PHILOSOPHY AND THE HUMAN SCIENCES

PHILOSOPHICAL PAPERS
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CHAPTER TEN

LEGITIMATION CRISIS?

I want to explore the question of whether we can speak of a 'legitimation crisis' in Western capitalist societies, and how it is to be conceived. I think we have not yet developed the concepts we need to come to terms with this fruitfully, and I want to try slowly and painfully to edge towards them here.

The belief that capitalism destroys itself is, of course, central to the Marxist tradition. *Capital* adumbrates a number of ways in which the system careens towards breakdown owing to the uncontrolled nature of capitalist accumulation. Later this vision has been refined, modified, even abandoned by some. We have had revised theories: that the system tends to increasing arms production, or imperialism, or both; that it tends to export its contradictions to the international sphere. More recently, we have theories like that of James O'Connor[1] which see capitalist economies as generating external costs that they cannot assume, which must be assumed by the political system, thus threatening its legitimacy.

I think this latter type of theory is approaching a theoretically fruitful area, in which we can identify something like 'contradictions' in modern advanced capitalist society.[2] But I think we can only make headway if we focus our attention on the question of legitimation. The breakdown, or self-undermining, of capitalism cannot be adequately understood, I want to claim, if we think of it primarily in economic terms: as a failure of output, or an escalation of costs. Rather, societies destroy themselves when they violate the conditions of legitimacy which they themselves tend to posit and inculcate.

What we need to get clearer, therefore, is the family of conceptions of the good life, the notions of what it is to be human, which have grown up with modern society and have framed the identity of contemporary men. This set of conceptions is, of course, essentially linked to the economic

[1] *The Fiscal Crisis of the State* (New York, 1973).
[2] Cf. also J. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston, 1975).

and political structures which have developed in the last centuries, although the link is not the simple one assumed by vulgar Marxism. But it is only by articulating these conceptions that we can identify the conditions of a legitimation crisis of contemporary society. For these will define the terms in which institutions, practices, disciplines, structures will be recognized as legitimate or marked out as illegitimate.

I shall thus try, in the first part of this paper, to sketch an all-too-schematic portrait of the main lines of development of what I want to call the modern identity; and then proceed in the following sentences to trace the features of modern society that reflect and entrench it; and the ways in which this same society may be systematically undermining its own legitimacy.

Before launching into a speculative attempt to define some of the basic features of the modern identity, it might be helpful to look at the moral condemnations and defences that are made of contemporary society, and that give articulacy, as it were, to the underlying legitimacy threat. The ones I want to pick out here are those which centre around the debate about growth. I will try to make a short inventory.

One of the most important streams in the malaise about endless growth is a moral protest, against a society whose motive forces are greed and envy. Schumacher articulates this most eloquently: 'The modern economy is propelled by a frenzy of greed and envy, and these are not accidental features but the very causes of its expansionist success.'[3] Schumacher's is ultimately what one would call a Platonic protest. What is evil in modern society is that it is based on the endless multiplication of desires. 'The cultivation and expansion of needs is the antithesis of wisdom.'[4] The member of modern society is like the figure in Plato's *Gorgias*, Callicles, who preaches the indefinite expansion of wants provided it goes *pari passu* with the expansion of the means to satisfy them.

For Schumacher, speaking out of the Platonic tradition, this is a kind of madness, at least a blindness. Ever-increasing desire is a kind of slavery. It prevents us from turning to higher things, like the contemplation of truth, or beauty, or devotion to some cause greater than ourselves. It also makes us prey to disquiet, internal division, tension and anxiety; and breeds conflict between men, as they are driven to struggle to fulfill their ever-expanding wants.

This Platonic protest is closely related to another stream of contemporary moral resistance to growth, which one might call the Romantic.

[3] *Small is Beautiful* (London, 1974), pp. 24–5. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Rousseau is the crucial transition figure, since he was deeply influenced by Plato, and a strong proponent of the limitation of needs.

The Romantic sensibility which emerges partly from Rousseau is, of course, profoundly un-Platonic, in that the 'nature' to which it aspires to turn is no longer the Platonic order of ideas, but rather the spontaneous flow of life which runs through us and all things. But its critique of Calliclean man converges very close to Plato's: the insatiable desire to possess things, to dominate them, is a kind of thraldom, interwoven with a blindness (or 'false consciousness') which is both cause and effect of an inability to communicate and receive communication, that is an ability to communicate with others, and to respond to beauty and meaning in nature. The drive to dominate generates compulsive activity, anxiety, inner tension, and eventually aggression and violence. Freedom and vision, as well as harmony, community and peace, are only possible if we somehow liberate ourselves from it.

This strand of critique, which I perhaps too loosely call 'Romantic', was echoed by the early Marx, developed by the Frankfurt school, popularized by Marcuse, and is now very widespread.

A third line of criticism, which often combines with either Platonic or Romantic, lies in the reproach that our society pushes inexorably towards bigness and concentration, and in the process inexorably destroys smaller communities and long-standing ties between people. This is often seen just as another aspect of the price we pay for our Calliclean path. Mobility and concentration have been seen as essential conditions of rapid growth. And perhaps more fundamentally, the true Calliclean man who puts acquisition first would naturally be willing to sacrifice past ties and loyalties; he would constantly readjust his 'relationship,' to suit the demands of advancing fulfilment.

But although linked with the reproach of endless acquisition, the drive to concentrations is separable. A society is conceivable which would concentrate or break up traditional communities in the name of some other goal than rising consumer standards. Indeed some Asian communist societies have seemed to provide a model.

As far as Western capitalist society is concerned, however, the protest against concentration is part of that against endless growth. What is being fought here is not just concentration with its evils of crowding, impersonal relations, loss of public accountability; but also mobility: the breaking up of older communities, of long-standing ties. At a deeper level, it is the liquidation of the past which is seen as terrible. The protesters

have a different model for how man inhabits time. In a perspective of desire-fulfilment, only the future counts; whatever can affect my happiness must lie in the future, fulfilment or frustration. But on the alternative view, men can only come to understanding themselves by finding some unity in their whole lives, and that means uniting their past to their future.

From this standpoint, one of the most profoundly objectionable features of modern society is its encouragement of the 'throw-away' style of life, in which everything which surrounds us suffers perpetual obsolescence. No external expression is left of the unity of life, of its continuity. The urban environment is constantly being transformed in the pursuit of profit or greater utility.

This third line of attack is thus levied against concentration and mobility, seen as linked. A fourth line of attack centres on the irrationalities of modern society. Because of the bent of this society, we find ourselves doing things, it is claimed, which we would never choose to do if we set about dealing deliberately.

Thus we sacrifice such goals as the humanization of work, or an undamaged environment, or communities rich in tradition, or genuine leisure, for the sake of continued growth in the number and variety of consumer goods and services, and continued increase in the level of technological sophistication. It is absurd, for instance, to endanger the ozone layer around the atmosphere, and the ear-drums of countless people, for the sake of shaving a couple of hours off the time it takes to fly from London to New York; particularly when the snarl-ups that accompany fast transit on either end eat heavily into the gain anyway. No one sitting down to such a decision, with a fresh mind, as a free agent, would make such a choice. But the bent of our technological civilization seems powerfully set in this direction; so that it takes immense effort to stop us hurtling ahead mindlessly towards higher technology.

This reproach of irrationality is separable from the moral critique above. One could agree that our society structures our choices irrationally, even if one did not share the Platonic/Romantic moral sense of the good. But for those who accept the moral critique, the irrationalities of contemporary society are not unconnected with its moral distortions. The drive to continuing expansion of needs is connected to the favouring of increased quantitative production and more intense technology, and all this makes us find this extraordinary bias normal most of the time. Marxist thought also sees a connection between irrational priorities and the ideological consciousness of capitalist society.

This fourfold criticism of the growth–concentration–mobile society strikes a chord in great numbers of people in our society. But what is significant is that the same people are ambivalent: they also respond to the defences put up for this society. The Calliclean life can also be defended. We can argue that restless ambition, the search for new fields to conquer, brings continued vitality and creativity, that concentration and mobility widen our horizons, that a society of vital, striving, ambitious, mobile people is an exciting and creative place to live. That is why, indeed, people are drawn to such centres as New York, Los Angeles, and other agglomerations of the Western world (including, and especially, liberal intellectuals who articulate the case against growth).

More soberly, we could defend this society by denying that the Calliclean image fits. For after all, what has consumer society brought about? For millions of people, whose forbears were the factory fodder of the industrial revolution, who may have been packed in over-crowded, insanitary, hastily-built workers' housing, sweated twelve hours and more a day, without privacy or a decent family life in the other twelve, barely able to scrape a living, with an appalling rate of desertion of women by their men, with children growing up stunted physically and emotionally; for these millions there now is the chance for a home, decently furnished, space, family life, the creative use of leisure, the building of a private space in which they can bring up a family, practise hobbies, see friends, as well as being plugged into a world-wide network of communications (admittedly only one-way).

From this point of view, many of the things that count against the consumer society of the Platonic/Romantic critique turn out to count for it. For instance, much of the effort of acquisition in consumer society is directed to acquiring and furnishing and equipping private space in which the nuclear family can operate: house, car perhaps garden, perhaps a house in the country. Instead of seeing these acquisitions as stages on the road to the disintegration of a wider community through the privatization of its members, we could seem them rather as the facilitators of greater integration of masses of people whose ancestors were swept up in the great migrations which accompanied and still accompany the continuing industrial revolution, and whose family life was often cramped and strained, and threatened with the vicissitudes of unemployment and pauperization.

We can take this line of thought further and reflect that the places in the Western world where some kind of local community can flourish all seem to share the feature that the private space of each of the constituent

families is felt as adequate, whatever difference they may be in absolute levels. In the places where this is not felt to be so, such as the ghettoes of city centres in the USA, we find the most frightening examples of the breakdown of community, and sometimes of the most basic rules of civilization. In our society, no one seems to be induced to participate in community life through a *lack* of private space.

It is considerations of this kind that left-wing opponents of the moral protest to growth have in mind when they accuse their adversaries of reflecting purely middle-class concerns.

