue from John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society*, Collier says that America in the recent past has displayed a gross private-sector/public-sector imbalance. "To put it in concrete terms," he writes, "we were spending too much on television sets and not enough on schools; too much on hunting weapons and not enough on police; too much on automobiles and not enough on mass transportation" (*RSA*, 255). The Reagan administration comes in for particularly harsh criticism by Collier on this score, though he makes clear that what the administration sought in terms of cutting taxes was precisely what most Americans wanted-i.e. lessened public burdens so that they would have more money to spend on themselves (*RSA*, 237-238).

A third consequence of the culture of selfishness in America, according to Collier's analysis, is, paradoxically, a decline in personal happiness and personal fulfillment. Self-centeredness not only weakens family and community ties, Collier contends; it also leads to great loneliness, anxiety, and depression as well. We are often most happy and most fulfilled, Collier explains, when we are absorbed in some type of group activity that directs our attention beyond our own immediate individual needs. An active involvement in the lives of other people and the lives of community organizations is not only

necessary for the well-being of those other people and organizations; it is also necessary, according to Collier, for our own happiness as well. Selfishness thus ends not only in injuring communities and children; it ends ultimately, he says, in destroying the self's own sense of well-being (*RSA*, 261).

At the end of his book, Collier readily concedes that there was much wrong with Victorian morality and Victorian ideals. "The denial of human sexuality, the double standard, the pervasive paternalism, the idealization of women, the over-control of children"-these, he says, were genuine flaws in Victorian culture which we should not try to overlook or deny. And he does not believe it possible to return to the exact manner and morals of an earlier generation or an earlier era. Nonetheless, American society in the heyday of the Victorian era-that is, roughly between the years 1815 and 1870-was a more stable, a more predictable, and above all a more decent and humane kind of society, Collier contends, than the society which replaced it, and it was so, he says, primarily because most people felt they had obligations to others which came before their own preoccupation with themselves (*RSA* 261-262).

Criticism of Collier

Collier's account of "the rise of selfishness" in America is lively and informative, and his book is indispensable reading for anyone who wants to understand the century-long process through which the older bourgeois-Christian value system that so impressed Tocqueville and that so deeply stamped the character of American society throughout most of the 19th century was first challenged and then eventually undermined by the carriers of an antagonistic value system. His work, however, suffers from two major difficulties, one conceptual, the other factual. To take the factual problem first: Collier in his narrative generally sees the effect of the vast waves of Southern and Eastern European immigrants who came to the urban centers of the United States in the years between 1880 and 1924 as having a corrosive effect on the attitudes and values so cherished by the Old Stock Victorians. The New Immigrants, according to his

interpretation, displayed almost none of the traditional Victorian values, as they were primarily concerned with having fun, while subjecting themselves to only the minimal amount of self-discipline and hard work that was necessary to get by in life at a fairly primitive level. Of the New Immigrants, he writes:

Hard work in the America of the 18th and 19th centuries often brought rewards, at times considerable ones. Similarly, for Victorian Americans, "repression of emotions and spontaneous impulses in favor of punctuality, order, cleanliness, and devotion to duty was a social necessity. . . ." Thrift, sobriety, and industry did actually pay off-if not always-in most cases to one degree or another. But the immigrants saw life in another way. Indifferent to Victorian notions of success, which they believed to be unobtainable in any case, they wanted to enjoy their lives as much as possible through the warmth of associations with family and friends; by means of such public entertainment as they could afford; and through drinking, and dancing in the saloons, concert gardens, and taverns they created for themselves in their own neighborhoods. The work ethic meant little to them; they had come out of cultures where work got you nothing but calluses and a sore back The immigrants, then, were bringing to the United States an array of habits, attitudes, and folkways that conflicted, at times dramatically, with the prevailing American patterns of thought and behavior. They were, in sum, resolutely anti-Victorian in almost every respect. They did not believe in discipline, punctuality, sobriety-the order and decency of the Victorian ethic. They wanted instead to live as expressively as they could. In what spare time they could snatch from their jobs and family obligations they wanted to drink, to dance, to gamble, to have fun. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the people of the old stock were appalled by their behavior. It seemed to them that the newcomers were intent upon destroying the decent and orderly society that they of the old stock were trying so hard to build and maintain (RSA, 31-33).

To say that Collier's account here is a stereotype would be to ascribe to it perhaps a greater degree of truth than it actually contains, for stereotypes, after all, often involve fairly valid generalizations. While it is true that many of the New Immigrant groups to which Collier refers—i.e., the Poles, Italians, Germans, Hungarians, Greeks, Jews, etc.—"lived more expressively" than the Old Stock WASPS in the sense that they believed in having fun at parties, at family gatherings, and at other festive occasions, and while they no doubt could drink, laugh, and dance in a less inhibited way than was the case with many of the members of the more laid-back Anglo-Saxon middle class (whose culture and upbringing may have tended to inhibit such activities), nevertheless, it was surely the more neurotic aspects of Victorian culture which the New Immigrants rejected, and not its more wholesome features. All of the New Immigrant groups, for instance, condemned habitual drunkenness and what we would today call alcohol abuse. Indeed, some of the New Immigrant groups, including the Italians and Jews, were a much more sober lot, with much fewer problem drinkers among their kind, than was the case among the older British, Scottish, and Welsh populations (Collier at one point acknowledges this fact). And while "living more expressively," and in some ways, perhaps, not as mannerly or refined, none of the groups that came to America in the 1880-1924 period approved of behavior that was violent, rowdy, licentious, or lewd. Most of the major New Immigrant groups, in fact, developed strong family-centered and church-centered cultures of their own in the various "urban villages" that they created in the large cities where they lived, and within these ethnic enclaves such behavior was just as much condemned as among the Old Stock Victorians. While most of the New Immigrant groups contained a segment that sociologists might characterize as a "disorganized lower-class," for most groups this was a fairly small proportion of the total population and was never influential enough to stamp the character of the ethnic community as a whole. The 19th century Irish constituted perhaps the one exception, but their immigration to America largely predated the New Immigrant period that Collier focuses on.

Collier has only the most superficial knowledge of American

immigrant history, and he is particularly weak in his knowledge of the influence of religion, and more specifically, of Roman Catholicism, on early twentieth century immigrant culture. In some ways, at least, Catholic immigrant culture was even more Victorian than that created by the Old Stock Victorians themselves. This was certainly true in regard to such marriage-related issues as adultery and divorce, which were condemned by the American Catholic Church with a degree of severity even greater than that represented by the Protestant Old Stock. (Indeed, one of the reasons the present writer's Old Stock Protestant mother was initially attracted to his Italian Catholic father as a potential life-mate was precisely because of the reputation immigrant-stock Catholics had acquired by the 1930s of being superior family people who took their marital vows much more seriously than Protestants.) Certainly in terms of actual religious practice, immigrant Catholics, on average, were more church-oriented than their Protestant counterparts: Catholics in the first half of this century not only attended Church more regularly than Protestants, but were much more likely to insist that their children be given a Christian education in a church-run school.

Immigrant Catholics, who comprised the bulk of the New Immigrants coming to America in the 1880-1924 period, tended to believe just as strongly as the Protestant Old Stock in the obligations of parents to provide for their offspring, in the necessity of carrying one's own weight in the world and "staying off relief," in the importance of strict standards of sexual morality both before and after marriage, and in the general obligation of all to act in a responsible manner consistent with one's social obligations. While Catholics were generally unsympathetic to the blanket condemnation of alcohol made by some Protestants (though more Catholics than are generally supposed were active in the early 20th century temperance movement), they were equally forceful in their condemnation of prostitution, pornography, abortion, and the mistreatment of children.

Collier's claim that the New Immigrants lacked a work ethic and were not interested in upward mobility is simply false. Many of the New Immigrants, to be sure, came from cultures where the oppor-

tunities for upward mobility were meager, but far from patterning their lives on this situation, this is precisely why many of them decided to leave their native lands and come to America. To leave the country one has grown up in in order to re-settle in a strange land thousands of miles away where a different language and different culture prevail takes a great deal of guts and gumption, and the millions of immigrants who have come to America, including those of the New Immigrant wave, have in general displayed a significantly *greater* willingness to save and sacrifice for the future, and to work long and hard hours (often at more than one job) than native Old Stock of comparable socio-economic status. The self-selection process involved in becoming an immigrant has generally assured that America has received the more ambitious, the more future-oriented, the less risk-averse, the more hopeful, and the more entrepreneurial of the world's peoples. While there has been considerable variation both within and between ethnic groups, most of the immigrants who came to this country in the period of the New Immigration brought to America a new energy and a new focus on improving themselves and the condition of their children that Tocqueville would surely have understood.

Collier's work also suffers from a serious conceptual flaw, though it is perhaps not so serious in the work of a social historian who makes no claim to being a theorist or philosopher. The conceptual difficulty involves Collier's use of the term "self" and "selfishness" to designate what he believes to be the greatest evils confronting contemporary America. In our declining commitment to family life and child-rearing responsibilities, in our growing addiction to ever larger doses of consumer goods, in our unwillingness to finance needed public services, and in our ever greater indulgence in alcohol, drugs, and sex, we Americans, says Collier, have become increasingly self-centered to the neglect of the needs of the group. This, he believes, can only have disastrous consequences. "I do not believe," Collier writes, "that there has ever existed a successful human society in which the needs of the individual members were invariably put ahead of those of the group" (*RSA*, 213). "Everywhere, not merely in human societies, but in most other primate groups as well," he

explains, "the integrity of the group is a primary concern" (*RSA*, 213). Taking a swipe at the Hippies then, he writes: "The *group*, which needed wood cut and corn hoed and shoes mended and children taught, could not be reconciled with *selves* who needed to write novels or play frisbee or smoke dope or lie in the sun" (*RSA*, 213).

Collier's basic point here is clear, and few would want to argue with it. Nevertheless, as our nightmare experience with communism, fascism, and the various hyper-nationalisms of this century should have made abundantly clear, there is a grave danger of framing the issue as Collier has done simply in terms of "the individual vs. the group." While we as individuals certainly have obligations to those collective institutions that help nurture and sustain us, and Collier is right in pointing this out, at the same time these collective institutions have critically important obligations to each of us as individuals, in so far as a main reason for their very existence is to facilitate the development of the individual human personality. Such a remark may sound trite, but in the context of an assessment of Collier's book it is well worth repeating. Any theory of our collective existence is fundamentally flawed if it does not recognize that each individual personality possesses a distinct uniqueness and a special depth dimension to its being-what traditionally has been called a soul-that all groups of human beings are obligated to respect. Any group theory which fails to give due regard to the uniqueness and inviolability of the individual personality should be viewed with the gravest suspicion.

Children in Pain: Christopher Lasch on the Decline of Families

Like Collier, Christopher Lasch believes that the social, economic, and cultural trends that have occurred in America in recent decades have had their most devastating effect upon children and upon the stability of the American family structure. Lasch, who grew up in the tradition of midwestern progressivism, and was most influenced in his early years as an academic scholar by a variety of socialist and social-democratic critiques of market capitalism, would gradually come to believe over the decade of the 1970s that the conventional

left-radical critiques of modern society, particularly in the area of marriage and family life, were increasingly less relevant to the most important social and economic problems confronting America. Lasch, it appears, would come to this conclusion largely through his own personal experience as a parent, as well as through his study of the history of the American family and the important changes it has undergone over time. Although Lasch disdains the title of social conservative (he specifically says, in fact, that neither conservatism, nor liberalism, nor socialism, nor libertarianism can offer much understanding of our present discontents), much of his writing over the last two decades displays an instinct and a sensibility that others less scrupulous in the use of simplifying labels would be quick to identify as socially conservative. Lasch, however, still retains a good deal of his earlier left-radicalism, particularly in his criticism of large scale corporate organization, huge military budgets, and the extreme acquisitiveness engendered by market economies, and what results is a certain eclecticism in his writing, though one which, in Lasch's own mind at least, has an inner coherence as the articulation of the sentiments and sensibilities that are common to people of lower-middle class or petty bourgeoisie origins. Lasch himself, of course, is not a member of the lower-middle class or petty bourgeoisie, and he sees its general point of view as flawed in significant ways, but he nevertheless feels that members of this class generally display a moral realism and a common sense wisdom that render their judgments on most matters far superior to those of the corporate, bureaucratic, intellectual, or media elite that tends to dominate so much of the public discussion in America.

"My own faith in the explanatory power of the old ideologies," Lasch writes in the Introduction to his most recent work, "began to waver in the mid-seventies when my study of the family led me to question the left's program of sexual liberation, careers for women, and professional child care" (*TOH*, 25). "Until then," he says, "I had always identified myself with the left I grew up in [in] the tradition of Middle Western progressivism, overlaid by the liberalism of the New Deal" (*TOH*, 25). "The unexpectedly rigorous business of bringing up children," he explains, "exposed me, as it necessarily

exposes any parent, to our . . . society's icy indifference to everything that makes it possible for children to flourish and to grow up to be responsible adults" (*TOH*, 33). Lasch then offers a long indictment of those cultural trends in America which he sees as inhospitable to the welfare of children and to the aims of parents who earnestly seek to raise children to become morally mature and responsible citizens. "To see the modern world from the point of view of a parent," he writes, "is to see it in the worst possible light":

This perspective unmistakably reveals the unwholesomeness, not to put it more strongly, of our way of life: our obsession with sex, violence, and the pornography of 'making it'; our addictive dependence on drugs, 'entertainment,' and the evening news; our impatience with anything that limits our sovereign freedom of choice, especially with the constraints of marital and familial ties; our preference for 'nonbinding commitments'; our third-rate educational system; our third-rate morality; our refusal to draw a distinction between right and wrong, lest we 'impose' our morality on others and thus invite others to 'impose' their morality on us; our reluctance to judge or be judged; our indifference to the needs of future generations, as evidenced by our willingness to saddle them with a huge national debt, an overgrown arsenal of destruction, and a deteriorating environment; our inhospitable attitude to the newcomers born into our midst; our unstated assumption, which underlies so much of the propaganda for unlimited abortion, that only those children born for success ought to be allowed to be born at all (*TOH*, 33).