I daresay great numbers of us feel the pull of both these orders of considerations. My aim here is not to arbitrate, but to try rather to explain what underlies this ambivalence by digging down to those basic underlying features of our conception of human life which have helped shape both the growth of society and the protest to it. It is this modern identity which can help to explain the legitimacy of modern societies and the threat to it.

II

We can start exploring the moral notions underlying consumer society if we ask how it avoids the stigma which traditionally attaches to endless acquisition. For Schumacher's strictures are those of the perennial moral tradition in our civilization. At any time previous to the modern era, it would have seemed evident that a way of life involving endless accumulation was at best morally suspect. We might ask, how did it ever come to seem otherwise? How did we break from the Platonic mould? It may seem odd today to frame the onus of the question in this way. But from a broader perspective, it is our modern society which stands out as different from the perennial norm.

We are given some help towards an answer if we look at what we value in consumer society. Over the last sixty years or so there has developed in the capitalist world a modern society in which masses of people have acquired the durable consumer goods necessary to possess an adequate private space, to mechanize much of the labour involved in living in it, and to have communications access through the media to the society at large. There are substantial minorities in all Western societies who are still outside, but the magnitude of the achievement is staggering. Millions of people are living on a standard of comfort that only a minority could hope for in the past, those who could command the service of others.

Compared to the condition of masses of urban dwellers at any earlier

stage of the industrial revolution, that is more than a great material improvement. It offers vastly superior conditions of personal development and family life.

What is special about it, and what many of its citizens have seized on, is that this way of life is in a sense more individualistic than previous ones. The family can live on its own, bringing in what it needs through its own transportation from shops which are often large and impersonal, doing the labour required for the home in the home, and even keeping in contact with the larger society and the world events within the home, thanks to the electronic media and the press. Relative to its neighbours and immediate surroundings, the family is much more self-contained than the great majority of any previous generation of urban dwellers, and incomparably more so than most villagers of previous ages. In another way, of course, the modern family is wide open all the time to the large currents of our civilization, because of modern communications. But it is open through a channel which by-passes the immediate community, and which intensifies its privacy.

This self-contained life has been attacked by critics as a negation of previous community. But what these critics often fail to appreciate is how much this self-containedness is in line with the identity which has developed in Western civilization.

Historians have shown the extraordinary development in modern times of a new ideal of family life.[5] Starting among the wealthier classes in Anglo-Saxon countries in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we see a growing idealization of marriage based on affection, of true companionship between husband and wife, and devoted concern for the children. Affectionate marriage and family life comes to be seen as an important part of human fulfilment, and the sentiments of love, concern, affection for one's spouse come to be cherished, dwelt on, rejoiced in, and articulated. Experiencing certain feelings is henceforth an important part of a fulfilled life, and important among these is love. This was naturally the age, too, when childhood comes to be seen as a separate phase of the life-cycle, with its own feelings and needs, and child-rearing becomes a subject of absorbing interest to the literate public. The spiritual age of Dr Spock begins.

This new mode of life/feeling centres on the nuclear family, and goes along with the building of a private space for this family. This can be seen

[5] See, for example, Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (London, 1977); and E. Shorten, *The Making of the Modern Family* (New York, 1975).

literally in the new organization of space in the home: for example, the building of corridors allowing servants to circulate without disturbing the privacy of the family, the installation of private dining rooms, and so on. But it also meant a withdrawal from the control, supervision of, or even subordination to wider groups, like the kinship lineage, or the village community. Moderns are appalled to learn, for instance, how much the pre-eighteenth-century village presumed to control, even of its members' intimate family life. One has only to think of the 'charivari' that henpecked husbands had to undergo, not to speak of fornicators.

These two changes, affection and privacy, obviously went together. The family based on affection had to be formed by affinity; it could not be the fruit exclusively of the dynastic and property arrangements that were so important for the old lineage. And it could only flourish in intimacy, which ruled out the open, goldfish-bowl world of traditional society.

Now what began with the wealthier classes of England and America spread in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through the rest of the Western world, and through the other classes of all Western societies. The achievement of consumer society that I have been describing is in a sense the (virtually) final universalization of the conditions of affluence-in-privacy which will allow (almost) everyone to live this ideal to the full without sacrifice and in comfort. Hence the minority which has not yet got these conditions sees itself as terribly deprived. For instance, ghetto negro families in the USA, sometimes idealized by critics of the modern family for their deviance from its norms, seem to aspire to nothing else than the western affectionate nuclear family.[6]

Thus what we value in consumer society is that it has put at (almost) everyone's disposal a mode of fulfilment which has been seen as central in our civilization for a couple of centuries, if not more. What lies behind this ideal, and how is it connected with lifting the limits to endless accumulation?

I think we can find the answer to this in what I want to call the modern identity, a new conception of what it is to be a human subject which entrenches itself in our thought and sensibility from the seventeenth century on. This in turn leads to a radically new understanding of nature. The development of this new identity emerges in a host of ways: in the new natural science, in the growth of atomism, in the new emphasis on sentiment, and so on. But perhaps we can trace it most easily through a

[6] See Lee Rainwater, *Behind Ghetto Walls* (Chicago, 1970), quoted in Christopher Larch, *Haven in a Heartless World* (New York, 1977), p. 218.

highly intellectual issue, that of cosmology, trying all the time to read the deeper changes underlying the transformations of doctrine.

Before the seventeenth century, the dominant cosmologies saw the universe as a meaningful order. By a 'meaningful' order, I mean one which can only be explained or understood in semiological categories, as an order which 'makes sense'. Consider what Lovejoy called the 'principle of plenitude', which was common property of all the pre-modern cosmologies. This was the principle that in the cosmic order all the possibilities are realized. But the very notion of 'all the possibilities' requires some background conception of a closed order. There must be a scheme in which everything has a place, because there are just a certain number of places and no more. Otherwise no determinate sense can be given to the idea of a totality of possibilities. And this scheme can only offer a determinate totality, because in some way it makes sense that there should be just this range of places, no more and no less.

Pre-modern cosmologies thus saw the world as the embodiment of an underlying scheme which made sense; one could say that they saw the different levels and types of existents as expressions of this scheme. For instance, following a Platonic formulation, we might see the things that exist around us as embodiments of the Ideas; where these Ideas themselves are not just a random collection but form an order in which each has a necessary place. Or we can take the medieval-Renaissance notion of the correspondences. The lion represents in the kingdom of animals what the eagle does among the birds, the king in the realm, etc. The parallelism here is not an interesting *de facto* resemblance; it exists not by chance, but by a necessity of things. These slots have to be filled because they make up an order which makes sense, and which in virtue of this is pressing for realization.

Compare a modern notion which might look analogous, the conception of an ecological order with a number of 'niches', also exhibiting relations of analogy, and which also tends to fill all its niches. Now this system is a whole, just in that it is an interlocking, self-sustaining system. Its wholeness is its being self-sustaining; this is the criterion by which it could be said to be missing something, or something could be said to have a place in it, and so on. Once it exists, it will tend to sustain itself, within certain limits. If the holder of one ecological niche becomes extinct, some other may take its place. But this is because of the *de facto* operation of the rest of the system; for example, there is food of a certain kind going begging. There is by contrast no reason why the whole system has the contour that it has; this is just what has evolved. There is only an explanation

of why certain species have the form they have in terms of the rest of the system, and hence the niches it offers. Here there is a quite other kind of 'making sense', if one wants to use this expression at all. Things make sense when they cohere as an interlocking, self-sustaining system. By contrast, the pre-modern view does have some account of why the whole system is as it is; the scheme of the totality of places is prior to the empirical embodiment of the system. It makes sense as an order of ideas, or archetypes, or modes and levels of being.

Now these two outlooks embed very different views of what 'nature' is. On the old outlook, the nature of something is the idea it instantiates. And each idea is intelligible against the whole order. The modern is more ready to identify the 'nature' of a thing with the forces or factors which make it function as it does, and these can no longer be seen as existing independently of the particulars which function this way. Nature is within.

At the same time, there is a radical change in the locus of thought. On the old view, there is a *logos* in things. But the modern view, rejecting meaningful order, understands thought as what happens within subjects. Thought is always in a mind.

These two changes helped to transform our notion of what it is for us as rational beings to discover our nature. Both my own nature, and the process of thinking whereby I define it, are within in a new sense. In the post-Cartesian age, we can aspire to understand ourselves even while abstracting from all the rest. (Descartes makes the crucial step in self-clarity, even while the existence of everything else is in doubt.)

In the twentieth century, we may no longer believe, like Descartes, in the soul or mind as an inner space open to transparent introspection. We now are more ready to treat ourselves like other natural objects. But we retain the idea that self-understanding is getting a clear view of the desires, aversions, fears, hopes, aspirations that are within us. To know oneself is to get clear on what is within.

This seems so normal and inescapable to us, that we can hardly imagine an alternative. But let us try. If only I can understand myself as part of a larger order; indeed, if man as the rational animal is just the one who is rationally aware of this order; then I only am really aware of myself, and understand myself, when I see myself against this background, fitting into this whole. I must acknowledge my belonging before I can understand myself. Engaged in an attempt to cut myself off, to consider myself quite on my own, autonomously, I should be in confusion, self-delusion, in the dark.

Let us try to articulate the sense of self that lies respectively behind these two notions of self-understanding. For the modern I am a natural being, I am characterized by a set of inner drives, or goals, or desires and aspirations. Knowing what I am really about is getting clear about these. If I enquire after my identity, ask seriously who I am, it is here that I have to look for an answer. The horizon of identity is an inner horizon.

For the pre-modern, I want to argue, I am an element in a larger order. On my own, as a punctual existence outside of it, I should be only a shadow, an empty husk. The order in which I am placed is an external horizon which is essential to answering the question, who am I? I could not conceivably answer the question with this horizon shut off. If I try to occlude it, I fall into a kind of nullity, a sort of non-existence, a virtual death.

The notion of 'identity' as I am using it here, somewhat Eriksonianly, can be understood in this way: to define my identity is to define what I must be in contact with in order to function fully as a human agent, and specifically to be able to judge and discriminate and recognize what is really of worth or importance, both in general and for me. To say that something is part of my identity is to say that without it I should be at a loss in making those discriminations which are characteristically human. I shouldn't know where I stood, I should lose the sense of what constituted beauty, what nobility, what truly worthwhile fulfilment, and so on. It helps constitute the horizon within which these discriminations have meaning for me.

This horizon is, of course, never fully defined. We find ourselves recurrently engaged in defining and exploring it further. But we have a general sense of where it is to be found. Now my claim is that for the modern, the horizon of identity is to be found within, while for the pre-modern it is without. What I call the modern identity is the modern understanding of what the question of identity amounts to, where one looks for an answer; it is, if you like, a general map of the paths of self-understanding.

These are, of course, two rather abstract ideal types. They provide rough sketches of a whole family of self-understandings on each side. But I believe that something like a shift from one of these families to the other occurs in our history during the last centuries, perhaps pivotally in the seventeenth century. It is this massive shift in self-experience which is reflected in, and partly defined and promoted by, the revolution in cosmology I adverted to above.

An identity shift of this kind involves a change in the basic categories of self-understanding and hence experience. For instance, it transforms our

understanding of what it is to live a proper or successful human life. For a modern, successful life, humanly speaking, is one where I have fulfilled the important drives, goals, aspirations which make up my nature. 'Fulfilment' is a natural term which comes often to our lips in this connection. But in the context of the pre-modern identity, to make something of one's life is to realize in one's person a place in the pattern, well, fully, with *éclat*.

This by no means implies unselfishness. That is to see it in a modern perspective which distorts. It is rather a matter of a wholly different way of conceiving human satisfaction, including the most egoistic. On one side, this can be seen as the fulfilment of desires which inhere in me; on the other, it comes from establishing my position in the order of things. Since this order underlies what is, to occupy a place in it firmly, fully, is to live a full life; one might say to achieve a greater fullness of being; to fail to do so is to sink towards the status of a shadow. A limpid everyday image of one kind of satisfaction is the fulfilment of a felt desire for an object, like hunger or thirst; an image for the other would be rather that of approaching a source of light or warmth, for example getting close to a fire.

It is evident that the latter kind of satisfaction can be just as much the goal of ruthless, egoistic ambition as the former. Thus an extremely important part of the pattern for most people in pre-modern society was that they belonged to a lineage, a *domus*. This was not only the case for aristocrats, but also for peasants. They strove to keep the family line going, to preserve its property, to keep the family land from being broken up. The identity of a man was bound up with his belonging to his lineage, a broader pattern which had to be maintained, and hence imposed goals. The successful life was one in which these goals are achieved in a high degree and in exemplary fashion. But one could apply a great deal of ruthless effort, of immorality and egoism to this task. This stands out more clearly in the life of aristocracy, who were constantly fighting each other for land, place and honour; for position in a pattern of order which was never itself challenged.

We are still close enough to this, or perhaps it is that it corresponds to something perennial in man, that we can understand the satisfaction of having been, for instance, an exemplary father, or a successful general. We have realized an archetype in striking fashion. But as moderns, we have been taught to reinterpret these satisfactions. I am happy to have been an exemplary father, because that was my aspiration; that was my 'thing'; or perhaps even, I consider it to be an aspiration found in all men. What is lacking is the idea that in doing so, I come close to the order of

being, that I myself exist more fully; that this life does not depend for its value on the shape of aspirations in me or in men, but rather on an order which defines what it is to be human.

We live with patterns today, and we are constantly rebelling against them. We can see this with contemporary women's liberation, which involves a rebellion against the former definition of the role of housewife: a 'homemaker', who sees to the running of the house, and even more to the warmth and emotional fullness of the home. This is attacked in the name of an ideal of self-realization, where each woman, *qua* does her own thing, realizes her talents, and does not exist simply to create the environment in which others can do so. Now in rejecting the pattern, women's liberation is continuing the movement of modernity. But the pattern itself is only a pale reflection of pre-modern ones. For it itself is based on the ideals of an earlier wave of modernity, that of the affectionate nuclear family.

We might say that we continue to create patterns, and to seek satisfaction in exemplifying them; but the shift to the modern identity means that we have difficulty seeing these patterns as ultimate. They are grounded for us in notions of fulfilment, or ought to be. Patterns should be subordinate and derivative. For an earlier identity, it was inconceivable that they be anything but ultimate.

Now the sense of enhanced life which comes from exemplifying a pattern in things is inherently bound up with life in society. The pattern is not relevant to me alone, but to all men. Consequently, society has to be ordered according to it; and it is indeed what binds men together in society. One cannot live the cosmic order in isolation from others. At the same time, realizing the pattern involves recognizing it; and realizing it together involves a common, public recognition of it. If our society exemplifies a cosmic order, then this is something realized in common and in public space, not in isolation.

And so realizing one's place in the pattern is bound up with being recognized as having done so, for it is a place in public space. And by the same token, living up to one's place is not just one's own affair; it is everyone's business. For each one of us helps to sustain the order by which everyone lives, as essentially public order. Thus the incredible (to us moderns) degree of social control of mores in pre-modern society, and the striking lack of privacy. The wider kin dictated so much the individual's life pattern, often when and whom he/she married. And the village community exercised an extraordinary surveillance over the lives of its members. The charivaris, manifestations of public collective ridicule,

illustrate this very well. In France, as mentioned above, a husband who has beaten his wife, or who did women's work, or who was cuckolded, was subject to charivari; presumably because he was allowing an inversion of the proper, patriarchal order. This could not be seen just as a matter between himself and his wife; the order concerned was everybody's. Sanctions had to be taken.

What is also significant in the charivari is the use made of shame. The experience was probably frightening; certainly difficult to live with, but above all humiliating. Shame plays an important role in societies which live by a public pattern; for whether the pattern is realized or not is always a public affair. One's life was led before everyone else, and hence shame and its avoidance played a big role in people's lives. There was no space, not just physically but psycho-socially, to withdraw into the privacy of one's own self-estimate, or the opinions of a circle based on affinity.

With the rise of the modern identity, this intensely public life withers. The community retreats, and the nuclear family achieves privacy. For the subject with a modern identity is looking for fulfilment. What this amounts to, he will discover in himself. This requires privacy, not, of course, the life of a man alone, but a life of relations founded largely on affinity: it is through our affinities that we largely come to discover ourselves. And this life cannot be subject to the constant scrutiny and judgement of the whole, nor submitted to the structures of a fixed pattern, without being inhibited and stifled. The modern man must be to this degree autonomous, that he can find himself; and autonomy for this end requires privacy.

So the growth of the modern identity involves the withering of community; communities of common life and ritual; of which the villages of traditional society are among the most important examples; and of which extended families tend to be another instance. In the new perspective, they are deprived of their importance, their status as indispensable matrices of order. But more, the modern subject is bound sooner or later to find their common rhythm irksome. In such a community of life and ritual, the whole group in principle moves through the stages of labour, achievement, and rest; of fasting, abstinence and then rejoicing; or mourning and celebration; together as a group.

But as the modern identity develops, and each tries to find himself, it becomes harder to maintain this coordinated rhythm. Rather, it comes to be seen as a constraint external to one's own rhythms, the shapes of one's feelings and aspirations which one strives to define. The modern literature of self-discovery is full of accounts of the adolescent or young person, for

whom the rituals of his society go dead, and of a self-finding won out of this moment of inward separation. 'J'ai eu raison, puisque je m'évade', as Rimbaud put it. Hence the ritual community first loses its essential status, then comes to seem irksome, and men break from it. The extended family goes the same way. The worrying thing is whether the movement is not going further and undermining the stable nuclear family as a life-long community.

Negatively the modern identity brings the withering of community, positively the goal of fulfilment of my own nature. But we should now try to see why this takes the form of emotional fulfilment, and specially emotional fulfilment in family life.

Feeling becomes important, because the fulfilment of my desires and aspirations must become evident in feeling. For it is not a matter of matching a cosmic pattern, but of answering my inner needs and desires. Whether they are fulfilled or not is ultimately a matter of my emotional life. And this therefore becomes a crucial factor in the good life. The good life is defined in terms of emotional satisfaction.

We can begin to see the background connection between the modern identity and the modern ideal of family life, the withdrawal of the nuclear family from the larger community, and its concentration on the sentiment and emotional fulfilment of its members. For the development of the modern sense of self involves both a pull towards privacy, and a focus on the fulfilment of drives, desires, aspirations which we find in our own natures. Once one takes this perspective, it is inevitable that the life of the family will take a central place; for what is more basic to human nature, seen as the ensemble of purposes and desires within each one of us? So to identify those purposes within us, be aware of them in feeling, and to fulfil them, becomes a central part of the good life. This life requires privacy, that one's life no longer be mediated by the larger group and the pattern that it embodies, for each finds his nature in himself.

The modern consumer society can be seen as the ultimate flowering of this ideal, a society in which (in principle) everyone has adequate private space for a full family life. This is central to the fulfilment of the man and wife, as companions and lovers, and also as parents. And it is also the locus in which the next generation is nurtured, so that the children in turn will be able to discover and seek their own kind of fulfilment, including the formation of marriages based on their own affinities. The contemporary family ideally has not only the space to live an unmediated existence unhampered, but also the means to foster the development and self-discovery of its children.

III

In the last pages, we have been able to see more fully what lies behind the modern ideal of family life and fulfilment, which is central to the consumer society. In some respects it is a culmination of the modern identity, the new sense of what it is to be a subject which develops with modern society. But is this connected with a lifting of the traditional sense of moral limit to endless accumulation?

In order to see this, we have to look at some of the shifts in moral consciousness and the definitions of moral aspiration which flow from the modern identity.

The modern subject must find his purposes in nature, that is in himself, as nature is now understood. He cannot expect to find them any more in a cosmic order of which he is a part. Of course, in a crucial phase of the modern revolution of identity, the focus was on God, not man. For an important element in the original impetus to reject the old cosmology came from a sense of the majesty of God. The idea of a sovereign God had always sat uneasily with the Greek-derived notion of a hierarchy of levels of being, an ordered cosmos which seemed independent of his will. Already medieval nominalism had expressed the unease of a strand of Christian thought. The semi-pagan embroideries of the notion of cosmic order by thinkers like Bruno awakened this reaction even more strongly. Arguably, this stress on the majesty of God was more important among Protestants, especially among Calvanists. But it also figures in the rise of modern conceptions of subject and science in Catholic countries. One thinks of the role of a monk like Mersenne in the circle of thinkers contemporary with Descartes.