Lasch sees the current weakness in the American family structure and the myriad difficulties parents encounter today in raising their children as the end product of a complex series of social and economic changes that have occurred in America since the latter part of the 19th century. One of the most important of these changes, he believes, was the shift from family-based occupations in agriculture, small business, and various skilled trades, to occupations in which the father worked away from the home in large-scale corporations or

other large enterprises over which he had little or no control. In the early part of the 19th century, when most men were employed as independent family farmers, shopkeepers, small businessmen, or tradesmen, fathers, Lasch explains, were not only in contact with their children for longer periods of the day than would be the case subsequently, but they would often assume the critically important role of training their male offspring to become partners with them in the running of the family farm or business. Under such circumstances, Lasch says, the role of the father in socializing the young male would rival in importance the socialization the male received from the mother, and the two parents together would constitute the dominant formative force in the child's life.

With the movement of fathers away from employment on the family farms or in the family business, however, young males, Lasch explains, were deprived of the close association with their fathers that had been the norm in early 19th century America. Working away from the home for long hours in a large-scale business enterprise in which he was only a minor underling, the salary-earning father, Lasch contends, was reduced more and more in his familial role to that of a mere breadwinner.

If the role of men in the family was declining in the latter half of the 19th century, the supporters of the family during this period, Lasch explains, had great faith that the parental deficit could be made up through the special child-rearing and civilizing talents of women. Women, he says, were generally seen in the 19th century as more family-oriented, more affectionate, more religious, and more moral than men, and their dominant influence within the family household was expected to lend a counterweight to the ruthlessly aggressive and acquisitive spirit that dominated outside market relations. The greater harshness and competitiveness of business life during the latter half of the 19th century, Lasch says, would lead to a greater emphasis on the nuclear family as an enclave in which loving and humane attitudes could prevail and children could learn the importance of such cherished bourgeois virtues as self-discipline, self-control, delayed gratification, and respect for authority. "The nineteenth-century cult of the home," he writes, "where the woman

ministered to her exhausted husband, repaired the spiritual damage inflicted by the market, and sheltered her children from its corrupting influence, expressed the hope that private satisfactions could make up for the collapse of communal traditions and civic order" (*HHW*, 168). "The withdrawal into the 'emotional fortress' of the family," he says, "took place not because family life became warmer and more attractive in the nineteenth century ... but because the outside world came to be seen as more forbidding" (*HHW*, 168). The late 19th century bourgeois family came to be seen more and more, Lasch explains, as "a haven in a heartless world," as a "last refuge of love and decency," where the dominant tone was to be set by the special nurturing talents of women.

This last refuge of love and decency, however, would continue to be assaulted by a variety of forces in the 20th century, Lasch explains, such that the once stable and self-confident bourgeois family of the 19th century would gradually give way to the uncertain and fragile institution that we have come to know in more recent years. Among those forces tending to weaken the family, according to Lasch, was the widespread acceptance of the ideology of the early 20th century mental health movement. Lasch's arguments against the mental health movement, and the therapeutic morality which it sought to propagate, are similar in many ways to those made by conservative Christians. A critical part of parenting, Lasch believes, involves the authoritative imposition of moral standards on the young and the demand that these moral standards be met. Moral guidance and what used to be known as character formation are seen by Lasch as crucial aspects of responsible parenting. Yet the ideology of the mental health movement, he contends, tended to undermine this sort of activity by teaching parents that moral absolutes and authoritative standards of right and wrong have no place in modern child-rearing (*HHW*, 173). Parents were to raise children in a non-judgmental, non-authoritarian manner, lest they impose upon them outdated or guilt-producing moral codes that would retard their future social development and adjustment. "The mental health movement, and more broadly the 'helping professions,'" Lasch writes, "positioned themselves in the vanguard of the revolt against old-fashioned

middle class morality." A "new morality of `human relations'," he says, would replace "the old morality of `right and wrong', `guilt and sin" (*HHW*, 102). The leaders of the movement had themselves escaped from the chains of this older bourgeois-Christian morality, Lasch remarks, "and they now had a mission to spread the new gospel among the unenlightened" (*HHW*, 102).

One of the most important effects of this more permissive, less judgmental style of child rearing that became common by the 1920s, Lasch explains, was the heightened influence upon a youth's development of his childhood and adolescent peer group. When parents do not offer firm guidance to their children in terms of how they are to act or not to act, Lasch contends, the peer group tends to take over to fill the void. Moreover, with their authority undermined by the permissive ideology of the mental health movement, parents in this century, says Lasch, tended not only to abandon the difficult task of discipline and character formation, but they often themselves began to defer to the peer group to determine what was permissible and what was not. Parents, Lasch writes, came to "shift much of the responsibility for the child's development to his peers-against whom, in the absence of firm standards of their own, they also measure[d] the child's academic, athletic, and psychological progress" (*HHW*, 173). Under such circumstances, says Lasch, children come to see the peer group as standing above the family and the real source of authority regarding proper conduct. The peer group, he says, comes not only to regulate taste, but "it puts forward its own version of ideal family life." The peer group, he writes, "circulates information about parental regulation currently in force, about regulations that are violated with impunity, about what the world upholds as the norm of parenthood. The child's mastery of this information gives him an important tactical advantage in negotiations with his parents" (*HHW*, 173).

The authority of parents over their children was weakened still further over the last few generations, Lasch believes, by a cult of expertise first propagated by a variety of social reformers, mental health advocates, physicians, philanthropists, and others in the early decades of this century. Alarmed by what they saw as the backward-

ness of many lower class families, and particularly lower class immigrant families, these social reformers, says Lasch; helped to propagate the view that only experts knew how to raise children properly and that family life would be improved as the influence and prestige of these experts increased. The effect of this cult of expertise, however, was not to improve parenting, Lasch contends, but to undermine the self-confidence of parents in their own abilities to make crucial parenting decisions. Instead of relying upon their own intuitions and common sense wisdom, parents in the 20s, 30s, and 40s, Lasch explains, began to defer more and more to those claiming special medical, psychiatric, and social-scientific knowledge, whose shifting and frequently conflicting advice often helped only to confuse them. "Outside advice," says Lasch, "weakens parent's already faltering confidence in their own judgment." "The proliferation of medical and psychiatric advice," he says, "undermines parental confidence at the same time that it encourages a vastly inflated idea of the importance of child-rearing techniques and of the parent's responsibility for their failure." "In their ignorance and uncertainty," Lasch explains, "parents redouble their dependence on experts, who confuse them with a superabundance of conflicting advice, itself subject to constant changes in psychiatric and medical fashion" (*HHW*, 172).

Parental authority over children was also weakened in this century, Lasch claims, by the growth of a powerful advertising industry and a mass media, which, in their pervasive influence over American attitudes and opinions, have made it almost impossible for parents to provide a sheltered space for their offspring in which their own values and norms could prevail. The advertising industry, moreover, tended to glamorize youth and to send out the message that older generations were old-fashioned and had little if anything of value to impart to the young. Coupled with the widespread view that technological knowledge was the paradigm for all knowledge, and that experts knew best what children needed, parents, Lasch says, became less and less sure that they possessed any enduring wisdom or cultural treasures that were worthy of being passed on to future generations. Under such circumstances, Lasch explains, par-

ents tended to abdicate their parental authority, as the great task of socializing the young was increasingly taken over by the media, by peer groups, by the public schools, by self-styled experts, by various social service agencies, and by those whom Lasch with sneering sarcasm calls "the helping professions."

With their authority and self-confidence undermined, many parents in recent decades, Lasch says, have begun to construe their role vis-a-vis their children, more as one of companion, helper, or older sibling than as any genuine authority figure. Lacking confidence in the validity of their own values and traditions, swayed by permissive theories of child rearing, and no longer able to compete with peer groups, the media, experts, the public schools, and various social service agencies for influence over the young, parents, Lasch charges, have increasingly abandoned many of the more important tasks of parenting. Many parents, in fact, he charges, have become so irresponsible that instead of offering guidance to their children, they try to keep up with them by affecting a youthful outlook and a youthful appearance, and by imitating their manner of dress and speech.

Children, however, Lasch believes, need authoritative moral guidance, and they need the structure of meaning and purpose that is provided by being situated within a continuity of generations and a continuity of cultural traditions. Without this cultural and generational continuity, Lasch contends, life becomes increasingly painful as it becomes dominated by varying moods of anxiety, boredom, and anomie. "The modern parent's attempt to make children feel loved and wanted," Lasch writes, "does not conceal an underlying coolness—the remoteness of those who have little to pass on to the next generation" (*CN*, 50). The "ever-present sense of historical discontinuity," Lasch says, is "the blight of our society," and "[it] falls with particular effect on the family" (*CN*, 50). In earlier centuries families provided the young with a sense of historical continuity, Lasch explains, in so far as parents saw themselves as situated within a meaningful family history that itself was part of a larger social and cultural history that was thought to contain important norms and truths that should be carried forward into the future. This sense of

historical continuity has been lost, Lasch claims, as Americans by and large no longer draw upon a meaningful past except in the debased form of nostalgia, and the greatest victims of this loss, he explains, are the young who increasingly feel a sense of numbness, disorientation, and drift.

In an op-ed piece in *The New York Times* a few years ago Lasch described in starkest terms the effect upon young people of this general historical and cultural discontinuity. "I believe," Lasch wrote, "that young people in our society are living in a state of almost unbearable, though mostly inarticulate, agony." "They experience the world," he wrote, "only as a source of pleasure and pain." The source of this malady he explained lay in the failure of adults to provide the young with an overarching context of cultural meanings with which they could make some kind of sense out of their lives:

The culture at their disposal provides so little help in ordering the world that experience comes to them in the form merely of direct stimulation or deprivation, without much symbolic mediation We have failed to provide them with a culture that claims to explain the world or links the experience of one generation to those that came before and to those that will follow. Once upon a time we told our children stories, drawn from our collective experiences that helped them to make their way in the world. The Bible, classical mythology, fairy tales and patriotic legends gave them something to live up to. The stories we all had in common, even when we disagreed about their meaning (even when we debunked them as offering an over-idealized picture of the world) served young people as a reassuring background or framework against which their own lives became intelligible.⁸

What Lasch says here, of course, is similar in many ways to the criticisms of contemporary American culture, and of the American educational system more specifically,⁹ that have been made in recent years by such social conservatives as Allan Bloom, E. D. Hirsch, and Russell Kirk. Deprived of a cultural framework of meanings that can

help provide continuity of generations and a sense of participating in a morally uplifting collective enterprise, young people, Lasch believes, have been spiritually impoverished and cast into the vast wilderness of modern life without guide or compass.

A major theme in Lasch's treatment of the American family is the family's ultimate failure to provide a secure haven or sanctuary against those destructive forces found in the heartless worlds of finance, business, and the street. These forces, according to Lasch, have not only gained in strength in the business and commercial world outside the family, but what is more disturbing, he contends, they have breached the walls of the family itself such that the self-seeking acquisitiveness and emphasis on immediate gratification that was long rampant outside the familial enclave would eventually come to influence marriage and family relations as well. The most intimate relationships of family life, says Lasch, have been perverted "by the calculating, manipulative spirit that has long been ascendent in business life" (*HHW*, 166). "The spirit of economic rationality," he writes, "had become so pervasive in modern society that it invaded even the family, the last stronghold of precapitalist modes of thought and feeling" (*HHW*, 36). "The more closely capitalism came to be identified with immediate gratification and planned obsolescence, the more relentlessly it wore away the moral foundations of family life" (*TOH*, 63). In the long run, argues Lasch, the "attempt to build up the family as a counterweight to the acquisitive spirit" that ruled in the market would prove to be a "lost cause" (*TOH*, 63).

Nowhere is this invasion of the family by the outside market world more evident, in Lasch's view, than in the rising rate of divorce, the increasing unwillingness of people to make binding commitments, and the vastly diminished investment many parents now make in the rearing of their children. Modern marriages, Lasch maintains, are increasingly being conducted according to the principles that are operative in the business world whereby "one leaves a position as soon as a better one offers itself" (*HHW*, 131). "Our society," he says, "far from fostering private life at the expense of public life, has made deep and lasting friendships, love affairs, and marriages increasingly difficult to achieve" (*CN*, 30). The greatest

losers in all this, of course, are the children, who can no longer count on the security of growing up in a loving two-parent home, and like Collier, Lasch stresses the deeply scarring effect that divorce can have upon the social and psychological development of the young. So great is the harm that divorce can have upon young children, Lasch believes, that in recent years he has seriously proposed that it be legally prohibited, or at least that it be severely restricted for those whose offspring have not reached a mature age.

The market mentality also corrupts many of the adolescents and children in modern marriages, Lasch contends, in so far as young people frequently come to judge their parents by their ability to provide material goods and services. Parents who cannot provide their young with the toys, clothes, games, electronic devices, recreational goods, and other desired commodities on an appropriate scale, says Lasch, are judged inferior and failing in their parental responsibilities.

Like Collier, Lasch believes that the decade of the 1980s did little to stem the decline of families in America. Despite all the rhetoric about family values, the 80s, Lasch contends, merely continued the moral slide that had become visible to all in the me-decade of the 70s, and the victory of a conservative president, he believes, did nothing to change things. Indeed, Lasch is even harsher in his assessment of the Reagan administration and the values it brought to national prominence than is Collier. Reagan-style conservatism, according to Lasch, is riddled with a fundamental contradiction in so far as the unregulated free market, whose virtues it so blithely extols, tends to further a spirit of self-seeking acquisitiveness that comes to pervade many other aspects of American life, including family and community relations. It is one of the fundamental themes of Lasch's work that the careerism and consumerism that market economies tend to engender, will, over time, tend to undermine the sorts of attitudes and behavior that are necessary to maintain vigorous family and community life. Lasch would apparently like to see very severe restrictions on many market-related activities, though he does not spell these out in any detail.

Lasch also has harsh words for the 60s-era feminist movement,

which he believes has had a largely negative impact on the stability of families and the quality of child care in America. While acknowledging the reasonableness of the feminist demand for equality in the workplace, "feminists, for their part," he writes, "need to acknowledge the deterioration of care for 'the young and the justice of the demand that something be done to arrest it" (*HHW*, xvi). "Feminists," he says, "have not answered the argument that day care provides no substitute for the family" (*HHW*, xvi).