One could therefore, and people did, look on the universe in mechanistic terms for the glory of God. But the result was in the end to turn men inwards. In either case, our purposes were no longer to be found in a cosmic order; but either in the vocation which God prepared for us, or in our own natures. But in a mechanistic conception of the universe, as a creature of God, his purposes could at least partly be discovered by examining the nature of what he had made; provided that one could discern it without presumption and false imaginings.

And so the theological motive for the modern revolution ends up reinforcing what one might call the humanist-naturalist motive. The modern subject is to find his purposes in himself, as a natural being. A good example of the dove-tailing of the two is Locke, a Christian thinker with a modern Christian consciousness: we are the workmanship of God, and

thus must follow his purposes. But these purposes are then read off our natural bent: to life, and to acquire through labour the means thereto; and they become the basis thereby of inalienable right.

A major consequence of this is that the modern subject demands autonomy. He is not part of a larger order, but must discern his own purposes. Perhaps what he has to discern is God's purpose in him, but again *he* is called on to do it. Thus relative to any social ordering, or supposed 'natural' ordering of society, he is seen as originally free. The ordering can only be legitimate, if it issues from his consent.

Hence the extraordinary seventeenth-century idea of a state of nature as the original condition of mankind. It was not that the solitary state was seen as optimal for men. On the contrary: God destines man for society. But this social condition is a purpose, which like all other purposes men have to discover in themselves and bring about. Thus society must be brought about by consent. The most basic function of man is discovering the purpose of God/nature in himself; in this basic function, he acts as an individual. Hence the image of the state of nature as the original condition.

Autonomy is therefore one facet of moral life. The second is discernment, the ability to identify what nature calls for in me, without illusion or presumption. Once again, there is theological precedent for modern naturalism. The Reformation placed particular stress on the notion that ordinary life was sanctified by God. This was stressed in polemic against the Catholic notion that there are special vocations of particular holiness which involve the renunciation of ordinary fulfilment, in particular family life. This was seen as part of the old notion of the sacred which the Reformation rejected as idolatrous, for fundamentally the same reason as it rejected the mass. On the contrary, ordinary life, including marriage, was hallowed by God, as long as it was lived in a spirit of humility, thankfulness and worship. But in living a sanctified life in fulfilment of my ordinary needs, I must see them for what they are: needs that God has put in me for his purposes, the maintaining and continuance of the human race. I must avoid the idolatry involved in giving them a special aura of significance, as the old monastic tradition demanding chastity tends to do for sexuality, for instance, treating it as though it had the numinous power to stand between us and a closer union with God. The Reformation sanctification of ordinary life involved its desacralization, emptying it of all magic and sacremental aura. This is one of the antechambers, I should like to claim, to the modern ideal of fulfilling nature in myself. And our contemporary ideal of family love has its roots partly in the puritan exaltation of 'holy matrimony'.

But the important thing to focus on for our purposes is that this notion of ordinary life, of fulfilling one's needs, describes an ideal, even a difficult one. It is not just a matter of following impulse. Rather it requires that we live our life in a certain spirit, a discernment which requires that we fight free of the presumptious illusions that sinful man is prone to. We have to live our ordinary life, while seeing our needs and desires in a certain light, as God-given, and hence free both from the aura of idolatry and the obsessive involvement of libertinism. The sanctified ordinary life is a spiritual condition, involving discipline and discernment. In using the things of this world, it is also asserting the supremacy of the spirit.

Now I should like to claim that the modern conception of fulfilling my nature, which partly grows out of this religious ideal, shares something important with it. Being in touch with the demands of nature is not something which comes of itself. It is an achievement. It requires control and clairvoyance. And thus it is an achievement which engages the peculiar excellence of man, that he is a rational animal. I have to be able to see nature as it really is, and that means strip off the false prestige of an order projected on to it by unthinking irrationality. I have to be able to set aside what Bacon called 'the Idols of the mind', as well as the illusions generated by concupiscence, vanity, greed. Men easily fall prey to illusions, to the false prestige of supposedly sacred order and hierarchies, to the infantile craving for magic, and hence to superstitions and imposture. It takes courage and vision to discern nature aright; or else education.

Hence what is humanly satisfying about this life is not just that natural impulses are fulfilled, but that men in doing so are exercising their reason and affirming their autonomy. The life according to nature satisfies the demands of the spirit as well, if I can so refer to what men sense as a higher goal, an object of strong evaluation. This is life according to nature, in its first version, as it emerges in modern society. As a conception of the good life, it flows out of the modern identity; so that what matters now is that I determine autonomously what my purposes are out of my own nature. But it recognizes this as an achievement; it sees this discernment as something to be attained, and which in certain respects runs against the slope of human weakness.

Thus the human excellence shown here resides in the ability to recognize and follow nature, not specifically in the natural impulses themselves. For what is specifically human about this life is not so much the desires, which are similar to those of animals for a good part, but the ability by reason to discern them and follow them as so discerned. It is reason and control which matter (as earlier, it was the worshipful spirit of

the God-fearing man): the rational identification of desire, and the rational fulfilment; and the control to do both. The latter branch of rationality is what we call instrumental rationality, and this became for many thinkers in the modern world synonymous with rationality itself.

This claim that the excellence of man consisted in reason and control, and not just the fulfilment of desires, may seem strained when we think of some of the variants of modern Enlightenment naturalism. This is because this naturalism developed in some versions an objectified account of human life, which had no place for a notion like excellence at all. This is the case, for instance, with utilitarianism, which claims to settle all normative questions with the aid of a single yardstick, that of happiness, i.e., desire-satisfaction, presumably something completely naturalistically determinable and measurable. My claim is that even this hard-boiled variant meets the description that I have drawn. Only in this case, the stress on excellence is unadmitted. It is, however, very much present, as one can see in the utilitarians' stress on rationality, their admiration of it as a human quality; their exhortations to it, their attempts to develop it or inculcate it. The man of reason, capable of making a dispassionate calculus of human happiness, achieves an excellence that the self-indulgent believer in metaphysics and superstition does not have. Rationality is a virtue-term for utilitarians. The fact that this kind of judgment has no place in their philosophy just shows its inadequacy as a vehicle of self-understanding.

This is according to nature, in a first version. There is a second which grows out of it in the eighteenth century. But before talking about this, I want to draw out a bit farther the importance of control for this first version. Control of myself, and of my environment: these are important, because they make us able to effect our desires. But control is also important for another reason. To see nature as it really is, not under the illusion of a supposed cosmic order, is to see the things around us as potentially raw material for our purposes. They no longer exhibit a purpose in themselves, in virtue of their place in a meaningful order; their relevance to purpose can only be to *our* purpose. The new modern naturalism inculcates an instrumental stance towards the world. That is why instrumental reason becomes so easily the whole of reason.

And that is why also taking an instrumental stance towards nature is important for more than its results. It is important itself, because it affirms the autonomy and the freedom from illusion/imposure of the one who takes it. Thus the famous quote from Bacon, that the fruits of control of nature were more important as gauges of our having the right vision,

seeing nature without superstition or imposture.[7] To use Max Weber's term, the instrumental stance to nature is the stance of disenchantment. This gives it intrinsic value, as well as the instrumental value that it has in producing goods.

Once again, we may demur here, because the self-image of much modern naturalism forbids our talking in these terms, and even raising such issues. But if one examines the rhetoric of naturalists, pays attention to their praise of rationality, the scientific stance, their portrait of their opponents as having taken a path of facility, having too easily surrendered to consoling myths, it is evident that their almost perverse joy in showing that man is only a machine in a meaningless mechanistic universe has a root in some sense of spiritual achievement involved in disenchantment and objectification. One wins through thereby, through austerity and courage, to autonomy, contact with reality, and hence efficacy.

But then efficacy, one's ability to get things done, is not valued only for the fulfilments of desire it makes possible. It is also valued as a sign of spirituality, of the correct stance of disenchantment to the world. It is a fruit of that which serves as its sign. In a curious way, we find another continuity with an earlier religious spirituality. Max Weber held that the Puritan saw in worldly success a sort of sign of election. I think there is much in this, though I would like to trace the route somewhat differently from Weber. Because the Puritan felt called upon to treat the world as a disenchanted one, for the greater glory of God, the stance of rational work had a high value, since this is one of disenchantment *par excellence*. The prospering of one's labours was the fruit of what was at base the right spiritual stance. What more understandable than that God should reward those who are faithful to him? This sense of the link between prosperity and godliness was very common in early America.

I want to suggest that the value put on efficacy in modern life according to nature is a kind of secular transposition, in some regards a continuation of this religious sense. For modern naturalism continues to value its own variant of the disenchantment of the world; now to the glory of man and his freedom. In the context of this outlook, it is quite rational and understandable that the instrumental stance to nature, which is that of radical disenchantment, should also pay off in happiness and prosperity. Thus the earlier religious belief in prosperity as a sign of godliness shades easily into a later secular variant in America. The chief sign of goodness is success.

We can now understand some of the background to the lifting of moral

[7] *The New Organon*, I, cxxix.

limits on accumulation. The modern notion of following nature, of life according to nature, at least in what I want to call its first version, lifts the curse of the Calliclean way of life. Modern man accumulates through productive labour. And this labour is the result of discipline and control, the discipline of an instrumental stance towards the world. In producing, we are not only meeting our needs, but we are also realizing our status as autonomous, rational agents. We are affirming ourselves spiritually, and not just fulfilling our material needs – using this term 'spiritual' again to designate the goals and aspirations which we recognize not only as ours *de facto*, but as having an intrinsic worth in our lives.