Lasch, in fact, tends to view feminism much the way he views the counter-culture of the 60s. Both, he believes, were false in their claims to being genuine radical movements, as their rhetoric, he contends, only concealed a self-seeking hedonism that was little different from the careerist and consumerist capitalism which they so vigorously denounced. Hippieism, feminism, and Reaganism, can thus all be seen by Lasch as part of the same cultural trend towards self-indulgent individualism that rejects the great sacrifices that must be made to maintain any kind of healthy family or community life. "In its own heedless disregard of the family and the needs of future generations," Lasch writes, "the feminist movement, like the cultural radicalism of the sixties that gave rise to it, merely echoes the culture it claims to criticize" (*HHW*, xvii).

A Culture of Narcissism

As Collier organizes much of his "decline narrative" around the single concept of "selfishness," so Lasch uses the term "narcissism" as a key organizing idea to characterize what he sees as the degenerate state into which American society has fallen. American society, he charges, has bred a "culture of narcissism" in which the narcissistic personality type has come to dominate many areas of both private and public life. "Narcissism," in Lasch's usage, it is important to realize, is not the same thing as selfishness. While narcissistic people do indeed tend to be absorbed in themselves, and in this sense, at least, are selfish, the narcissistic personality type that dominates so much of American society, according to Lasch, is characterized by a very specific sort of self-absorption that unlike the selfishness that we might identify with a lustful, greedy, or overly ambitious person,

derives from an inner emptiness and a general inability to enter into all but the most shallow and superficial relationships with other human beings. Narcissists, according to Lasch, experience an inner emptiness to their being; they are selectively apathetic; they disengage emotionally from personal relationships and public causes; and they generally are more concerned with getting by in life through a minimum expenditure of effort and energy than in striving to get ahead or to realize some meaningful life goal. Narcissists, says Lasch, are often haunted by a fear of nothingness or a vague feeling that their life has no meaning; they are casual or even promiscuous in their sex life, but incapable of deep or lasting love relationships; they do not experience their lives as part of a meaningful flow of history or a meaningful succession of generations; they are often indifferent to the welfare of those around them; and they generally adopt a one-day-at-a-time attitude towards life rather than living according to a long-range plan. The narcissistic personality, says Lasch, is a personality that has shrunk to the level of a "minimal self," which fears binding commitments and deliberately cultivates a protective shallowness in relations with others. It is because of this last factor, Lasch believes, that narcissists are so often found in large-scale bureaucratic organizations, since an ability to manipulate people and a capacity for shallow and fleeting relationships, he believes, is often the way to a stable and successful career in such organizations.

In order to overcome their inner sense of emptiness and futility, Lasch explains, narcissists will often try to live vicariously by identifying with the rich and famous. Television-watching and identification with media stars thus comes to play a crucial role in an age of narcissism, according to Lasch's analysis, and identification with those who have become public personalities comes to serve as a means of raising one's self-esteem by vicariously sharing in their fame. In the form of the Hollywood celebrities, however, the narcissist has chosen as figures to honor those who are often extreme narcissists themselves, Lasch contends, and the result, he believes, is that narcissism in the extreme form of the Hollywood star comes to set the tone for important aspects of public life in America.

In addition to identifying with media stars, narcissistic personali-

ties, says Lasch, often seek to fill the inner emptiness they experience in themselves through the purchase of more and more consumer goods. Consumerism and compulsive shopping for frivolous novelties has become, he charges, one of the major features of American and other advanced capitalist societies. Consumerism, Lasch says, is fed by a powerful advertising industry, which he accuses of making the consumer into an addict who cannot live without ever increasing doses of externally provided stimulation. Advertising and the logic of consumerism, says Lasch, "upholds consumption as the answer to the age-old discontents of loneliness, sickness, weariness, [and] lack of sexual satisfaction" (*CN*, 72). In an age of narcissism, people go shopping, he contends, not merely to buy useful and needed goods, but to dispel their boredom, overcome their loneliness, and relieve their depression. Unlike the acquisitive individualist of the 19th century, the contemporary narcissist, says Lasch, does not accumulate goods against the future, "but demands immediate gratification and lives in a state of restless, perpetually unsatisfied desire" (*CN*, 71). The narcissistic consumer, he says, comes to look at the commodities offered for sale "as if they were mood altering drugs" (*TOH*, 522). But consumerism cannot overcome the spiritual desolation of modern life, Lasch insists, and consumerism, he believes, creates many problems of its own including status anxiety and status envy, personal insecurity, and the anxiety of parents concerning their ability to satisfy the demands of their children for ever more expensive commodities.

The narcissistic personality type that now dominates advanced industrialized societies has a particularly intense fear of old age, Lasch explains. Since narcissists are little concerned with posterity (including often enough their own offspring), have little religious faith, and cannot dedicate themselves to great causes or values beyond their immediate day to day self-interest, life for the narcissistic personality, says Lasch, becomes increasingly terrifying and lonely as the narcissist begins to advance in years. Historically speaking, the contemporary narcissist, Lasch believes, represents a drastic shift in the way people throughout the ages have tended to relate themselves to future generations. Lasch quotes on this topic

from a remark by Tom Wolfe: "Most people, historically," Wolfe writes, "have *not* lived their lives as if thinking, 'I have only one life to live.' Instead they have lived *as* if they are living their ancestors' lives and their offsprings' lives" (*CN*, 7). But in his prevailing passion to live for the moment, the narcissist, says Lasch, loses all sense of historical continuity and no longer feels himself part of a succession of generations reaching into the past and extending into the future. "To live for yourself, not for your predecessors or posterity"-this says Lasch, has become the dominant narcissistic passion of our time (*CN*, 5).

If the contemporary narcissist does not relate well to children or to future generations, he does not do much better, according to Lasch, in establishing loving and committed male\female relationships. Americans today, Lasch contends, generally find less and less human fulfillment in their place of work, and often their political and communal life is spiritually even more impoverished. To make up for this, he says, Americans often seek to attain great meaning and fulfillment through their personal romantic relationships and frequently demand of such relationships "the richness and intensity of a religious experience" (*CN*, 194). The high demands that are thus made on interpersonal relationships, however, Lasch contends, produce a situation of "emotional overload" where failure becomes ever more likely. The narcissistic personality is almost certain to fail in such a situation, according to Lasch, for such a personality lacks the depth of character and the capacity for self-sacrifice and binding commitment that is necessary to maintain any kind of high-level love relationship.¹⁰

Recognizing his incapacity to maintain a deep and intimate relationship of male\female love, narcissists, says Lasch, generally turn away from close emotional attachments and often become casual or promiscuous in their erotic life. In severing sex from love, marriage, and procreation, the narcissist becomes truly liberated from all traditional standards and taboos, Lasch concedes, but the result is not the fulfillment the narcissist seeks. Far from finding happiness, fulfillment, or contentment, the sexually-liberated narcissist, says Lasch, is left perpetually unsatisfied and eventually

succumbs "to hypochondria, to melancholy, or to suicidal self-hatred . . . that alternates with a chronic mild depression" (*HHW*, 183). This "chronic mild depression," Lasch believes, has become the dominant mood of our age. Even when narcissists marry, as many of them do, they do not, says Lasch, invest much in their marriages emotionally, and they usually consider their marital vows to be strictly "non-binding."

Failing to find meaning in love, work, or dedication to children and causes, and left unsatisfied by the fantasy worlds of advertising, television, and Hollywood glamour, the contemporary narcissist in America, according to Lasch, frequently seeks his peace of mind through the vehicle of psychotherapy. Therapy, says Lasch, has displaced religion as the major organizing framework for much of American culture, as it has successfully replaced the older promise of salvation and forgiveness with the newer one of mental health. Yet therapy for Lasch—or at least the kinds of therapy that have developed in America over the past several decades—is itself a narcissistic enterprise that tends to make the narcissistic people who seek it out even more narcissistic. Modern American forms of therapy, Lasch charges, have come to equate psychic health and personal liberation "with an absence of inner restraints, inhibitions, or hangups." Unlike the original psychoanalysis developed by Sigmund Freud, therapy, says Lasch, "no longer seeks merely to bring unconscious wishes to light, so as to analyze the consequences of their repression," but instead, in a purely self-indulgent manner, "seeks to dissolve the very mechanism of repression" (*HHW*, 140). Elaborating on this point he writes: "To liberate humanity from . . . outmoded ideas of love and duty has become the mission of the post-Freudian therapies and particularly of their converts and popularizers, for whom mental health means the overthrow of inhibitions and the immediate gratification of every impulse" (CN, 13). "Even when therapists speak of the need for 'meaning' and 'love'," Lasch writes, "they define love and meaning simply as the fulfillment of the patient's emotional requirements" (CN, 13). "It hardly occurs to them," he says, "to encourage the subject to subordinate his needs and interests to those of others, to someone or some cause or tradition outside himself

(*CN*, 13).

Lasch also charges therapy with undermining the sense of moral responsibility, without which, he insists, it is often impossible for people to change their ways. "Therapeutic modes of thought and practice," he writes, "exempt their object, the patient, from critical judgment and relieve him of moral responsibility" (*CN*, 230). There is an intimate connection, however, Lasch believes, "between the erosion of moral responsibility and the waning of the capacity for self-help" (*CN*, 230). In its rejection of the older religious notions of sin and guilt, and in its attempt to replace the moral categories of good and evil with the medical categories of health and sickness, therapy, Lasch believes, may be denying to the self-absorbed what they most need to overcome their self-absorption.

Progress, Hubris, and the Rediscovery of Moral Realism

If the narcissistic "minimal self" dominates much of contemporary American culture for Lasch, at the same time he believes that the thrust of much of the economic and technological aspects of our civilization is not so much narcissistic in the specific sense in which he uses this term, but, on the contrary, Faustian or Promethean. Lasch criticizes what he sees as the Faustian/Promethean ethos of modern technology and the capitalist economic order that it has made possible on two separate grounds. First, he believes that technology-driven economic growth is already approaching its natural limits, which are imposed by the scarcity of the earth's natural resources and the fragility of its delicate eco-system. Continual economic growth in the advanced capitalist countries, Lasch contends, will not only increase the gap between rich and poor nations, and thus heighten global political tensions, but it will also, he believes, deplete the earth's stock of non-renewable natural resources, pollute the environment, and destroy nature's delicate ecological balance. Lasch's ideas and formulations in this area thus parallel quite closely the views propagated over the past two decades by Green parties in Europe and by various environmental groups in the U.S.

But the idea of unending technological progress—the great dream of the Enlightenment and the scientific revolutions that preceded it—is criticized by Lasch on moral and spiritual grounds as well. An ever expanding standard of living, which provides the main rationale for the continued development of technology and industry, involves, says Lasch, not only a very narrow ideal of the good life, but on a deeper level, he believes, it reflects a pathological unwillingness to accept the limitations and constraints imposed by the human condition itself. The dream of unending technological and economic progress, Lasch believes, involves an infantile fantasy of omnipotence and a Promethean refusal to accept the humble place assigned to man in the overall scheme of things. It is, he believes, a kind of cosmic impiety that would deny our creaturely finiteness and our dependence upon forces over which ultimately we have little control. "In psychological terms," says Lasch, "the dream of subjugating nature is our culture's regressive solution to the problem of narcissism—regressive because it seeks to restore the primal illusion of omnipotence and refuses to accept limits on our collective self-sufficiency." "In religious terms," he says, "the revolt against nature is also a revolt against God—that is, against the reality of our dependence on forces external to ourselves" (*CN*, 244). But "neither Prometheus nor Narcissus," Lasch writes, "will lead us out of our present predicament" (*MS*, 20). What is needed, he believes, is a true ecological attitude towards the physical universe which would seek to bind man to nature as caretaker and cultivator, while accepting the inevitable tensions that exist between our unlimited aspirations and the limits of our knowledge and capacity. Both the Promethean attitude of technological mastery over nature and the Hippie/flower child attitude of tensionless unity with nature must be rejected, Lasch insists.

What man in contemporary American culture needs most, according to Lasch, is a strong dose of moral realism that understands both the creative and destructive capacities of human nature and can look forward to the future with a sense of hope and trust that is not shaken by a recognition of the inevitably tragic dimension of human existence. Lasch finds this moral realism in three separate sources.

First, there is what we might call the common-sense realism which Lasch finds in the attitudes and sensibilities of lower-middle class culture. While he agrees with liberal critics of this culture who decry its intellectual narrowness and its tendency towards nativism, provincialism, and racism, nevertheless, liberal critics of "Middle America," says Lasch, "in their eagerness to condemn what is objectionable," have been blinded to "the positive features of petty bourgeois culture" (*TOH*, 531). Among these positive features, Lasch includes a pride in workmanship, a dedication to home and family, a concern for church and neighborhood, a respect for the sanctity of life and the need for limits as reflected in the opposition to abortion, and a general willingness to find satisfaction in a modest level of material well-being. Perhaps the greatest virtue of lower-middle class culture in Lasch's eyes is its skepticism regarding the view that technological progress brings moral progress and its realistic understanding that in morals no less than in economics "everything has its price." "Whatever can be said against them," Lasch writes, members of lower-middle class culture (i.e. small proprietors, artisans, tradesmen, and farmers), "are unlikely to mistake the promised land of progress for the true and only heaven" (*TOH*, 17).

A second source of moral realism for Lasch is to be found in the form of psychoanalysis originally propounded by Sigmund Freud. While many neo-Freudian revisionists, particularly those on the Left, have criticized Freud's view of human nature as too "pessimistic" and as giving undue weight to the forces of instinct and unconscious motivations to the neglect of the social and cultural factors that influence human life, it is precisely in these disputed features of Freud's thought that Lasch finds its greatest strength. Freud's contention, espoused most clearly in his *Civilization and its Discontents*, that there is an "irreconcilable antagonism between culture and instinct" is the most important insight of Freudian psychoanalysis, according to Lasch (*HHW*, 77). Psychoanalysis as Freud originally formulated it, Lasch believes, is guided by a moral realism that recognizes that civilized behavior requires the renunciation and suppression of some of our most powerful instincts, and that this

renunciation inevitably involves some degree of tension, conflict, and suffering. Psychoanalysis for Freud, Lasch explains, could help men and women understand better the nature of the great sacrifices that had to be made in the name of civilization thereby rendering those sacrifices somewhat easier to bear. But Freud's version of psychoanalysis, Lasch stresses, made no claim to being able to provide meaning to life, nor did it claim it could make people happy, contented, or secure. Like Freud, Lasch believes that conflict and suffering are inevitably a part of human existence, that life consists of a series of renunciations," and that contrary to many modern illusions, this state of affairs cannot be altered in any fundamental way either through therapy, through behavioral conditioning, or through an abundance of material goods.