From a Platonic perspective, a life of endless accumulation is one of vice, because it represents a kind of slavery, an obsessive craving for what is purely material, leaving no place for what is higher, what is truly important, what has intrinsic worth, that is worth not just dependent on its being in fact desired by us. An object of mere desire, say, a succulent fruit, has worth only because it happens to give us pleasure. This is in virtue of a purely contingent fact about our make-up. But the contemplation of beauty and truth has an intrinsic worth, independent of whether men have the discernment to see it, and desire it. To be concerned with the endless accumulation of things is to be totally occupied with the goods which are merely so *de facto*, at the expense of those which are so intrinsically. But this is to miss the point of a specifically human life. Man is the being who is sensitive to the good, in the sense of the intrinsically good, the goodness founded on Being, and not on mere appearance. If we call this the spiritual dimension, then the Calliclean man's life is a perversion, because he systematically sacrifices the spiritual dimension to the pursuit of mere *de facto* goods. To escape this must mean to put a limit on accumulation.

But in this modern perspective of the life according to nature, this no longer holds. The accumulation of goods through productive activity is an exercise of our spiritual capacity, that in man which has intrinsic worth; it is an affirmation of spirituality. The greater its extent, the more forceful the affirmation. Continued accumulation bespeaks consistent, disciplined maintenance of the instrumental stance; hence is not a deviation, or a form of decadence, but a realization of man's spiritual dimension. Far from being an obsession with things, or a sort of entrapment in them, it is an affirmation of our autonomy: that our purposes are not imposed on us by the supposed order of things, but we develop them ourselves through our discernment of nature. The instrumental stance towards nature is a spiritual declaration of independence from it.

Seen in this light, the ideal of life according to nature represents a revolution from the traditional moral outlook. But it is not quite the revolution it is commonly represented as being. Frequently those who defend a naturalist outlook speak of the modern moral revolution as an affirmation of hedonism, that its central value is pleasure, or happiness, or the fulfilment of desire, and that it rejects a Platonic morality as irrationally ascetic. And this line is taken up by the revolutionary hedonism which is one of the strands of the contemporary New Left.

But this is the same error of perspective as we saw above with utilitarianism. The metaphysic has no place for any notion of worth beyond *de facto* desire-fulfilment. But in this it is less than self-clairvoyant; because in fact it operates with a stronger notion. And indeed, I would argue that it is next to impossible for human beings quite to do without some conception of intrinsic worth in their moral reflections. The sense of the moral superiority of rational utilitarian policies, of policies of universal happiness, stems from the unspoken appreciation of the rational autonomy and altruism which they express. The mere fulfilment of desire could never be a value sufficient to ground our moral categories. It could never be the basis of moral admiration, for instance, or of indignation.

Hence the curse on the Calliclean way of life is lifted, endless accumulation is not seen as vice, because the autonomous rational accumulator is not a prisoner of the things he accumulates; he is not in thrall to his desires, as Calliclean man was painted by Plato. We begin to descry now the conditions in which a modern society could lose faith in itself. But before we go on to this, we should look at a second version of life according to nature which emerges later, in the eighteenth-century. For this in some respects provides the antidote, the ground of criticism of modern society.

In this second version, it is the voice of nature which sets our highest goals, those that have intrinsic worth. That is, the specifically human excellence does not lie in the autonomy and rationality with which men discern and fulfil desires, which desires themselves are for things of mere *de facto* worth; rather it lies in the tender and noble sentiments which he has, which flow from an undistorted or unsullied nature. It is not calculating reason which tells him that he ought not to harm his fellow man, or that he must be industrious and sober, but the voice of nature, a pure unsullied impulse which carries him towards benevolence, industry, sobriety, frugality, the enjoyment of simple pleasures, and the like.

The great protagonist of this second version is Rousseau, as in a sense the utilitarians were a good, if largely unself-clairvoyant, example of the

first version. For the utilitarians, the excellence of the good man does not lie in the quality of his desires; these are the same as those of the bad man; it lies in the rationality and control with which he identifies and carries out the desires.[8] But for Rousseau, the important difference lies precisely in the quality of the motivation. The good man is moved by the pure voice of conscience/nature, which truly comes from him; the bad man by heteronomous passions. The motivations of good and bad are not homogeneous, but qualitatively different.

So living according to nature, version I, means exercising rationality and control to follow the demands of nature, which are themselves of no more than *de facto* worth. In version II, it is following the voice of nature, a source of pure, higher desire within us which induces us to act well. Sentiment thus comes into its own; and the eighteenth-century cult of feeling was bound up with this new conception of nature which Rousseau did so much to articulate.

Now this second version can turn and challenge some of the most important values of the first. The first puts great value in an instrumental stance, a stance of disenchantment towards the world, with the consequent control. Disenchantment is the condition of a true grasp of nature. And because of the importance of an instrumental stance, reason is identified with instrumental reason.

But for version II, discerning the demands of nature involves identifying my true sentiments, setting aside the false (because unnatural, heteronomous) passions. It requires a kind of intuition, of attunement. If we want to speak of reason in this context, it cannot be instrumental reason, but a form of rationality which can grasp intrinsic value. It is not *Zweckrationalität*, but a kind of *Wertrationalität*, to use Weber's terms. Further, in a stance of disenchantment, we seek only *de facto* goods, things that are satisfying to our *de facto* desires. But what we are looking for in version II is our yearning for the intrinsic good.

So the second version can turn critical of the first. The stress on instrumental reason and a stance of disenchantment can be taxed as a blindness, an insensitivity to the crucial distinction between virtue and vice, an incapacity to discern what truly comes from nature. And from this perspective, the striving after control and efficacy, that is, the domination of

[8] In the more objectifying variants, it can lie in the associations he has been trained to make, the shape his self-love has been conditioned into; this is standard fare for the social engineering of the Enlightenment, e.g., Helvétius; but it is never possible as an understanding of *moral* predicament; just because it only portrays men as *objects* of social policy.

nature, can seem like a wilful refusal to listen, a kind of flight forward, an attempt to still with material success the demand for an insightful reflection on the intrinsic value of one's ends.

For if our ends are depraved, that is, not according to the voice of nature, the successful use of instrumental reason in encompassing them will not improve them; rather it will make us worse in committing our lives more fully in this deviant course.

In this way, the second, Rousseauian version of modern life according to nature re-introduces another form of the ancient moral critique of limitless striving, and endless accumulation. It is now seen again as a deviation, as a form of enslavement to what is secondary which blinds us to what is primary. Rousseau rounds on the utilitarian mainstream of the Enlightenment with a Platonic condemnation and Platonic-inspired vision. For him the good life essentially involves frugality, the limitation of needs; their continued extension is a fact of heteronomy, of a loss of centre; a drowning of the voice of nature.

But the condemnation of endless accumulation which comes from the modern doctrine of life according to nature, second version, is more thoroughgoing than the ancient one. Where the ancients see only the headlong rush of uncontrolled desire in the striving to accumulate, not recognizing the spiritual dimension which the first version implicitly claims for it, the modern critique recognizes and condemns just that form of spirituality. The ascesis of disenchantment-control is seen as a kind of loss of contact with nature, humanity, the self. It is not just vice but a kind of wilful blindness. Its strength turns out to be its greatest evil. The full development of this critique is not found in Rousseau, but will develop later.

But although it rehabilitates something like the Platonic critique, the second version is a very modern theory. The higher source, which the good man must be in touch with, is not a cosmic order, but nature within. Virtue is understood as identical with freedom, with the following of purposes which are truly mine. Rousseauian moral theory is centrally a theory of freedom. A theory of this kind emerges from the modern identity, could only emerge when it was becoming firmly established. More, we might claim that a theory of this kind had to emerge, that version II could not but follow version I; that once we reject the cosmic order as a source of value, and develop the modern notion of nature, we cannot avoid finding an alternative source in this nature; that is, images of nature as a healing force, as a source of goodness, cannot but have appeal, even if not all of us

give intellectual assent to them, even, indeed, if some strive against them.

So versions I and II have strong inner connections; and yet they animate very different judgements and feelings about modern society. Version I provides an important part of the justification of modern consumer society, as we can already see and shall spell out further in a moment; whereas the second version underpins much of what I have called the Platonic/Romantic critique. This is why, as I mentioned earlier, so many of us feel ambivalent about the dispute over growth, and the direction of our society. The battle is in a sense an intra-mural one for the modern identity.

This will perhaps become more evident if we note the developments of version II. For it has gone through more than one phase. In its beginning, with Rousseau, the voice of nature is to be recovered, but what it says is relatively simple, and in a way everyone knows what it is; it is the voice of conscience and goodness. But with the Romantics – properly earlier, with what one might call 'expressivism' – we have a shift. We come to the idea that each man (and also nation) has a nature within him (it) that has to be explored and revealed. This only comes to light in its articulation, and it is entirely original and peculiar to the man (or nation) concerned. Now not only do we need to turn away from other-dependence and false passion; but we have to be able to find ourselves, to articulate what we are. In a further development this turns into the notion that our fulfilment requires an inner exploration. From the second version emerge the ideas of self-exploration and fulfilment which play such an important part in our time; the need for self-expression which is also self-realization.

All this has become part of our civilization, and underlies the present malaise about the growth society; and in more than one way. The later, expressive-Romantic variants of the second version are deeply interwoven into our love/family lives. They have helped to transform the original eighteenth-century model of the affectionate marriage. As Stone points out, in this ideal, the companionate marriage was meant to be founded on affection, affinity, growing into love. But Romantic passion was decried as a very dangerous basis for it, as much as was lust. But with the developing models of self-realization, this is no longer so. Love relations are meant to meet the strongest passions of emotional fulfilment, which may no longer be called Romantic, but would unquestionably have been stigmatized as such by our eighteenth-century forbears, if they were not frankly condemned as lust. Indeed, our contemporary sense of the importance of this kind of fulfilment even threatens the stability of marriage, which we seem increasingly willing to sacrifice to it.

In this and other ways, the Romantic-expressive aspirations are woven into our understanding of the good life in modern society. And in a sense they combine with contemporary variants of version I, which value instrumental rationality and efficacy. Expressive aspirations help constitute the ends for which we are being highly *zweckrational* and efficacious, for instance, in consumer society, where rationalized production is seen as aimed to make fulfilment in family life available to the many. Both versions of living by nature are thus entrenched in our contemporary civilization.