Lasch is clearly skeptical of the attempts made by post-Freudian analysts to absolve people from the obligation of established moral codes or to eliminate feelings of guilt for actions they have done. Lasch also criticizes what he sees as the watery humanitarianism of some neo-Freudian revisionists who would believe that meaningful love and commitment is possible without some form of parochial attachment. You cannot have genuine love for people, whether individuals or" groups, Lasch insists, that is not in some sense parochial. Love, he believes, must be directed to this or that person-but not to others-this or that group-but not to all groups-if it is to remain at all meaningful, intense, or productive.

The third source of moral realism for Lasch is the prophetic and neo-Augustinian strain in the Jewish/Christian religion as represented by such 20th century figures as Reinhold Niebuhr and Martin Luther King, as well as by such earlier figures as Jonathan Edwards, Orestes Brownson, and Abraham Lincoln. The prophetic and neo-Augustinian tradition in the Biblical religion is praised by Lasch for its realistic understanding of the shortcomings of human nature, its recognition that sinful man is in need of continuous repentance, and its emphasis on the obligation to live in the present with faith and hope without adopting an unrealistic optimism regarding the future. Neo-Augustinian and prophetic religion is seen by Lasch as having played a critical role in American history as a counterweight to the

shallow optimism of liberal progressivism. Martin Luther King, in particular, comes in for Lasch's praise in this context. King, Lasch believes, was a genuine American hero, who was able to temper the optimistic liberalism so endemic to American political life with "a deeper awareness of life's tragic dimension" that he learned from his early exposure to the Baptist Christianity of the black church and his later encounter with the "neo-orthodoxy" of Reinhold Niebuhr and others (*TOH*, 391).

Criticism of Lasch

Lasch's reflections on the family and on our contemporary "culture of narcissism" contain many valuable insights that add to our understanding of some of the key social developments in America in what has been described as our "post-Protestant" era. Though his use of psychoanalytic theory will at times appear fanciful to all but convinced Freudians,^{1,2} in general, his psychological account of the aimlessness, hedonism, and mild depression of the narcissistic personality of our time is illuminating, sometimes brilliantly so. Two criticisms of Lasch's views, however, must be made in the present context. First of all, his claim that global economic growth will soon be approaching its natural limits is not backed by *any* kind of evidence, and indeed, it is a highly dubious conjecture. Contrary to what Lasch believes, the scarcity of non-renewable natural resources and the constraints placed upon certain types of industrial activities by the need to preserve the earth's delicate eco-system does not necessarily translate into the conclusion that we are approaching the limits of economic growth. As Joseph Schumpeter and others have reminded us, technological innovation is a key to increased economic productivity, and technological innovation is always an open sea that cannot be well predicted nor its limits well discerned. Technology to be sure cannot save us from sin, and our increased control over nature most surely has led many to the intoxicating hubris and overweening pride of which Lasch speaks. Nevertheless, technology can increase our economic efficiency and raise our standard of living, and there is no reason to believe that the innovative process will

radically change in the near future. To give just two examples: Fusion energy to replace fossil fuels, and pollution-free hydrogen fuel cells to power our automobiles are just some of the possibilities on the horizon for overcoming what at the present time might appear as a definite natural limit placed on economic growth.

A second problem with Lasch's thought concerns his criticism of large-scale business organizations. Drawing from 19th and early 20th century critics of corporate capitalism, particularly syndicalists and populists, Lasch criticizes what he sees as a lack of a sense of accomplishment that goes with most jobs in large-scale industries and government bureaus, where each individual performs a highly specialized task in return for a stipulated wage. Small-scale proprietorship, whether in farming, business, or a skilled craft, is seen by Lasch as a more meaningful and fulfilling kind of life occupation than employment as a wage laborer in a large-scale enterprise, and the greater leisure time and improved standard of living that the former kind of employment can make possible is no compensation, Lasch insists, for the spiritual impoverishment of spending much of one's life working at a meaningless and unfulfilling task. Although Lasch does not go quite as far as calling for an end to all large-scale productive enterprises, he criticizes those who would dismiss such proposals as mere sentimentalism or nostalgia, and suggests that the dogma of "the obsolescence of small-scale production" needs to be re-examined (*TOH*, 220). "The assumption that economic abundance comes before everything else," says Lasch, "leads unavoidably to an acceptance of centralized production and administration as the only way to achieve it"-and this assumption, he believes, must be called into question if people are really going to talk seriously about meaningful work and meaningful communities of workers (*TOH*, 328).

While the decline in small-scale proprietorship and the sense of independence that went along with it, is in some ways to be lamented-and here Lasch speaks not only for syndicalists and populists, but for earlier Jeffersonians, conservative Catholics, and the Southern Agrarians of the 1930s-at the same time, it is simply not the case, as Lasch seems to assume, that wage labor in large-scale

productive enterprises is by its very nature meaningless or alienating. As anyone who has ever worked a variety of jobs can attest, the key to satisfaction in any job, regardless of the size of the enterprise in which one works, is the ability to perform a task competently, the belief that the task one is performing is a useful or important one to the institution for which one works, and the belief that one's efforts are properly appreciated and properly rewarded. Some jobs are perhaps so tedious and boring that the jobs would be found unsatisfactory for most people under almost any condition. This may be the case, for instance, for certain assembly line jobs-though people of very low intelligence reportedly find such jobs stimulating and rewarding, and in any case, the number of such jobs as a percentage of the overall workforce has been declining for decades. It is simply not true, however, that the vast variety of jobs that are performed by people working in large factories, bureaus, and offices are somehow, by their very nature, spiritually deadening or alienating. Whether one considers the job of a secretary, computer programmer, janitor, fork-lift operator, financial accountant, art designer, production manager, file clerk, safety engineer, electrician, carpenter, industrial chemist, security guard, or plumber-or indeed almost any other of the many hundreds of different kinds of jobs that are performed in large-scale organizations-the job itself may or may not be a source of satisfaction depending on a variety of factors. Some people clearly *prefer* working for large-scale organizations rather than being their own proprietor because of the greater job security and benefits such organizations typically offer, and while the "company man" may have declined dramatically in number, as Lasch seems to believe, it is still certainly the case that many people often identify themselves with the company for which they work and are proud to be known as part of a particular corporate team. In Japan, of course, this latter pattern is said to be the norm, which at a minimum should teach us that, contrary to what Lasch seems to believe, in advanced capitalist societies work in a well-run and well-managed corporate organization need not be all tedium, drudgery, exploitation, and spiritual death.

**The Demise of the Bourgeois-Protestant Value System:
Daniel Bell on the Triumph of Cultural Modernism**

Daniel Bell is the only one of the three authors treated in this review who actually uses the term conservative to describe his attitude towards certain issues of culture and value. In the 1978 Foreword to his thoughtful and highly influential book on *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, Bell summarizes his views on diverse topics with the pithy formulation: "I am a socialist in economics, a liberal in politics, and a conservative in culture" (CCC, xi). By "conservative in culture," Bell means that he believes in objective standards of good and bad in the realm of literature and art, and that he sees the maintenance of tradition-and particularly religious tradition-as central to the vitality of a culture, since it is tradition, he believes, which provides continuity of memory with the past and which shows new generations how older generations have coped with such fundamental human dilemmas as the inevitability of death and suffering. Bell's cultural conservatism seems to have intensified in response to the assaults upon traditional American norms and values by the Hippie generation of the 1960s, though one of the striking features of Bell's thought over the decades is just how consistent it has been since his student days at City College in the late 1930s. Bell always appears to have been a very sober-minded social democrat, who always believed in the necessity of a large private-sector economy and institutional guarantees of civil liberties, and who never had much sympathy either with the revolutionary and apocalyptic romanticism of the Leninist left, nor with the antinomianism and bohemianism so common among young opponents of bourgeois society. Bell too, from a very early age, seems to have been powerfully attracted toward great literature and great art, and never appears to have been bothered much, either by left-populist or relativist-positivist assaults on the idea of objective aesthetic and cultural standards.

Much of Bell's early writings, both as editor of the socialist *New Leader* in the early 1940s and later as the labor editor of *Fortune*, was turned toward what he believed to be "the key problem of modern

life,"¹³ namely, the sense of alienation that ensues from the fact that most workers in modern industrial organizations could not find satisfaction in their jobs. Inspired in part by the humanistic strains in the Marxist tradition, Bell explored in a number of his early articles and studies various ways in which work in large-scale industrial organizations might be made less tedious and stultifying. Bell at this time was particularly critical of the vogue for time-motion studies and other studies by industrial sociologists that failed, he believed, to consider the meaningfulness of factory work from the standpoint of the actual lives of the workers involved. The thrust of Bell's criticism, however, was always in a meliorist or reformist direction, as he never believed in the desirability either of government ownership of the means of production or total worker management of factories.

Indeed, despite his early attraction to Marxism, Bell never appears to have taken very seriously the more romantic and utopian visions to be found in leftist literature, whether socialist, communist, or syndicalist. In his first widely read book, *The End of Ideology*, which was written over the decade of the 1950s, Bell tried to show that revolutionary and romantic ideologies had exhausted themselves in the murderous wars and revolutions of this century, and that we were now approaching an era where utopian visions would cease to have a powerful impact over people's minds. In the past, Bell explained, utopian politics had drawn great vitality from its promise of a total transformation of society-"it wanted to wash away an entire society in one tidal wave" (*EL*, 312). But reality must eventually dawn on the utopian radical, Bell declared, and we are once again back to the mundane affairs of life. Concepts and visions deriving from heroic and ultimately romantic images of human life, Bell suggested, had not served mankind well in the political arena, whereas the more mundane view of politics as a place where diverse interests could be explored and reconciled had produced the more civil kinds of politics that one found in Britain and America. In America, Bell said, "we do not live at extremes"-which is one reason, he believed, America had successfully avoided the destructive ideological conflicts that had brought so much havoc to Europe in this century. Bell was particularly critical at this time of those

radicals of both the left and right, who, yearning to live their own lives at some extreme, condemned ordinary sorts of people for their failure to live at such a level of grandeur (*EL*, 301).

With the 60s and 70s Bell's interest began to shift from labor problems and the decline of utopianism, first to the structural economic changes that were taking place in many advanced industrialized societies, and then later to the increasing importance of cultural developments and cultural changes upon the evolution of the American character structure. Bell was to display in these years an almost uncanny ability to discern the direction in which intellectual inquiry was headed in America, as his two books from this period, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, first published in 1973, and *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, which appeared three years later, were each to become the center of an enormous amount of controversy and discussion, as *The End of Ideology* had been a decade previously. It was in the "Coda" appended to *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* that Bell first put forth his theory of cultural modernism and how it had all but destroyed the older bourgeois-Christian notions of character and morality, and he would later develop these themes at much greater length in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, as well as in several essays.

Bell uses the term "modernism" to cover what he sees as a common sensibility that has permeated much of the literature, philosophy, poetry, painting, theater, and film of the last century and a half in both America and Europe. Although key elements of the modernist sensibility, according to Bell, can be found in Rousseau, de Sade, and other 18th century thinkers, and although modernism, he believes, had its ancient analogue in certain gnostic, hermetic, and Dionysian cults of antiquity, modernism, says Bell, only began to flower as a literary movement in the 19th century, and was to reach its peak of creativity, he says, in the period from 1890 to 1920. Its great apostles, Bell explains, were such anti-bourgeois artists and writers as Byron, Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Lautreamont, Nietzsche, Alfred Jarry, and Antonin Artaud.

At the heart of cultural modernism, says Bell, is a rage against bourgeois orderliness and traditional religious restraints on personal

behavior in the name of the absolute freedom of the individual to explore through the medium of art every avenue of personal experience. Under the impact of the modernist ethos, says Bell, poetry, painting, literature, and music no longer sought to harmonize with Christian religious sensibilities and conventional norms of morality (as was the case with most pre-modern art), but, on the contrary, sought to overthrow all existing moral and religious tabus in order to act out in the imagination-and frequently in life as well-all that previously had been considered sordid, licentious, criminal, and perverse. Modernism, Bell explains, involved a Faustian urge to explore the most forbidden regions of the demonic in order to find in this exploration a renewed source of psychic vitality and energy. In the work of modernist artists, Bell writes, "there are no sacred groves that cannot be trespassed upon and even trampled down" (RS, 431). "Modernism has been a rage against order, and in particular, bourgeois orderliness. The emphasis is on the self, and the unceasing search for experience" (CCC, xxi). "The crucial insistence is that experience is to have no boundaries to its cravings, that there is `nothing sacred. - "One cannot set aesthetic limits-or even moral norms-to this protean reach of the imagination" (CCC, xxi). "In the modernist imagination, all is permitted-murder, lust, sodomy, incest, degradation-in order to nourish the rich fantasies of the unconscious" (RS, 43).

Cultural modernism, Bell contends, was a radical attempt to detach the individual from all traditional authority, whether in the form of custom, tradition, sacred books, venerated institutions, or objective standards of rationality, in order to make one's own personal experience the touchstone of what is real, important, and morally valid in life. All institutional and communal ties, and all continuity with the past, he says, were to be abandoned in order that the individual could be free to explore the furthest reaches of human experience unhampered by the restraints of traditional religion and morality, which modernist artists felt to be intensely oppressive and constraining. Cultural modernism thus contained a radically antinomian and anti-institutional thrust, according to Bell, as it sought to ground its understanding of reality in the radical subjectiv-

ity of each individual's own unique experience. Bell sees the opening two paragraphs of Rousseau's *Confessions*¹⁴ as prototypical of this radical subjectivity and radical privatization of experience, which would find echoes in modernist literature and art throughout the next two centuries. In place of the bourgeois-Christian emphasis on character formation and the cultivation of moral virtue, modernism, says Bell, placed its emphasis on a particular notion of individual personality development that was centered upon the enhancement of the autonomous and antinomian self "through the compulsive search for individual differentiation" (C CC, xxiv). The modernist emphasis on the singularity and uniqueness of personal experience, Bell contends, necessarily leads to a pre-eminence of the self in one's world-view, and this, he believes, must inevitably overwhelm any communal or objective standard of judgment.