And yet they are also at odds, as we have seen. This comes out most obtrusively today in their stances towards our natural surroundings. Version I tends to encourage a purely instrumental stance, even exploitative. Even in this tradition, there has been a sense that the whole panoply of the natural world, and particularly of living things, provided a vast object lesson in natural existence; so that looking at it, contemplating it, would enable us to break free of false perspectives and see nature as it really is. So even in version I, our natural environment cannot just be treated as a garbage heap.

But this sense is transposed and becomes much stronger with the expressive-Romantic variants of version II. For some of them, we only come to our natural selves when we are in tune with the whole of nature. Man has to be in a relation of communication with nature. The exploitative, *zweckrational* stance denies this, and makes it impossible. The resulting 'domination' of nature involves a distortion of human life, a repression of our own natures, and oppression and exploitation one of another.

Life according to nature underlies almost inescapably our conceptions of the good life just because it is so bound up with the modern identity. And this in two versions, with their families of variants. They are both operative in our civilization, are interwoven in our ideals, and yet are also at odds. Their conflict underlies some of our most profound divergences in social outlook. And yet on these issues, we are frequently torn, feel affinity for both sides. We sense here just how much these disputes are intra-mural to the modern identity.

IV

This conception of life according to nature, in its two versions, has grown up with modern society. It has been embedded in the structures, practices and institutions of this society; in our relations of production, in our

application of technology to production on a massive scale, in our sexual relations and family forms, in our political institutions and practices.

Certain of these institutions and practices have been of crucial importance in sustaining this modern identity. This has generally been lost to sight, because the modern identity itself (in phase one) has stressed individual autonomy to the point where the necessity of social mediation has been lost to view. The modern identity has too easily bred myths of social contract – and is still doing so today, in a transposed way.[9]

But we can single out four features of modern society which have played a vital part in developing and sustaining our sense of ourselves as free agents. The first is equality. Clearly, the modern identity is incompatible with the status of serf or slave. But the requirement is stronger than this. The identity of the free subject establishes a strong presumption in favour of equality.

Hierarchical societies are justified on the old conception of a cosmic logos. Different groups can be seen as expressing complementary principles. This has been the traditional justification of hierarchy everywhere; different classes and functions correspond to different links in the chain of being. Each was necessary for the other, and for the whole; and the place of each relative to the others is thus natural, right, according to the order of things.

Once this view is swept aside, the basic justification of hierarchy disappears. All self-determining subjects are alike in this crucial respect. There is no further valid ground for hierarchy as an unquestionable, unchanging order of precedence.

Equality is thus one dimension of the free subject's relation to society. Another very obtrusive one is that he must be the subject of rights. As a free subject, he is owed respect for his rights, he has certain freedoms guaranteed. He must be able to choose and act within limits free from arbitrary interference of others. The modern subject is an equal rights-bearer. His having this status is part of what sustains his identity.

Perhaps these two conditions express the basic minimum status of a modern subject in society; that without which his identity must either flounder, or his predicament is experienced as intolerable. But there have been two other important features of this status which are worth mentioning. One of the important faculties of the modern subject is his

[9] See J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Boston, 1971); R. Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Boston, 1974); although Rawls himself is by no means a prisoner of the atomist perspective.

ability to effect his purposes, what I called above 'efficacy'. Someone without efficacy, unable to alter the world around him to his ends, would be incapable of sustaining a modern identity, or else would be deeply humiliated in his identity. Now to some considerable degree, each can have a sense of efficacy in his own individual action: getting the means to live, providing for the family, acquiring goods, going about his business, and so on. The very fact that we command so much private space is most important for our sense of efficacy; in particular, the ability to move around on our own, which the car gives us. The car notoriously gives many people the sense of power, of efficacy, of being able to do things and get places, on their own. Admen recognize this, and also its affinities in us with a sense of sexual potency.

But important as private efficacy is, it is not possible to make it the whole: to give no thought at all to my efficacy as a member of society, to affect its direction, or to have a part in the global efficacy that society possesses relative to nature. So along with the sense of being equal rights-bearers, there are two other important features of our status in society which have played a role in sustaining the modern identity.

The first is our status as citizens, that collectively we determine the course of social events. The modern West has taken up this ancient tradition, that only the citizen is a full man, capable of acting and making a name for himself in men's memories; and has made this an integral part of our sense of efficacy. It is an important part of our dignity as free subjects that we govern ourselves.

The second dimension is that of production. As producers, in the broadest sense, we belong to a whole interconnected society of labour and technology, which has immense efficacy in transforming nature. Every day it produces even more astonishing wonders in this regard. In so far as we belong to this society, work in it, take part in it, contribute to it, we have a share in this efficacy; we can think of it as partly ours, as a confirmation of ourselves. This is an important part of our self-consciousness in advanced industrial society. And symmetrically, it is an important source of malaise, of a creeping sense of unavoidable inferiority among Third World elites.

The modern subject is therefore far from unmediated in fact. He may be, relative to the local community; but he cannot be, relative to the whole society. On the contrary, he is sustained on one hand by the culture, which elaborates and maintains the vocabulary of his self-understanding; and on the other by the society in which he has a status commensurate with free subjectivity: a status of which we have isolated four dimensions,

the equal bearer of rights, who is producer and citizen. All this underpins my identity as free individual, which could not long survive a state of nature.

The set of practices by which the society defines my status as an equal bearer of rights, an economic agent, and a citizen – practices such as the operation of the legal system, the political system of voting and elections, the practices of negotiation and collective bargaining – embeds a conception of the agent and his relation to society which reflects the modern identity and its related visions of the good. The growth of this identity can help explain why these practices have developed in the direction they have; why, for instance, voting and collective adversary negotiation take a bigger and bigger place in our societies. But this connection may also help explain why we experience growing malaise today.

It is perhaps not hard to see how our contemporary society satisfies the modern identity. The first version of the modern identity stressed three things: autonomy, fulfilment of our nature, and efficacy; the last being a confirmation of our control, our productive power, and hence our freedom from things. Modern consumer society satisfies these three demands, or appears to. It affords privacy, treats us as autonomous beings, who are efficacious as producers and citizens, seems aimed towards providing us a fulfilment which we determine, along with those with whom we have knit ties of intimacy. It also appears to satisfy some of the variants of natural fulfilment, second version, particularly the Romantic-expressive ones. For much of our private fulfilment, in our relationships, in our artistic and expressive life, is drawn from expressive models. In a sense, we are Romantics in our private existence, our love lives are drawn by a notion of Romantic mutual discovery, we look for fulfilments in our hobbies, in our recreation; while the economic, legal and political structures in which we coexist are largely justified instrumentally.

But then this compromise between versions I and II, which at times seems so stable, at others seems racked with tension. Now is one of those times. In a sense, we can understand some of the background to this too. We have seen how version II of our ideal of natural fulfilment can be turned into a powerful critique of the first version. So we immediately understand the strictures which are flung at our political and economic and legal structures: that they are merely instrumental, that they deny community, that they are exploitative towards man and nature, and so on.

We can see how closely interwoven both the affirmative and critical stances are to our contemporary society, how much they are from the same roots, and draw on the same sources. But perhaps we can also hope to gain some insight into the dialectic between the two, how the balance tips now one way, now another.

What the efficacious industrial, consumer society has going for it is presumably that it delivers the goods. But if we examine this society in the light of the modern identity, we can see that this achievement is not just a matter of meeting quantitative targets. Rather we see that in version I efficacy is valued as the fruit and sign of rational control. Increasing production originally became a value in our civilization, against all the temptations to sloth, and all the blandishments of traditional ethics, because in producing we came to see ourselves as not just meeting our needs, but also realizing our status as autonomous, rational agents. Continued accumulation bespoke a consistent, disciplined maintenance of the instrumental stance to things; it was a realization of man's spiritual dimension. Far from being an obsession with things, an entrapment in them, as it might be stigmatized on a Platonic conception, it is an affirmation of our autonomy; that our purposes are not imposed on us by the supposed order of things. The instrumental stance towards nature is meant to be a spiritual declaration of independence from it.

From this we can understand the potential vulnerability of this kind of society and way of life. The ways and forms of its accumulative life have to go on appearing as affirmations of freedom and efficacy. Should they be seen as degenerating into mere self-indulgence, then the society undergoes a crisis of confidence. It is a moral crisis, but which is inescapably also a political one; because what is impugned is the definition of the good actually embedded in our practices. Should we come to repudiate this, our allegiance to these practices is threatened, and therefore our society itself.

It follows that our society has always been vulnerable to a certain moral critique. It is in trouble if it stands self-convicted, convicted that is, in the eyes of its members of pure materialism, that is, aiming purely at material enrichment. This may not be evident, because of certain commonplaces of sociological comment, such as that we are allegedly more hedonistic in outlook than our forbears. There are some ways in which this is true, but it does not make the underlying sense that our dignity consists in our capacity to dominate, and not be dominated by things, any the less important for us. For this is rooted in the modern identity. If more people are willing to accept a 'permissive' society today, it is because they see such self-indulgence as combinable with the free self-direction whereby we determine our own purpose and fulfilment; and in this they lean partly on certain post-Romantic notions of emotional fulfilment. Those who find

this combination hard to accept are precisely those who are most worried and rendered most anxious by the permissive society. Even the revolutionaries, who call for a total rejection of the work disciplines of the 'Protestant ethic', can do so because of a conception of freedom, which is allegedly the fruit of such total abandonment. That this is not a realistic hope should not blind us to the kind of hope it is – one still very much in line with modern identity.

Indeed, one could argue that the more a society is founded on the modern ideal of life according to nature in its first version, the more it should be vulnerable to doubts about its moral standing; that is, the more these doubts are unsettling. It is not surprising to find that this kind of worry is a very old one in the USA. Fred Somkin has shown how the prosperity of the Republic in the early-nineteenth-century raised soul-searchings.[10] On one hand, it was just what one might expect, a proof of efficacy and hence the spiritual excellence of America. On the other hand, it seemed to threaten vice, self-indulgence, a forgetfulness of republican virtue and the demands of the spirit. As Somkin showed, it was essential for many Americans of the time to prove that the prosperity was indeed a fruit of the spirit. The alternative was too unsettling to contemplate.