Having abandoned sacred tradition and all communal standards of judgement, the modernist impulse, says Bell, sought solace and meaning in life either through an unending quest for novelties and pleasures—a quest, he says, which on a personal level would usually end in debauch—or through the self-infiniteizing urge to reach out beyond the human condition and attain a God-like knowledge in some form of gnostic ecstasy. Some modernist artists, Bell explains, have pursued both of these courses of action. An example of this latter type, according to Bell, was the French poet Charles Baudelaire, whom Bell sees as in some sense the quintessential embodiment of the modernist spirit.

One might be tempted to look upon the modernist writers and artists that Bell describes as having only marginal significance on the course of Western social and historical developments. This certainly is how not only Marxists—whose economic determinism has little room for cultural interpretations of social change—but many liberals as well would tend to view the impact on mainstream society of the various poets, novelists, painters, and other creative artists that Bell sees as constituting the modernist avant-garde. But this would be a great mistake, Bell believes, for the cultural impact of modernism over the last sixty years or more has not only been significant, but has become virtually all-pervasive, at least in America. As many intellec-

tuals in the latter part of the 19th and the early part of the 20th century began to abandon their traditional religious attachments and the general outlook of the small-town environments in which many had been raised, modernist novelists, poets, philosophers and artists, Bell explains, were increasingly looked upon as the hierophants of a new vision and a new truth that would supplant what was felt to be the cramped vision and repressive morality of small-town Protestant Christian society, which had emphasized such traditional bourgeois virtues as self-restraint, respectability, frugality, sobriety, delayed gratification, and sexual abstinence outside of marriage.

The period from 1910 to 1930, Bell explains, was particularly significant, for this was not only a period of dazzling achievement in a number of areas of modernist art and literature (e.g. futurism, expressionism, fauvism, cubism, surrealism and dada in painting; symbolism in literature and poetry; stream-of-consciousness writing in novels, etc.), but in America, Bell says, it marked the great transition from modernism in art to modernism in lifestyle. Whereas the modernist impulse throughout the 19th century was primarily confined to art and to the world of the imagination, what happened in the early decades of this century, Bell explains, was that art began to spill over into life as significant numbers of alienated intellectuals, many of them graduates of elite universities, began to gather together in bohemian enclaves in order to experiment with modes of living that would be more in tune with the modernist vision. This pattern, says Bell, would later be followed outside of the bohemian enclaves by large segments of mainstream society. "At first, for the advanced social groups, the intelligentsia and the educated social classes, and later for the middle class itself," Bell writes, "the legitimations of social behavior passed from religion to modernist culture" (*CCC*, xxiv).

Bell sees the establishment of Greenwich Village as a bohemian enclave by the group known as the Young Intellectuals shortly before the First World War as a milestone in this transition from art to life. The Young Intellectuals, he explains, were in rebellion against what they perceived to be the narrowness, conformism, and pervasive hypocrisy of small town life in America, and were attracted to the

teeming vitality and diversity that was to be found in the great urban metropolis of New York City. Included among this group, Bell points out, were such later luminaries in the literary and intellectual worlds as Walter Lippman, Van Wyck Brooks, John Reed, Sinclair Lewis, Archibald MacLeish, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Edmund Wilson. The Greenwich Village intellectuals of this period, says Bell, rejected Protestant notions of diligence, work, and sexual self-restraint, which they came to see as producing warped, neurotic personalities that were incapable of living spontaneously or truly enjoying life. Drawing upon popularized versions of Nietzsche, Bergson, Freud, D.H. Lawrence, and other vitalist thinkers, the Greenwich Village intellectuals of this period, says Bell, came to believe that traditional bourgeois restraints on the passions and the instincts were a major source of human unhappiness, and that, in particular, the release of suppressed sexual desire was a necessary step in the achievement of personal fulfillment and liberation. Many of the Greenwich Village bohemians of this period, Bell points out, publicly flaunted their contempt for traditional sexual morality by living openly in unmarried cohabitations.

What has happened in the many decades since the World War I period, says Bell, is that the modernist attitudes and beliefs that were first embraced as a guide to living by small numbers of urban bohemians and intellectuals, were eventually adopted as the reigning philosophy by the major cultural institutions of the society, including the leading literary periodicals, museums, universities, film studios, art galleries, etc., such that the anti-bourgeois, anti-traditional, and antinomian quest for personal experience and personal self-gratification would become the dominant cultural message collectively broadcast by these institutions, and this message would eventually come to stamp the character of the lifestyles of ever larger segments of the general population. Over the last sixty years or more, says Bell, culture has become a force in its own right for shaping the American character structure, and this force, he explains, has generally been hostile to traditional bourgeois morality and religion. An anti-bourgeois "adversary culture" has come to dominate the world of official culture, says Bell, and within this world, at least, the adversary

culture's hegemony, he contends, is unchallenged. The clash between the eroded remnants of the older bourgeois-Protestant value system, which had placed great emphasis on communal bonds, self-restraint, and the orderly and diligent performance of work, and the anti-bourgeois values of the adversary culture may be a source of continuing conflict within the American polity, but within the cultural world itself, Bell contends, there is no longer any struggle. The anti-bourgeois, anti-traditional value system of cultural modernism, with its elevation of the autonomous self to a position of supreme arbiter in matters of morals and aesthetics, has won out, Bell explains, leaving the older bourgeois-Protestant value system with no culturally respectable defenders. This victory, in fact, has been so complete, he believes, that in recent decades genuine avant-garde art has disappeared, since such art, he explains, requires for its existence some firmly established tradition for it to attack, or some widely shared aesthetic sensibility which it can shock.

The demise of the older bourgeois-Protestant value system, which the early 20th century inherited from its 19th century past, is well summarized by Bell in the following remarks:

The bourgeois world view-rationalistic, matter-of-fact, pragmatic; neither magical, mystical, nor romantic; emphasizing work and function; concerned with restraint and order in morals and conduct-had by the mid-nineteenth century come to dominate not only the social structure (the organization of the economy), but also the culture, predominantly the religious order and the socialization system which instilled "appropriate" motivation in the child. It reigned triumphant everywhere, opposed only in the realm of culture, by remnants of an aristocratic and Catholic spirit that disdained its unheroic and antitragic mood, as well as its orderly attitude towards time (PS, 301).

The last hundred years have seen an effort by antibourgeois culture to achieve autonomy from the social structure, first by a denial of bourgeois values in the realm of art, and second by

carving out enclaves where the dandy, the bohemian, and the avant-gardist could live in contrary style. A hundred years later, both efforts have been completed. In doctrine and cultural lifestyle the anti-bourgeois has won The triumph of modernism represented a victory for the autonomy of culture. In the culture today, antinomianism and anti-institutionalism rule. In the realm of art ... no one opposes the idea of experiment, of boundless freedom, of sensibility rather than intellect as a principle of art, of impulse rather than order, of the imagination completely unconstrained. There is no longer an avant-garde because no one in the culture is on the side of order and tradition (PS, 301).

Modernism and the Sensibility of the Sixties

The decade of the 1960s is seen by Bell as a period in which cultural modernism in America reached the extreme limit of its development both in art and in life. The loud rock music of the period; the Hippie experiments with psychedelic drugs, communal living, and permissive sex; the attack on technological rationality and bourgeois attitudes towards time in the name of pre-modern modes of consciousness; the rage to shock and to flaunt one's contempt for bourgeois values through dress and lifestyle; the flight from heterosexual monogamy; the growth of a vast popular porn culture with an emphasis on the sexually sordid and perverse; the emphasis on violence, cruelty, and gore in popular movies such as *Bonnie and Clyde* and *M[°]A[°]S*H[°]*; the celebration of the instinctual and the irrational in art and literature; the dabbling in revolutionary politics—all these developments that took place during the 60s and early 70s are seen by Bell as an expression of the modernist impulse that has been carried to an extreme.

The modernist spirit of the 60s, according to Bell, found some of its most radical expression in the works of several of the writers of the period—many of whom were called "post-modernists"—as well as in the popular porn culture. "In the 1960s," Bell writes, "a powerful

current of postmodernism developed which carried the logic of modernism to its farthest reaches. In the theoretical writings of Norman O. Brown and Michael Foucault; in the novels of William Burroughs, Jean Genet, and to some extent Norman Mailer; and in the porno-pop culture (more vulgar and more brassy) that is played out in the world of drugs, rock music, and oral sexuality, one sees a culmination of modernist intentions" (WP, 288). Bell then explains how this so-called "postmodernism" carries out, yet goes beyond, the initial modernist project:

Traditional modernism, no matter how daring, played out its impulses in the imagination, within the constraints of art. Whether demonic or murderous, the fantasies were expressed through the ordering principle of form. Art, therefore, even though subversive of society, still ranged itself on the side of order and, implicitly, of a rationality of form, if not of content. Postmodernism overflows the vessels of art. It tears down the boundaries and insists that acting out, rather than making distinctions, is the way to gain knowledge (WP2288).

There are several dimensions to the postmodernist mood. Against the aesthetic justification for life, postmodernism substitutes the instinctual. Impulse and pleasure alone are real and life-affirming; all else is neurosis and death. In a literal sense, reason is the enemy and the desires of the body the truth. Objective consciousness defrauds, and only emotion is meaningful (WP, 288).

In the Hippie movement too, the modernist and postmodernist spirit of the 60s found its logical culmination, Bell contends. Bell's assessment of the 60s counter-culture is similar to that of Lasch and Collier, though Bell is even more dismissive in his judgement of the movement than either of these other two writers. Indeed, Bell's contempt for the Hippies, whom he sees as little more than posturing exhibitionists and feckless narcissists, often knows no bounds. The 60s counter-culture, Bell writes, was a "pathetic celebration of the

self that sought to be vital through the "playacting of Revolution" (CCC, 144). The very name of counter-culture, he says, was a conceit, and far from being new or daring as it claimed, the movement, he states, only re-enacted on a more massive scale the cultural protest of the World War I generation of Young Intellectuals fifty years previously. "The so-called counter-culture," Bell writes, "was a children's crusade that sought to eliminate the line between fantasy and reality and act out in life its impulses under a banner of liberation." "It claimed to be new and daring," he remarks, "when it was only repeating in more raucous form-its rock noise amplified in the electronic echo-chamber of the mass media-the youthful japes of a Greenwich Village bohemia of a half century before" (CCC, xxvi). "What was new . . . about the Arcadian fantasy of the 1960s," says Bell, "was that while in the past such longings were largely rhetorical . . . in the 1960s one found the fantasies and sexual demands of childhood acted out during adolescence on a mass scale unprecedented in cultural history" (CCC, 144). "The counter-culture," says Bell, "proved to be a conceit" (CCC, 81). "It was an effort," he says, ". . . to transform a liberal life-style into a world of immediate gratification and exhibitionistic display. In the end it produced little culture and countered nothing" (CCC, 81). "It was less a counter-culture than a counterfeit culture" (CCC, xxvii).

The Protestant Ethic and the Contradictions of Capitalism

While culture in the *20th* century became a powerful and independent force for influencing social attitudes, the victory of cultural modernism over the older bourgeois value-system was only made complete, according to Bell's analysis, when certain features of the modernist project were taken up by the capitalist advertising and marketing system. The modernist emphasis on the self and its ongoing search for novelty and new experience proved congenial to the marketing thrust of modern capitalism, Bell explains, and beginning in the *1920s*, he says, a veritable revolution began to take place in American society, as the increasingly powerful advertising and marketing industries succeeded in eroding the older Puritan inhibi-

tions against spending, consumption, debt, and luxurious living, and gradually convinced ever larger numbers of Americans that it was all right to live more lavishly and to enjoy the possession of more and more consumer goods and their ostentatious public display. The advertising and marketing industries, Bell explains, were successful in translating the modernist emphasis on self-enhancement and the quest for personal experience into a materialistic-hedonistic ethic of capitalist consumerism, which by the 1950s, he says, had largely replaced the older Protestant Christian ideals of thrift, frugality, delayed gratification, self-discipline, and self-restraint." The institution of credit buying, Bell believes, was particularly important in breaking down some of these older inhibitions and restraints, as it encouraged a live-for-the-day kind of attitude that emphasized present enjoyment rather than provision for the future, and encouraged many people to live beyond their means. From an ethic of work and saving, he says, America rapidly moved towards an ethic of consumption and enjoyment. "Despite some continuing use of the language of the Protestant ethic," Bell writes, "the fact was that by the 1950s American culture had become primarily hedonistic, concerned with play, fun, display, and pleasure-and typical of things in America, in a compulsive way" (*CCC*, 70).

While Americans by mid-century had lost most of their Puritan inhibitions on buying and consuming, such was not the case, Bell explains, with sex, which, he says, took another decade or two before it too would succumb to the forces of cultural modernism and the hedonistic lifestyles promoted by the marketing system. But succumb it would, and very rapidly so, Bell explains, such that by the late 60s, he says, a new "fun morality" centering on sex had firmly established itself within large segments of the middle class, with the state of California leading the way. Moreover, commercialized sex in the form of pornographic movies and magazines-much of it of the crudest and most perverted kind-became a mass industry during this period, Bell points out, and for significant segments of mainstream society, permissiveness and an "anything goes" attitude regarding sex became the order of the day. The 50s cult of mammon, Bell remarks, would gradually be supplanted in the decades that

followed by the newer cult of orgasm as the dominant organizing passion of much of American life.

The victory of cultural modernism and capitalist-promoted hedonism and consumerism over the older bourgeois value system, has produced, Bell believes, a fundamental contradiction in the American social order. The capitalist system of production, which has largely been taken over by large-scale corporations that can produce goods more efficiently than smaller enterprises, still demands of its employees, Bell explains, a certain level of regularity, dedication to work, competence, and often a career-orientation, while the advertising and marketing system, he says, together with the major cultural institutions of the society, encourage a life of hedonistic self-indulgence, instant gratification, and a generally negative and antinomian attitude towards work, discipline, company loyalty, and dedication to one's career or calling. The capitalist economic order, in conjunction with the cultural system, thus promote incompatible values, and the consequences of this situation, Bell believes, are far-reaching. This fundamental "contradiction of capitalism"-or what Bell often speaks of as a "disjunction of realms," with the culture and the marketing system allied on one side, and the productive system on the other -is summarized by Bell in the following words:

In the world of capitalist enterprise, the nominal ethos in the spheres of production and organization is still one of work, delayed gratification, career orientation, devotion to the enterprise. Yet, on the marketing side, the sale of goods, packaged in the glossy images of glamour and sex promotes a hedonistic way of life whose promise is the voluptuous gratification of the lineaments of desire (CCC, xxv).

On the one hand, the business corporation wants an individual to work hard, pursue a career, accept delayed gratification-to be, in the crude sense, an organization man. And yet, in its products and its advertisements, the corporation promotes pleasure, instant joy, relaxing and letting go. One is to be

"straight" by day and a "swinger" by night (CCC, 71-72).

American capitalism, as I have tried to show, has lost its traditional legitimacy, which was based on a moral system of reward rooted in the Protestant sanctification of work. It has substituted a hedonism which promises material ease and luxury, yet shies away from all the historic implications of a "voluptuary system," with all its social permissiveness and libertinism. The culture has been dominated (in the serious realm) by a principle of modernism that has been subversive of bourgeois life, and the middle-class life-styles by a hedonism that has undercut the Protestant ethic which provided the moral foundation for the society. The interplay of modernism as a mode developed by serious artists, the institutionalization of those played-out forms by the "cultural mass," and the hedonism as a way of life promoted by the marketing system of business, constitutes the cultural contradiction of capitalism (CCC, 84).

Given Bell's account here, one might suppose that the most serious consequence of this "cultural contradiction" involves such work-related problems as irregular work habits, high employee absenteeism, on-the-job substance abuse, inferior workmanship, a lack of international competitiveness for American-produced products, etc. Out partying and debauching themselves all night, swingers, after all, make very unreliable straights when they return to work the next morning with little energy or enthusiasm to perform what are frequently boring tasks. Yet these sorts of problems, which are often the subject matter of articles in popular magazines and journals, are *not* the kinds of problems that Bell chooses to focus on in his later writings, though he would no doubt see them as one of the important results of the fundamental contradiction in values that he believes lies at the heart of modern capitalist society. The victory of cultural modernism and the hedonistic way of life promoted by the marketing system has not only eroded the work ethic, Bell contends,

but more seriously, it has undermined the entire Protestant Christian understanding of man's place in the universe and the transcendental system of meaning that alone provided coherence and purpose to the older bourgeois way of life in America. Thus, the crisis of advanced capitalism is seen by Bell not merely as an economic crisis or a crisis of on-the-job discipline—though he certainly sees it as this—but as a more general moral and spiritual crisis that pervades almost every facet of middle class life in America. Under the impact of hedonism and modernism, Bell contends, life for middle class man has become disenchanting and de-spiritualized, though one of the most basic needs human beings have, he believes, is to find some transcendental meaning or purpose to what they do. Without such a purpose, he says, individuals become disoriented, motivations are distorted, countries become devitalized, and a sense of *carpe diem* prevails. The forces of hedonism and modernism have destroyed the older Protestant pattern of meanings, Bell asserts, and with the decline of faith in utopianism and the secular religion of progress, nothing, he says, remains to take its place. Or rather, a nihilism and antinomianism remain, but for the mass of mankind, says Bell, these can only produce a sense of anxiety, forlornness, and a dread of ultimate extinction. Bell's analysis of the spiritual crisis of advanced capitalist societies is thus very similar in many ways to that of Weber, though it is the modernist adversary culture and the capitalist marketing system, more than natural science or the functional rationality of bureaucratic organization (the two culprits in Weber's analysis), which have destroyed the old faith, according to Bell, at least in America.

A lucid summary of Bell's "cultural contradiction" thesis is contained in the following remarks:

In the early development of capitalism, the unrestrained economic impulse was held in check by Puritan restraint and the Protestant ethic. One worked because of one's obligation to one's calling, or to fulfill the covenant of the community The Protestant ethic had served to limit sumptuary (though not capital) accumulation. When the Protestant ethic was sun-

dered from bourgeois society, only the hedonism remained, and the capitalist system lost its transcendental ethic. There remains the argument that capitalism serves as the basis for freedom, and for a rising standard of living and the defeat of poverty. Yet even if these arguments were true . . . the lack of a transcendental tie, the sense that a society fails to provide some set of "ultimate meanings" in its character structure, work, and culture, becomes unsettling to a system (CCC, 21). [T]he society is left with no transcendent ethos to provide some appropriate sense of purpose, no anchorages that can provide stable meanings for people (CCC, xxi).

The historic justifications of bourgeois society-in the realms of religion and character-are gone. The traditional legitimacies of property and work become subordinated to bureaucratic enterprises that can justify privilege because they can turn out material goods more efficiently than other modes of production. But a technocratic society is not ennobling. Material goods provide only transient satisfaction or an invidious superiority over those with less. Yet one of the deepest human impulses is to *sanctify* their institutions and beliefs in order to find a meaningful purpose in their lives and to deny the meaninglessness of death. A post-industrial society cannot provide a transcendent ethic-except for the few who devote themselves to the temple of science. And the antinomian attitude [fostered by cultural modernism] plunges one into a radical autism which, in the end, dirempts the cords of community and the sharing with others. The lack of a rooted moral belief system is the cultural contradiction of the society, the deepest challenge to its survival (PS, 480).

The End of Modernism and the Return of the Sacred

One of the most important themes in Bell's later writings is how the very structure and style of most modernist art, not merely its overt content or message, has served to weaken and eventually to overwhelm the human capacity for aesthetic contemplation and other types of contemplative activities. What Bell has to say on this topic is quite original, and indeed, may constitute his most valuable contribution to our understanding of the modernist impulse. From the Renaissance up to the middle of the 19th century, Bell explains, high art tended to promote contemplative activity and the cultivation of refined aesthetic judgement by allowing the spectator the contemplative distance necessary to assimilate critically the beauty, wonder, order, and meaning which the creative artist sought to capture in his work. Whether in the form of painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry, novels, plays, or music, art throughout this long period, Bell explains, was organized around a rational conception of space and time that stressed meaningful temporal progression (e.g. the unidirectional beginning, middle, and end found in novels, plays, narrative poetry, and musical compositions), clear distinctions between foregrounds and backgrounds (in painting and the other visual arts), and a clearly established psychic and aesthetic distance between the work of art and the viewer. The dominant thrust of modernist art, however, according to Bell, has been radically anti-contemplative, since it seeks, he says, to "eclipse" the contemplative distance that is necessary to form a rational aesthetic judgement or to appreciate a genuine artistic vision by overwhelming the spectator in the sensation and impact produced by the art work itself. This tendency to eclipse contemplative distance and envelop the spectator totally in the work of art forms what Bell calls a "common syntax" that is shared, he believes, by many seemingly diverse forms and genres of modern art.

This "eclipse of distance" Bell says, can be seen in cubism's emphasis on simultaneity; in abstract expressionism's preoccupation with shock and impact; in the stream-of-consciousness novel's attempt to absorb the reader into a flux of events unstructured by a

comprehensible temporal order; in hard rock's blaring noise that makes it impossible even to hear oneself think; and in the modern cinema's emphasis on action, excitement, immediacy, and spectacle. The visual arts-television and film in particular-lend themselves more readily to this destruction of distance than either literature or philosophy, Bell explains, since they do not allow the self-pacing and the ongoing critical assessment of a text that is possible with any material that is intended to be read. In its ability to select images, camera angles, length of scenes, the pace and rhythm of the flow of events, etc., modern film, says Bell, has gone farthest in its ability to control and manipulate the emotions, and through the immediacy of its impact, he believes, it can destroy more thoroughly than any other art form the capacity for critical rationality and mature aesthetic judgement. The fact that the mass culture that has grown up in America in recent years is primarily a visual culture centered around the cinema and television, rather than a print culture emphasizing literature, philosophy, theology, or any other print medium, has far-reaching, and largely negative consequences, Bell believes, in terms of its overall impact on the American psyche.

The effect of modern art upon the viewer, Bell contends, is to erase all boundaries between self and world, self and society, self and God, in such a manner that more primitive "primary process" thinking takes over the psyche, and mental life becomes dominated by fantasy, dream, hallucination, suggestion, and the irrepressible forces of primal instinct and impulse. The techniques for eclipsing psychic and aesthetic distance developed in the cinema-including rapid cuttings, the flashback, the interweaving of themes and break-up of ordered sequence-would eventually, Bell explains, be adopted by novelists and commercial advertisers, and the result, he believes, is that each of us is cast into a hyper-stimulated aesthetic environment that makes the development of a mature emotional and aesthetic sensibility extremely difficult. Since Bell, like Plato, believes that there is an intimate relation between aesthetic sensibility and character development, the destruction of high art under the impact of modernism, he believes, is at least partially responsible for the modern loss of self-control and the domination of psychic life by

the forces of irrationality and polymorphous-perverse sexuality. The modernist "eclipse of distance" also carries over, Bell believes, to social relations, where a loss of social distance is to be observed, he says, in the decline of manners, in the emphasis on quick and superficial familiarity in personal relationships, in the lack of respect for privacy, and in the general erosion of social etiquette and civility.

But the most serious result of the modernist destruction of psychic and aesthetic distance, according to Bell, is in the area of religion, where the modernist unwillingness to accept limits to the quest for personal experience has contributed, he believes, to the death of the sacred, and to the resulting sense of forlornness and existential disorientation. Like Durkheim, Bell believes that the sacred, in its concrete symbolic manifestations, must be separated off from the profane in both space and time and a respectful distance maintained (like the subject before his sovereign), lest the sacred be contaminated and ultimately destroyed by excessive familiarity with the more mundane. Traditionally, sanctuaries and temples have provided this necessary separation in space, Bell explains, while holy days or holy periods have preserved the integrity of the sacred in time. The emphasis before the modern period, says Bell, had been on the maintenance of *havdolah-a* Hebrew word, which means literally a "separation of realms," but was originally used, Bell explains, to mark the distinction between the Sabbath and the rest of the week, and more generally, between the realm of the sacred and the profane. But in its refusal to treat anything as sacred, and in its Faustian urge to exceed all human boundaries and be like the gods, modernist art and modernist culture, Bell contends, has been motivated by a kind of demonic hubris that would deny human finitude and deny the traditional gulf between the human and the divine. Modernist art and modernist culture, in its destruction of *havdolah*, has contributed, Bell believes, to modern man's plunge into a Nietzschean universe in which there is no longer any up or down left, God is dead, and the specter of nihilism haunts our every move.

Modernist art, particularly in film and painting, produces constant stimulation and disorientation, Bell says, but there is no insight, progression, or resolution—there are no transcendental calls, no

transfigurations, no purgations through tragedy and suffering. The modernist contempt for limits destroys the older transcendental orientation, he says, and replaces it by an unceasing quest for ever new and varied personal experience. But however exhilarating this quest may be-and Bell doesn't deny that the avant-guard artist's rage against limits, his imaginative embrace of the most forbidden regions of the demonic, his ostentatious contempt for bourgeois values and the bourgeois lifestyle, and his personal plunge into a world of sex and drugs, is without its particular fascination and attraction-nevertheless, it is like living one's life on a merry-go-round, Bell says, and it becomes terrifying once one realizes that one cannot stop.

We have reached, however, Bell contends, the end of modernism, for the traditional bourgeois value-system which modernism sought to attack no longer exists to any extent worth mentioning, and the creative impulse of modernism as a movement in art and literature, he says, was played out long ago. Since the secular system of meanings provided by the political utopianisms and the Enlightenment religion of progress have proven to be illusory, and the older religious gods, if not dead, no longer provide the existential anchorages and orientations that they did in the past, modern culture, says Bell, is increasingly incoherent, disjointed, and anomie. Above all, it suffers, he believes, from the death of the sacred and the lack of a living language that could relate human beings to some kind of transcendental system of meanings that would provide purpose and coherence to their lives. "The real problem of modernity," Bell writes, "is the problem of belief. To use an unfashionable term, it is a spiritual crisis, since the new anchorages have proved illusory and the old ones have become submerged" (*CCC*, 29). Elaborating further on this theme, he writes:

It is a situation which brings us back to nihilism; lacking a past or a future, there is only a void (*CCC*, 29).

[T]he pervasive sense of disorientation which has spread through the culture (and which is the source of the crisis of modernity)

is attributable to the lack of language that can adequately relate one to transcendental conceptions-aphilosophy of first causes or an eschatology of final things. The religious terminology which pervaded our modes of comprehension has become threadbare, and the symbols which soaked our poetic and rhetorical modes (compare the King James Version to the New English Bible) have become attenuated. The poverty of emotive language in our time reflects the impoverishment of a life without litany or ritual (*CCC*, 86).

Nevertheless, despite the spiritual impoverishment of advanced capitalist societies, some kind of "return of the sacred," Bell thinks, is inevitable, for religion, he believes, is as natural-and as necessary-to human life as is language and social organization. All human beings in all cultures and time periods, Bell says, are confronted with certain core existential questions and dilemmas arising out of the very nature of the human condition. These questions and dilemmas center around such topics as the finitude of human existence, the inevitability of death and suffering, the nature of love and courage, the meaning of tragedy, and the nature of social obligation. Religion, in its various forms, is an attempt, Bell says, to provide some kind of answer to these core questions and dilemmas, and it will continue to exist, he believes, as long as the human condition remains what it is. Contrary to what Romantics, Hippies, and certain philosophers have contended, Nature can be no substitute for religion, Bell asserts, for by itself, Nature, he says, provides only constraints to our physical actions, but can provide no meaning or purpose to our lives. History, too, is no substitute for religion, according to Bell, for contrary to what Hegelians, Marxists, and Progressivists have believed, History, says Bell, has no immanent telos, and like Nature, can provide no ultimate meanings. While some people manage to get by in the world without any religious faith or any tie to a living religious practice, for the great lot of mankind, Bell believes, such a situation will inevitably lead to a sense of profound disorientation and anomie.