My claim is that we have left this era behind, when we could be shaken by this kind of doubt. It is not a relic of an earlier 'puritan' era. In a transposed way, many of the features of the puritan era have been recreated in our contemporary variant of the modern identity. Only now the relevance of this has spread well beyond the United States, beyond the Anglo-Saxon world; just because so many societies have been made over so that their dominant practices, those not only of their economic and public life, but also of their family life, reflect the modern identity. With this in mind, let us look at the features of contemporary society which tend to undermine our confidence in it as moderns.

V

1

The first feature is work. For a great many people work is dull, monotonous, without meaning, 'soul-destroying', to use Schumacher's word.[11] And, connected with this, in work relations, most men are far from the equal autonomous subjects that they are at home, or that they feel to be as consumers. For the most part, they stand very much as subordinates in

[10] In *Unquiet Eagle* (Ithaca, 1967). [11] In *Small is Beautiful*.

command relations, and have very little say in how they will work, or in what conditions.

We enter here on to Marx's terrain. It is impossible to make a sensible critique of consumer society without invoking Marx. But there is one very important amendment which I want to make at the outset. I want to see the present formula of consumer society, with its mix of fulfilment and distortion, as a kind of historic compromise which we have, most of us, acquiesced in. Orthodox Marxists, however, are committed to seeing it as an alienating (provided they want to use this word) formula imposed on the working masses by the ruling class, through a mixture of force, mendacious persuasion, propaganda, control of information, divisive tactics, and so on.

This seems to me very wrong. The working class of early industrial society was certainly pitched into the proletarian role against its will. It had the terrible conditions of sweated labour and blighted townscape thrust on it. It was held in place by force where it tried to resist. But in the 150 years since then, our societies have become mass democracies; the conditions of work under capitalism have been profoundly modified; the remuneration of workers has become much greater; they have some substantial control over conditions through trade unions and political power. It is difficult to argue that what remains unmodified in capitalism remains so because of force and fraud, when so much else has been changed, often in the face of bitter resistance from industrialists.

Rather the compromise of affluent society must be seen to represent a tacit acquiescence – for the present anyway – in subordinate relations of labour, on the part of the mass of workers. The compromise consists in accepting alienated labour in return for consumer affluence. This compromise can seem to make sense in the lives of many people, not only because the one can be represented as the necessary condition of the other: by not demanding citizenship in the work-place, the worker allows the provident engine of industry to run untrammelled and generate ever-growing prosperity. But also it can appeal, because alienation is the obverse of non-involvement, the condition then of complete mobility. To become a citizen at work would require some commitment to the enterprise, the devotion of some of my life-energies to this community and its plans and decisions; else the participation becomes a mere sham, or the manipulated instrument of active minorities. But this devotion is a price that the aspiring consumer-citizen may be unwilling to pay, a limitation on the self-contained life he has no desire to take on.

The development of the affluent society, in which the majority can

preside over a self-contained life in adequate private space, has thus gone along with a tacit reluctance to challenge the regime of alienated, subordinate labour. This is the first distortion; the fact that it is connived in by the majority, rather than brutally imposed on them, does not make it any more healthy.

2

The sense of the common interest that underlies this compromise is: that the machine must run on. But the machine that we find ourselves with in our societies is a capitalist one, that is, it consists mainly of enterprises whose institutional goals are to grow through the accumulation and re-investment of profit. They have become immensely effective in some ways in the application of technology to this end. But they cannot easily tolerate interference which attempts to set priorities for the production process. A modern capitalist economy can take, indeed, requires much intervention to keep it going: fiscal, monetary controls, subsidies of all sorts. But basic to its operation are the principles that firms must be masters of their own investment, and that they must be able to invest where they can accumulate the greatest profits, or foster the greatest overall growth, or most effectively maintain market share, or some such objective. The condition of the machine running effectively is that no one tries to control too closely its priorities.

And so we get the culture that moral critics object to: the fixation on brute quantitative growth, unalloyed by judgements of priority. The justification of this has to be an image of the good life, in which the acquisition of more and more consumer goods – what the system is good at producing – is seen as a central purpose of life.

Once again, the majority of us acquiesced in this historic compromise for similar mixed reasons as with alienated labour above: on one side, the non-imposition of priorities seemed to be the condition of the machine's running on, on the other, the resultant mode of life satisfied us as modern subjects in certain ways. First, the disinvolvement, our collective silence on priorities seemed the condition of our freedom severally to 'hang loose', each to go our own way, build his own private space, live his self-contained life.

Secondly, the definition of the good life as continuing escalation in living standards has an inescapable appeal to unregenerate men, which we all are. This Plato well knew. Appetite tends to run on to infinity, unless controlled by reason. The consumer society appeals to the lowest in us. But this, just put like that, is only a half-truth. It is also the case that the

consumer society comes to us dressed up in a form that meshes with some of the aspirations of the modern subject.

Thus we are invited as consumers to acquire and furnish a private space, which is the condition of an autonomous, self-contained, unmediated existence. We need this space so that we and our family can grow, so that we can be close to nature (a garden, a house in the country). Much advertising plays on this aspiration to private space: the advertisements always show happy families filling those interiors, driving away in those cars, surrounding those barbecues, and so on. Of course, what is not justified is the continued increase; why should the mobile private space we travel in become ever more rapid and high-powered? Why must labour-saving mechanization continue without stop, even up to electric tooth-brushes and similar absurdities? This could never be justified intellectually, but somehow the implication is that more and more powerful accoutrements mean more of the fulfilment that they are meant to make possible. The commodities become 'fetishized' in a non-Marxist sense, endowed magically with the properties of the life they subserve: as though a faster car might actually make my family life more intense and harmonious.

There is a third reason why this compromise appeals to us; and which also aids in fetishization of commodities. The runaway machine, doing prodigies of technological mastery of nature, satisfies our sense of collective efficacy. The member of this society can feel that participative efficacy as producer that I spoke of above. At the same time, personal efficacy is a theme often played on to fetishize commodities. That is what is appealing about high-powered cars, and powerful engines generally. And this in turn taps feelings of machismo and sexual potency. Admen are aware of this.

And so we acquiesce in the consumer goods standard of welfare; and we accept the suspension of our sense of priorities, which allows us to see as normal some truly absurd inversions, such as supersonic flight; until we break the thrall, and look afresh and astonished at what we are doing.

VI

These features of industrial society, the meaninglessness and subordination of work, the mindless lack of control of priorities, above all the 'fetishization' of commodities, all represent a challenge to our image of ourselves as realized moderns, determining our purposes out of ourselves, dominating and not being dominated by things. To the extent that we let these negative features impinge on our self-understanding, we cannot but

feel a fading confidence, an unease, a sense that the continued sense of efficacy by which we sustain our self-image within the modern identity is a sham. If we see ourselves as the playthings of mindless impersonal forces, or worse, the victims of a fascination with mere things, and this in the very practices which are supposed to sustain our identity and our conception of the good, then we cannot but lose confidence in these practices. We are threatened with a kind of anomie, in which we cease to believe in the norms governing our social life, but have no alternative but to live by them nonetheless. There is a crisis of allegiance to our society.

I believe this is part of what underlies our present malaise. And to understand why it arises now, we have to see why in recent years these features have begun to press themselves on us. Our consumer society is in several ways the victim of its own success; and these ways compound to put it in crisis.

1

First, the very prosperity of this society cannot but produce doubts and hesitations around its fetishization of commodities. When the society was still struggling to make decent housing and basic consumer durables widely available, the connection of all this effort and production with the goal of securing private space for all was clear enough. But now that most have this space, the refinements, the introduction of higher power, more speed, new models, frills, and so on, begin to look more and more disproportionate. It is harder to believe in all this as a serious social purpose.

Of course there is still a substantial minority which has not yet entered the affluent society. Production for them would make sense. But the continuation of the consumer boom does not seem to be very effective in helping these 'pockets of poverty'. The wealth does not 'trickle down' very adequately. This is partly because the continued boom goes with an upping of the ante, a whole range of new products which one has to get to be well-equipped at home, in the car, and so on. Much of each year's growth is pre-empted by the already affluent who expect a rise in their standard of living. It is very hard to prise some off to redistribute to the poor. This is even more so, of course, when growth slows down or stops, as we have seen in recent years. Then the resistances to redistribution get greater. We can think of the ugly mood of the California electorate, enacting Proposition 13, setting a limit to property taxes, something which will certainly involve cutting drastically programmes for poor and ghetto areas.

At the same time, the replacement of lower by higher technology can make things actually worse for poorer people. It ups the cost of being poor, so to speak. If all of society moves over from the bicycle to the automobile, so that cities are laid out to service it, and the availability of housing to jobs presupposes that people can travel for miles with a car; then you have to get a car to get around, and you may have to get around to hold a job, at least a good job. So you have to have a car. On a bicycle, you will get gassed, perhaps killed, and anyway cannot go the distances. So it ends up costing much more to be poor in New York, than to be middle class, say, in Madras. Growth can thus make the lot of poor people worse.

Now all this – the increasingly evident fetishistic character of the consumer standard, plus the fact that its steady rising does not seem able to alleviate suffering where it counts, or improve what is crying out for improvement – contributes to a loss of faith in the consumer standard, in the value of indefinite increase in consumer goods and services, in indiscriminate growth. This may have less effect on older people, but it visibly emerges in scepticism, questioning, rejection by younger people.

2

Among the things which may be cast into doubt in this crisis is the value of family life itself. This is particularly critical, because the version of the modern identity predominant in our society is one which aims towards a mobile subject, who loosens the ties of larger communities, and finds himself on his own in the nuclear family. But this gives a tremendously heightened significance to the nuclear family, which is now the main locus of strong, lasting, defining relations; and it has given family life and the emotions of family love a uniquely important place in the modern conception of natural fulfilment. The eighteenth century already sees this positive valuation of family life, family ties, and family feelings.

For this to be challenged is thus critical for the identity which has been dominant in our society. But it is not only under threat because it is associated with (to some) discredited consumer way of life. It is also threatened by the very scope of the development of the modern identity. In effect, if the business of life is finding my authentic fulfilment as an individual, and my associations should be relativized to this end, there seems no reason why this relativization should in principle stop at the boundary of the family. If my development, or even my discovery of myself, should be incompatible with a long-standing association, then this will come to be felt as a prison, rather than a locus of identity. So marriage is under greater strain. This is all greater in that the same aspiration to self-development and self-fulfilment leads women now to challenge the

whole distribution of roles and emotional give-and-take of the traditional family.