Besides providing some kind of response to certain core ques-

tions of human existence, religion satisfies certain other indispensable human needs, according to Bell, which will ensure its survival in the future. Traditionally, he says, religion has provided the foundation for the moral order of a society, and of equal importance, he explains, is the function of religion in satisfying the human need for relatedness and continuity from generation to generation. One of Bell's major indictments of modernism, is that, in its emphasis on self-expression, on the uniqueness of the individual, on doing one's own thing, etc., cultural continuity has been effectively destroyed such that the generations no longer link up with one another. Children can no longer relate to the mental world of their parents, and each generation is set adrift in an ever-changing sea without landmarks or a storehouse of past experience to guide its way. Through the common culture provided by its rituals, belief system, patterns of holy days and worship, etc., religion, says Bell, has been a major force throughout history in preventing this generational fragmentation, and he believes that it will once again assume this role following the exhaustion of cultural modernism and the loss of faith in political utopias.

Some kind of religious revival, Bell believes, will take place in the future, and while he says the exact form of such a revival is impossible to predict, the religions that come into prominence, he thinks, will probably be of the traditionalist sort that seek to maintain continuity with the past. In his Hobhouse Lecture on "The Return of the Sacred," which he delivered at the London School of Economics in 1977, Bell said that if there is to be such a revival, it will not turn to the involuted self of modernism, or to the nature-worship of romanticism, but to "the resurrection of Memory." On a distinctly Burkean note, he remarked at that time that "if there are to be new religions-and I think they will arise-they will, contrary to previous experience, return to the past, to seek for tradition and to search for those threads which can give a person a set of ties that place him in the continuity of the dead and the living and those still to be born" (RS, 444).

Any new religion-or any revival of an old religion-that satisfies the genuine needs of human beings in the aftermath of cultural

modernism, will not only have a strong traditionalist component, Bell believes, but will most certainly be a religion stressing the importance of human limits and the necessity to maintain moral bounds. The great historical religions, says Bell, have been religions of restraint that recognized the great destructive power of human hubris and the need for social sanctions to contain the potentially self-destructive and demonic forces that lie deeply imbedded in the human soul. Any new religion that meets the needs of the current cultural situation, Bell believes, must continue in this tradition of restraint. "The great historic religions of the West," Bell writes, "share a common judgment of the nature of man: When there is no restraint, when mere experience is the touchstone of what should be permitted, the impulse to explore everything, to seek all sensations, even when sanctioned on aesthetic grounds, leads to debauchery, lust, degradation of others, and murder. The lesson they all have drawn is that a community has to have a sense of what is *shameful*, lest the community itself lose all sense of moral norms" (CCC, 276-277).

Bell himself seems strongly attracted both to orthodox Judaism and to the neo-orthodox Protestantism represented by such thinkers as Reinhold Niebuhr and Karl Barth. These religions are praised by Bell for their tough-minded view of human nature and for their realistic understanding of both the creative and destructive potentials of human societies and of the limits to what can be achieved in human history. By contrast, religions such as ethical Judaism (and by implication, such related movements in the Christian orbit as Liberal Protestantism, Unitarianism, and Ethical Culture) are seen by Bell as shallow and insufficiently religious for meeting the deeper spiritual needs most people have. Bell too, seemingly alone among leading American intellectuals of the Left, has kind words to say for Protestant Fundamentalism. "A large substratum of society," Bell remarked in his Hobhouse Lecture, "has always felt the need for simple pieties, direct homilies, [and] reassurances against their own secret impulses . . . but . . . until recently these people have been derided by the predominantly liberal *culture* (not society) and, more importantly, abandoned by the clergy, who, coming from the edu-

cated classes and subject to the conformist pressures of the liberal culture, had lost their own nerve, and often, as well, their belief in God." "The exhaustion of Modernism and the emptiness of contemporary culture," he continued, "mitigate that social pressure, and Fundamentalist ministers can step forward, with less fear of derision from their cultured despisers. These groups, traditionally, have been farmers, lower-middle class, small-town artisans, and the like. In the long-run occupational sense, they are in the decline. Yet in the more immediate future they may be the strongest element in a religious revival" (RS, 444). One can see here, in the favorable references to small town artisans and other members of the lower middle class, echoes of Lasch's critique.

Criticism of Bell

Bell's critique of cultural modernism and of the hedonistic attitudes promoted by the capitalist advertising and marketing system has an inner coherence and forcefulness which many will find compelling. Bell writes with both passion and conviction and his fundamental contentions are illuminated through a wealth of historical and other examples that have been culled from a variety of disciplines, including sociology, political science, history, art history, literary criticism, and psychology. His polymathic scholarship is much more characteristic, in fact, of older-style European scholars (e.g., Max Weber, Erich Fromm, Hannah Arendt, Eric Voegelin) than that produced by the more narrowly focused and highly specialized academic thinkers one finds in most American universities. The broad sweep of Bell's scholarship and his penchant for focusing on long-term historical trends to the neglect of significant counter-currents and counter-trends, opens his work, however, to charges that he "over-generalizes," and that he offers a very one-sided view of the modern culture which he seeks to criticize. One can, of course, easily point to important artists and thinkers whom Bell has left out of his account of the modern sensibility, largely, it would seem, because they don't help to illuminate his general thesis. Among literary figures in this century, for instance, it is not at all clear how such figures as T.S.

Eliot, J.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, William Faulkner, Robert Frost, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, Walker Percy, Flannery O'Connor, and many others, would fit into Bell's account of the modernist intellectual who is in a rage against all order and tradition, and who seeks above all to celebrate his unbounded self and its lawless quest for personal experience. Similarly one could point out-as some critics of Bell have-that however dominant avant-garde modernists may have become in this century in the area of painting and sculptor, in such areas as Shakespearean theater and classical ballet, traditional styles and sensibilities have been maintained.

Bell's critique of the music of the 60s lends itself to a similar criticism: far from being all noise or the weird and cacophonous sounds of hard-core acid rock or heavy metal (Led Zeppelin, the Grateful Dead, Iron Butterfly, etc.), the 60s saw perhaps the finest flowering in this century of the quieter and more gentle tones of both folk music and soft rock (Simon and Garfunkel; Judy Collins; Peter, Paul, and Mary; the Beatles; the Association; Joni Mitchell; James Taylor, etc.) that one could hardly characterize as an attempt to shock, overwhelm, or weaken the listener's capacity for forming rational and mature aesthetic judgements.

Such criticisms-and the list of counter-examples could be carried into the areas of philosophy, cinema, religion, and all the other subject areas Bell discusses in his wide-ranging critique of cultural modernism-are easy to make against Bell's work, and to the extent that Bell often fails to qualify or nuance many of his sweeping generalizations, they are criticisms that are perfectly sound and legitimate. Nevertheless, such criticisms do not really go to the core of Bell's critique, for the generalizations he makes, it would seem, are fairly sound ones, to the extent that they accurately describe what are in most instances the major cultural trends of the past century, even while neglecting, perhaps, important subordinate ones.

A weightier criticism of Bell's thought concerns his characterization of the 19th century capitalist order as a harmonious "convergence of realms" in which the small-town bourgeois-Protestant values propagated by the family, the neighborhood school, the local church, and the local community were reinforced by the driving

ethos of the economic system, as well as by much of the art and literature of the times. Bell's understanding of 19th century American capitalism has been significantly influenced by Max Weber's ideas regarding the religious origins of the early "spirit of capitalism," and it is here, it would seem, that Bell has been led astray to some degree. For the relatively few remarks Bell devotes to describing the 19th century capitalist order depict the economic system of that period as one driven, not by a spirit of acquisitiveness, or by a pragmatic concern to improve the standard of living of one's self and one's family—which is how contemporary observers, including in different ways both Tocqueville and Bryce, saw it—but by a deeper religious interest in fulfilling a calling, in sanctifying one's life, and in giving glory to the Creator. Bell's loftier picture of pre-20th century capitalism may be an accurate description of America in the heroic age of the first and second generation of New England Puritans, but surely by the latter part of the 18th century these Puritan religious concerns which Bell stresses, while by no means absent, had dramatically declined in importance. If one just thinks of the transition from 17th (and early 18th) century figures such as John Winthrop, John Cotton, Anne Hutchinson, Richard Hooker, the Mathers, Roger Williams, William Penn, and Jonathan Edwards, to the leading figures at the end of the 18th century whom we call our Founding Fathers (i.e., Franklin, Washington, Hamilton, Madison, Jefferson, et al.), one gets a good idea of the scope of this transition. Rather than being a motivating force for encouraging economic activities, as Bell emphasizes, religious beliefs and religious worship in 19th century America is probably best seen as Tocqueville saw it; namely, as a powerful character-molding, character-forming, and restraining force that kept the human acquisitive instinct, that was everywhere apparent in 19th century America, from degenerating into the kind of self-seeking individualism that would destroy all bonds of community life. The capitalist-commercial society of the 19th century, in other words, must be seen as containing within itself certain potentially destructive tendencies which the deep strain of piety and religiosity in the American character helped to keep in check. It was not as harmonious an order as Bell sometimes characterizes it, though he

is undoubtedly correct that it was the Protestant religion in the 19th century that provided an overall framework of meaning to human life, as well as a restraint on the passions, and that it is this which distinguished middle class life in that period from much of middle class life today.

The most serious criticism that can be made against Bell's critique of modernist culture, however, concerns his understanding of the relationship between religion and personal religious experience. For Bell, the quest for personal religious experience, the desire to reach out beyond the earthly-human plane, to "speak in tongues," to seek religious ecstasy, etc., is seen as a kind of demonic hubris which refuses to accept the lowly position of human beings that has been ordained in the very nature of things. The quest for personal religious experience or other exalted states of consciousness is closely identified in Bell's mind with such figures of the recent past as Norman O. Brown, R.D. Laing, Timothy Leary, and Allen Ginsburg, as well as with such 19th century figures as Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Nietzsche. Bell distinguishes what he calls "religions of restraint," among which he would include Judaism and Christianity, which have tried, he says, to discourage or prohibit such a personal quest, from "religions of release," which seek to encourage such activity. The cult of Dionysus in ancient Greece, certain ancient Gnostic sects, various ancient fertility cults, as well as the Hippie drug culture of the 60s epitomize such "religions of release" for Bell, and are often associated by him with the modernist project of Faust. The quest for personal religious experience, Bell believes, has the effect of radically dirempting the individual from the continuity and authority of all past religious tradition; it furthers the growth of an anarchic kind of antinomianism; and if carried to its logical end, it leads, he believes, to a life of debauchery, insanity, and murder. One can get a good sense of Bell's views on these matters from the following remarks taken from *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*:

The great historic religions of the West have been religions of restraint. We find in the Old Testament an emphasis on the law,

and a fear of human nature unchecked: an association of release with lust, sexual competitiveness, violence, and murder. The fear is the fear of the demonic-the frenzied ecstasy (ex-stasis) of leaving one's body and crossing the boundaries of sin (CCC, 157).

The decline of religion . . . provoked a momentous break with the centuries-old conception of an unbridgeable chasm between the human and the divine. Men now sought to cross that gulf and, as Faust, the first modern, put it, attain "godlike knowledge," to "prove in man the stature of a god" or else confess his "kinship with the worm" The "unhappy consciousness" of which Hegel wrote is the realization of a divine power and status that man must strive to achieve. The deepest nature of modern man, the secret of his soul as revealed by the modern metaphysic, is that he seeks to reach out beyond himself; knowing that negativity-death-is finite, he refuses to accept it. Behind the chiasm of modern man is the megalomania of self-infinetization (CCC, 49).

When Bell writes about religion and the modern world it is important to realize that he does so, as he himself has so poignantly explained in some of the essays in *Winding Passage*, from the perspective of a second generation American Jew, who, like most of the Jews of his generation, rejected early on their Orthodox past, but in his more mature years has come to realize the terrible price that all modernist-influenced intellectuals have had to pay in this century in rejecting the religion of their forefathers. Through personal pain and anguish, Bell has come to see the importance of intergenerational continuity and a respect for the wisdom and traditions of the past, and in living through the 60s, with its proliferation of often bizarre and exotic cults, and the widespread interest displayed in mystic-like states of ecstasy induced by psychedelic drugs, Bell would come to associate the quest for personal religious experience with an attack upon the very foundations of public order, tradition, and personal

sanity. But in the area of religion, and particularly on the topic of mysticism and religious experience, Bell is in many ways unmusical, and his blanket condemnation of the quest for personal experience, if accepted, would have a most disastrous effect upon the religious revival for which he yearns. Indeed, since the Great Awakening of the 1730s, which was patterned after the Wesleyan Methodist movement in England, the great genius of Protestant revivalism in America has been its ability to combine the experiential component of religion-i.e. the enthusiastic, the ecstatic, the mystic, the charismatic, the pentecostal-with an emphasis on traditional family values, church membership, and the need for personal rectitude and restraint (the latter particularly in the areas of sexual morality and the abstention from drink).

Bell's identification of the quest for illuminative experience with the demonic and the debauched has some historical basis, in so far as one can always point to a number of figures whose attempt to "reach out beyond the human and be like the gods" has manifested a demonic will-to-power rather than the intense piety and religiosity that we would associate with figures such as Edwards, Whitefield, Wesley, Law, or the members of the primitive Jerusalem Church described in the *Book of Acts*. One can also point to many cases of religious insanity, where personal religious experience has overwhelmed its recipient and resulted in outright mental imbalance. 'The dangers of the spiritual life in this regard are well attested to in the famous Talmudic story about the fate of the four men who beheld Paradise: one killed himself, another went insane, a third became a sorcerer, while only Rabbi Akiba "left in peace and returned in peace" (*Hagigah* 14b). Acknowledging that there is a danger in personal religious experience, however, is like acknowledging that there is a danger in fire or electricity; it is an important warning, but we shouldn't let it dissuade us from their proper use.

The history of Jewish and Christian religious movements certainly contain enough figures like Thomas Munster and Sabbatai Zevi, whose desire to reach out to the divine has not been accompanied by the appropriate humility, self-discipline, soundness of mind, or benevolent intentions. But the list of those who sought to cross the

allegedly unbridgeable gap between the human and divine, and to find in that crossing not sin, but grace, forgiveness, and beatitude, is surely a much longer and more impressive one than the list of demonic figures upon whom Bell would apparently dwell. Whether one focuses one's attention upon the Orphics, Pythagoreans, Platonists, and Neo-Platonists in the ancient Greek world; upon Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, St. Benedict, and many of the other Christian Church Fathers; upon the medieval German Hasids; upon St. Bernard, St. Francis, St. Bonaventure, Meister Eckhardt, Henri Suso, St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, or any of the other medieval and early modern Catholic mystics; upon George Fox and the 17th century Quaker movement; upon Methodism and revivalist Protestantism; upon 18th and 19th century Eastern European Hassidism; or upon a whole range of Eastern religious movements including almost every variety of Buddhism, and the Vedantic and Yoga traditions in Hinduism-in every one of these cases one finds a desire for personal religious experience, for a closing of the gap between the human and the divine, that has been combined with a piety, devoutness, and emphasis on personal restraint and personal *askesis* that is the exact opposite of the Baudelaire-, Rimbaud-, and Timothy Leary-like attitudes and lifestyles that Bell tends to equate with mystic vision quests. In a word, Bell fails to distinguish a pious mysticism from an impious one, and in doing so he would extract from religion much of its energizing soul and its core capacity for moral and spiritual transformation.

Once again we can turn to Tocqueville for sound insight. While acknowledging in the camp-meeting and revivalist traditions of the American frontier a tendency towards fanaticism and imbalance, at the same time Tocqueville saw in the revivalists' quest for the saving experience of the Spirit a legitimate human urge to transcend the narrow confines of a life lived exclusively on the plane of sense. It was not a Faustian urge, but a divinely inspired one, according to Tocqueville, which impelled human beings to reach out beyond the plane of the material and the finite in order to find communion with what is infinite and non-material. In a section of *Democracy in*

America titled "Why Some Americans Manifest a Sort of Fanatical Spiritualism," Tocqueville wrote:

Although the desire of acquiring the good things of this world is the prevailing passion of the American people, certain momentary outbreaks occur when their souls seem suddenly to burst the bonds of matter by which they are restrained and to soar impetuously towards heaven. In all the states of the Union, but especially in the half-peopled country of the Far West, itinerant preachers may be met with who hawk about the word of God from place to place. Whole families, old men, women, and children, cross rough passes and untrodden wilds, coming from a great distance, to join a camp-meeting, where, in listening to these discourses, they totally forget for several days and nights the cares of business and even the most urgent wants of the body

It was not man who implanted in himself the taste for what is infinite and the love of what is immortal; these lofty instincts are not the offspring of his capricious will; their steadfast foundation is fixed in human nature, and they exist in spite of his efforts. He may cross and distort them; destroy them he cannot. The soul has wants which must be satisfied; and whatever pains are taken to divert it from itself, it soon grows weary, restless, and disquieted amid the enjoyments of sense. If ever the faculties of the great majority of mankind were exclusively bent upon the pursuit of material objects, it might be anticipated that an amazing reaction would take place in the souls of some men. They would drift at large in the world of spirits, for fear of remaining shackled by the close bondage of the body. It is not, then, wonderful [i.e., something to be wondered at] if in the midst of a community whose thoughts tend earthward a small number of individuals are to be found who turn their looks to heaven. I should be surprised if mysticism did not soon make some advance among a people solely engaged in promoting their own worldly welfare (DA, II, 143).

Tocqueville's remarks here are important, for they not only throw important light on Protestant revivalism in America, but they also offer a key to understanding some of the more positive aspects of the 60s, and particularly of the 60s youth movement. Bell, even more forcefully than Collier or Lasch, views the 60s almost entirely in negative terms, seeing in this decade the fruits of a century long-process of modernist antinomianism and capitalist-driven hedonism. His evaluation is harsh, but in many ways accurate, and those social conservatives who would trace the proximate causes of our present discontents to moral and social developments which first surfaced on a mass scale in the 1960s surely have a strong case to make. Nevertheless, although there were all the destructive tendencies present in the 60s of which Bell, Lasch, and Collier write, and although it was precisely these tendencies which were adopted by large segments of the cultural mainstream in the 70s and 80s, there was something positive about the youth movement of the 60s which Tocqueville would have understood. For however adolescent, undisciplined, immature, and even infantile the members of the Hippie generation may have been-however pampered, spoiled, and in their own way, perhaps, addicted to material goods and a life of ease and comfort-at the same time, there was a genuine awareness among at least certain segments of the 60s generation that in modern man's restless pursuit of material abundance and his irrepressible drive to conquer nature, somewhere along the way he had lost his soul. Such an observation is certainly not a new one, and the counter-culture's excursions into the worlds of Zen, shamanism, *I Ching*, *TM*, Vedanta, Christian mysticism, yoga, theosophy, kaballah, Sufism, astrology, tarot, and LSD may have produced few permanent fruits. But the Hippie generation youth came to understand something about human nature that in a highly competitive and technologically-oriented society was in danger of being lost. As Tocqueville would have said, they came to understand that the taste for what is infinite and the love of what is immortal is a yearning planted in the very core of human nature, and that this yearning cannot be satisfied either by an abundance of material goods or by the status gained through success in a career. This is a truth which social

conservatives of both the left and right should readily be able to accept from the Hippies, and to integrate into their own understanding of our current social malaise.

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NOTES

1. All references to *Democracy in America (DA)* are to the two volume edition edited by Phillips Bradley (New York: Vintage Books, 1945).

2. The letter is reproduced in the second volume of the Bradley edition of *Democracy in America*, p. 402.

3. Tocqueville describes the intense passion for personal gain in America, and its pervasiveness throughout the culture, in sweeping terms: "Men living in democratic times have many passions, but most of their passions either end in the love of riches or proceed from it" (*DA*, II, 239). "The love of wealth is therefore to be traced, as either a principal or an accessory motive, at the bottom of all that the Americans do" (*DA*, II, 240). "The love of well-being has now become the predominant taste of the nation; the great current of human passions runs in that channel and sweeps everything along in its course" (*DA*, II, 138). "In America everyone finds facilities unknown elsewhere for making or increasing his fortune. The spirit of gain is always eager, and the human mind, constantly diverted from the pleasures of imagination and the labors of the intellect, is there swayed by no impulse but the pursuit of wealth. Not only are manufacturing and commercial classes to be found in the United States, as they are in all other countries, but, what never occurred elsewhere, the whole community is simultaneously engaged in productive industry and commerce" (*DA*, II, 37).

4. "The character of Anglo-American civilization . . . is the result-and this should be constantly kept in mind-of two distinct elements which in other places have been in frequent disagreement, but which the Americans have succeeded in incorporating to some extent one with the other and combining admirably. I allude to the *spirit of religion* and the *spirit of liberty*. The settlers of New England

were at the same time ardent sectarians and daring innovators . . . Hence arose two tendencies, distinct but opposite, which are everywhere discernible in the manners as well as the laws of the country One sees them . . . seeking with almost equal eagerness material wealth and moral satisfaction; heaven in the world beyond, and well-being and liberty in this one" (DA, I, 44).

5. While holding the role of husband and wife in equal esteem, the Americans, Tocqueville explained, believed that every association requires a head and that the husband should be "the natural head of the conjugal association." This was an arrangement accepted by both men and women, and Tocqueville says that he never met a woman in America who considered male authority within the family to be a usurpation of her rights. Nevertheless, Tocqueville believed that those forces of the democratic age which "bring nearer to the same level the father and son, the master and servant, and, in general, superiors and inferiors" would eventually, both within the family and outside it, "raise woman and make her more and more the equal of man" (DA II, 222-223).

6. The deep religious faith of the Americans also contributed to the stability of American politics, Tocqueville believed, and a sudden loss of faith, he thought, would prove disastrous for a free people. Apparently drawing from the experience of the French Revolution and the subsequent rise of the Napoleonic dictatorship, he explained how the great anxiety and sense of drift that is caused by a people's sudden loss of faith regarding the ultimate questions of human life can induce many to seek order and certitude in the political realm by surrendering their liberty to a dictator: "When the religion of a people is destroyed, doubt gets hold of the higher powers of the intellect and half paralyzes all the others. Every man accustoms himself to having only confused and changing notions on the subjects most interesting to his fellow creatures and himself Such a condition cannot but enervate the soul, relax the springs of the will, and prepare a people for servitude. Not only does it happen in such a case that they allow their freedom to be taken from them; they frequently surrender it themselves. When there is no longer any principle of authority in religion any more than in politics, men are

speedily frightened at the aspect of this unbounded independence. The constant agitation of all surrounding things alarms and exhausts them. As everything is at sea in the sphere of the mind, they determine at least that the mechanism of society shall be firm and fixed; and as they cannot resume their ancient belief, they assume a master" (DA, II, 22-23).

7. After the Second World War, according to Collier, television would have effects similar to the earlier stage, screen, radio, and music industries, only the magnitude of its effect would be much greater. Indeed, TV, says Collier, has changed the very nature of life in the U.S.; nothing, he contends, has affected human consciousness more. For many people, he explains, television has become the central element in their lives, as television-watching is often used as a substitute for interpersonal relationships and as a means of overcoming personal isolation and loneliness. But television, Collier says, is by its very nature a passive medium that can be no substitute for active engagement with others and the world. It is neither challenging for fulfilling, and much of the programming, Collier believes, is uninformative and of very low quality. One could, of course, severely restrict the amount of time one watches TV (the average American, according to Collier, looks at about 28 hours of television per week), and view mainly quality shows. But the actual number of people who view TV with high selectivity, says Collier, represents only a small fraction of the vast TV-watching audience, and on balance, he believes, the effect of the medium is to stupefy the population, dull its imagination, retard its emotional and intellectual growth, and subject it to a fantasy world that often cannot be distinguished from reality. Instead of edifying, he believes, it often prevents people from developing their better moral, spiritual, and intellectual potentialities (RSA, 239-245).

8. "The I's Have It for Another Decade," *The New York Times*, Dec. 27, 1989, A23.

9. In *The Culture of Narcissism*, Lasch criticizes the loss of ancient traditions in words that could have been lifted almost verbatim from the writings of Bloom and Kirk. "Those who teach college students today," he writes, "see at first hand the effect of

[various harmful practices found in high schools] not merely in the students' reduced ability to read and write but in the diminished store of their knowledge about the cultural traditions they are supposed to inherit. With the collapse of religion, biblical references, which formerly penetrated deep into everyday awareness, have become incomprehensible, and the same thing is now happening to the literature and mythology of antiquity—indeed, to the entire literary tradition of the West, which has always drawn so heavily on biblical and classical sources. In the space of two or three generations, enormous stretches of the 'Judaean-Christian tradition,' so often invoked by educators but so seldom taught in any form, have passed into oblivion. The effective loss of cultural traditions on such a scale makes talk of a new Dark Age far from frivolous" (CN, 150-151).

10. The quality of male\female relationships has also been adversely affected, according to Lasch, by contemporary feminism. While agreeing with the feminist argument that codes of chivalry, the sentimental exaltation of women, masculine defense of the "fair sex," etc., were part of a social system that sought to subordinate women to men economically and otherwise, at the same time, he feels that the various polite conventions that previously governed male\female relationships "provided women with ideological leverage in their struggle to domesticate the wildness and savagery of men" (CN, 190). Both the burdens and benefits of contemporary feminist liberation, Lasch believes, can be summed up in the observation that "men no longer treat women as ladies" (CN, 191).

11. Lasch specifically takes Margaret Mead to task for her attempted revision or refutation of Freud. Concerning her *Coming of Age in Samoa* he writes: "Once again we see the limits of an approach to culture that confines itself to purely conscious phenomena and confuses the absence of 'Victorian' or 'puritanical' attitudes with the absence of any sexual prohibitions at all. The repression of sexuality, in one form or another, remains the very condition of culture, and in every culture, accordingly, sexual life consists of a series of renunciations Cultural relativists are so strongly impressed by cultural differences that they overlook what human

beings share simply by virtue of being human" (*HHW*, 201).

12. I.e.: "When a narcissistic mother, already disposed to see her offspring as extensions of herself, attempts to compensate the child for the father's desertion . . . her constant but perfunctory attentions, her attempts to make the child feel wanted and special, and her wish to make it 'stand out' communicate themselves to the child in a charged and highly disturbing form. The child imagines that the mother has swallowed or castrated the father and harbors the grandiose fantasy of replacing him, by achieving fame or attaching himself to someone who represents a phallic kind of success, thereby bringing about an ecstatic reunion with the mother" (*CN*, 175).

13. *The New Leader*, August 22, 1942.

14. "I am commencing an undertaking, hitherto without precedent, and which will never find an imitator. I desire to set before my fellows the likeness of a man in all the truth of nature, and that man myself.

"Myself alone! I know the feelings of my heart, and I know men. I am not made like any of those I have seen; I venture to believe that I am not made like any of those who are in existence. If I am not better, at least I am different. Whether Nature has acted rightly or wrongly in destroying the mould in which she cast me, can only be decided after I have been read." (Modern Library translation)

15. Already in the late 50s, Bell was describing the advertising and marketing industries in the following terms:

Aided and abetted by advertising and the installment plan, the two most fearsome inventions of man since the discovery of gunpowder, selling has become the most striking activity of contemporary America. Against frugality, selling emphasizes prodigality; against asceticism, the lavishness of display. No creature in history is more uxorious than the American consumer, and this submissiveness drives him to buy The American citizen, as *Fortune* once noted, lives in a state of siege from dawn until bedtime. "Nearly everything he sees, hears, touches, tastes, and smells is an attempt to sell him something To break through his protective shell the advertis-

ers must continuously shock, tease, tickle or irritate him, or wear him down by the drip-drip-drip or Chinese water torture method of endless repetition. Advertising is the handwriting on the wall, the sign in the sky, the bush that burns regularly every night" (*El*, 254).