3

The degree of concentration and mobility are beginning to have social consequences which produce tension for our society. For instance, the concentration of people in large cities begins to have negative consequences beyond a certain threshold. Unless they are well-designed, with multiple centres, it tends to make life and getting about more time-consuming and stressful, and relations more full of tension.

In addition, large cities cost more per head to run. As Hugh Stretton puts it, 'They generate more travel, congestion and local pollution per head. They force wasteful rates of demolition and rebuilding on their inner parts. Intense competition for central and accessible locations makes it harder to solve problems of density, shares of space and – above all – land prices.'[12] So concentration begins to raise the overhead costs of social existence.

Concentration/mobility does this in other ways too. The bleeding of local communities for the megalopolis forces a write-off of the excess unused stock of housing and public capital in the declining communities. The decline of the extended family means that society must pick up the pieces for the old, the abandoned, the chronically sick, and so on. In all these ways, the concentrated/mobile life virtually forces an expansion of the public sector. The prevailing doctrines about the efficiency of concentration and giant organizations ensure that the state will compound the error by over-bureaucratizing the public sector.

But the enlarged public sector, both as cost and as bureaucracy, creates great malaise. As a cost, it forces higher taxes. But these are resisted by citizens who have come more and more to see themselves as independent individuals. The link between their high mobility, that is, their 'hanging loose' from all partial communities, and the higher overheads of society is generally quite invisible to them. Ironically, it is just this pattern of life of hanging loose that makes them less capable of seeing it, and makes them look on the public sector as a barely necessary evil. So as they increase the need of the public sector, they decrease their own readiness to assume the burden. This thoroughly irrational state of affairs leads to all kinds of tensions and eruptions, of which the recent California tax revolt is one example.

[12] *Capitalism, Socialism and the Environment* (Cambridge, 1976), p. 224.

What further justifies the revolt is the over-bureaucratization of the public sector, which not only makes it unnecessarily costly, but also makes it very unresponsive to the public. This helps to make the process even less transparent, whereby we meet our needs through public mechanisms of our own providing. And this lack of transparency increases the alienation.

What is even worse is that the movement towards concentration and the break-up of partial communities is not entirely voluntary. Once the process goes a certain way, it acquires an élan which is sometimes hard to resist. One may want to stay in a smaller farming community; but as the services move out and concentrate in larger centres in response to earlier movements as well as general concentration, one may find it impossible to function. So more and more people follow the trend, and more services, move, schools, suppliers, outlets, etc.; and more people move; and so on.

4

Thus three 'successes', or hypertrophies, of the consumer society are increasing malaise: the very success of the consumer growth tends to discredit the consumer standard, the development of the identity of self-fulfilment tends to fragment the family which was previously its privileged locus, and the increase of concentration alienates us from government. But besides a loss of faith in the consumer standard, tension in the family and the state, the danger of identity crisis, these strains also undermine that sense of our status within the larger society which is supportive of our identity. Unresponsive bureaucracies make us less sanguine, or frankly cynical, about citizenship; and sometimes even fearing for our rights. The discredit on the consumer standard makes us feel less positive about the efficacy of the whole society in which we have a part as labourers.

But the hypertrophy of this sense of collective efficacy is itself a fourth cause of malaise. As our awareness of belonging to an organized, technological, productive society grew, so did the confidence that we could solve any problem given the will and the concentration of resources. This sense of bullish confidence probably reached its high point in the post-war period in the Kennedy era in the USA, when intelligence, good will and organizing science were set to tackle the age-old problems of poverty, inequality and facial alienation, through the New Frontier. The sense of new creation was heightened by the symbolism of an attractive young man at the head of the enterprise. But since then, things have gone sour. We are more and more made aware that some problems, including

the most grievous social ones, like intractable poverty, and racial division, resist even immense resources. They are more than problems, they are human dilemmas. The sense of our efficacy has taken a serious blow.

In sum, by this combined effect, we have been led partly to lose confidence in our definitions of the good life, partly to feel alienated from and even cynical about our governmental institutions, partly to feel uncertain and tense about our social relation and even about our family life, partly to feel unsupported by the larger society in our identity as modern subjects.

5

All this is likely to make for strains, tensions, mutual aggressivity. But as it happens, a bout of social conflict was probably coming our way after the halcyon decades of steady consumer growth of the post-war period. This was partly because of the growth of the public sector and its consequent burden on the productive sector and on tax-payers, which I mentioned above. But it is also because we live in a society which has become more equal and 'classless' in style and spirit, in which workers and the less well-off have acquired greater bargaining muscle through trade unions, in which the general standard of education has risen, and in which there is a prevailing belief that government can do anything, so that age-old poverty, or underdevelopment, or inequality, formerly seen as in the order of things, is now removable. Such a society will sooner or later make more and more insistent demands on government and the economy, which by their very nature and number will be incompatible.

To face this, a society needs an even higher degree of cohesion, self-confidence, and mechanisms of effective self-management. But instead, we affronted this period with lowered confidence, inner tensions, and in greater alienation from our institutions than before. The result has been a scramble for income and advantage in which powerful forces competed and maintained their position, but at the expense of the unorganized, through inflation. We are being forced to return to more orderly consensus through the disastrous experience of inflation. But it is a slow and reluctant business, and leaves many burning resentments and sense of grievance without vent.

This is because the consensus is forcing us to decide something that has previously been let happen, viz., the distribution of income. We are being forced to take a greater hand in the collective direction of our economy. But any agreement on this, hard enough at any time, is only possible

within some common sense of purpose. We would have found it much easier to agree on a wages policy in the 1950s. But that is exactly why, of course, we did not need one then. Because of our uncertain purpose, and our faltering confidence in the over-riding value of the society we are evolving through our economic efforts, the disciplines imposed by any incomes policy will often be felt as an imposition, a rip-off. And the angry reaction of one group, tearing through the limits, will stimulate others to do the same. High wage-claims in one sector prompt them in others. Tax-payers' revolts increase the bitterness of the poor. Inflation is the visible sign of our disarray, and itself an object of anxiety. It compounds our self-doubt.

So to sum up the argument: the modern identity, and the accompanying moral visions, give the background both to the affirmative and critical stances to our society. They show them to be closely related. But they also help us understand the balance between the two.

For in fact the affirmative view does not just praise endless accumulation; this is understood as an affirmation of efficacy, productive power, which in turn is a sign of autonomy, and of our domination over things. Thus the affirmative view is vulnerable to whatever presses on us an understanding of our plight in which we are not in fact autonomous, are not dominating, but enslaved to things. The word 'fetish' is redolent of this. It connects with the earlier rejection of idolatory, and the modern's sense of superiority over the primitive, of having won free from an obsession in things, an immersion in them, a shaping of his life on their model.

In fact we live in a society whose practices embody a certain notion of identity, and the human good. This must be ours, or we cannot give this society our allegiance; we are alienated from it. At the time, we rely to a great extent on these practices to maintain this sense of identity. If these practices which supposedly embody the modern identity can be shown to lead in fact to some such failure to achieve it, as we mentioned in the last paragraph, then our allegiance to them is shaken; and perhaps our faith in the conception of the modern identity is shaken as well. We turn to other models.

In the balance between affirmative and negative stances to our society, the affirmative relies largely on the first version of life according to nature, as this has become embedded in the political and economic, largely market-atomistic practices of our society. If we become convinced that we are dominated by mindless forces, or enslaved to commodities which we make into fetishes, then we will withdraw allegiance from these practices, and obviously from the first version, or at least this way of expressing the first version institutionally.

VII

If something like the story in the preceding pages is true, then we can understand why modern capitalist society will be prey to recurrent 'legitimation crises'. It has a fateful tendency to sap the bases of its own legitimacy. The very institutions and practices which express and entrench the modern identity in its successive phases – the capitalist industrial economy in a liberal polity – are also undermining participants' faith in this identity, or in these institutions as fit carriers of this identity, or both. This society is in a sense in 'contradiction', the full extent of which is not evident if one looks simply at the economic irrationalities, or the galloping externalization of costs, which provoke a fiscal crisis – though these may be grievous enough dangers. The most lethal tension only comes into view when we try to understand the society in the light of the sense of the human good which it presupposes and helps to inculcate – what I have been calling the modern identity.

But then the further question arises: is this a contradiction just of *capitalism*? The uncontrolled drive to growth, concentration, mobility; the exaltation of instrumental reason over history and community; these have been features of most hitherto attempted models of socialism. Political theory has yet to come seriously to grips with this crisis.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

I

1

A vigorous debate is raging today about the nature of distributive justice. But the controversy concerns not only the criteria or standards of justice, what we would have to do or be to be just; it also touches the issue of what kind of good distributive justice is. Indeed, I would argue that as the debate has progressed, it has become clearer that the solution to the first kind of question presupposes some clarification on the second. In any case, recent extremely interesting works by Michael Walzer and Michael Sandel raise fundamental questions in the second range.

I want to take up both issues in this paper. In the first part, I raise questions about the nature of distributive justice. In the second, I want to look at the actual debates about criteria which now divide our societies.

First, what kind of good, or mode of right, is distributive justice? Rawls helps us by giving us a formulation[1] of the circumstances of justice: we have separate human beings who are nevertheless collaborating together in conditions of moderate scarcity. This distinguishes it from other kinds and contexts of good. For instance there is a mode of justice which holds between quite independent human beings, not bound together by any society or collaborative arrangement. If two nomadic tribes meet in the desert, very old and long-standing intuitions about justice tell us that it is wrong (unjust) for one to steal the flocks of the other. The principle here is very simple: we have a right to what we have. But this is not a principle of *distributive* justice, which presupposes that men are in a society together, or in some kind of collaborative arrangement.

Similarly we have to distinguish distributive justice from other kinds of good or right action. If in the above case one of the tribes were starving,

[1] In *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971); following Hume. I am aware of the difficulties which this formulation makes for Rawls, which Sandel has so well explored in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge, 1983), chap. 1.