Chapter Two
From '50' to '00'—
Changes of Mind; Alterations of the Heart?

There is just something missing in everything, though you can't put your finger on it, as if there had been a change in the blood or in the air; a mysterious disease has eaten away the previous period's seeds of genius, but everything sparkles with novelty, and finally one has no way of knowing whether the world has really grown worse, or oneself merely older. At this point a new era has definitely begun.

Robert Musil

I am struck by the vast distance that lies between my own adult world and that of my parents when they were young adults. The distance is more than simply the measure of the temporal elapse of fifty years: it is a profound moral and social distance. The lapse of those years, it often seems, is marked by a spiritual disintegration, the effects of which are sadly apparent in an impoverishment of human relations: higher crime rates, exploding illegitimacy, the normalization and commercialization of vices such as gambling and soft-core pornography, the appalling vulgarity and coarseness of popular culture, the destabilization and disintegration of the family, and the destruction of manners and civility.

My own children are coming of age in a much different place than I did, where the most distinctive sorts of changes and transformations have occurred and are still happening. Roles are reversed and re-reversed. Judgments are
overturned. Norms are dissolved. Institutions have been plunged into flux and are on the defensive. Such a frenzied pace of change is a recent phenomenon—and for that reason daunting and melancholy. For vast periods of history, life unfolded generation after generation much as it always had. Customs, traditions and beliefs were passed along with little reflection and largely intact. Sons and daughters became what their fathers and mothers had been. They undertook the same tasks and assumed the obligations that had bound their parents. They believed what their parents had believed about themselves and the world. Of a much earlier people, the Romans of the ancient Republic, historian Christian Meier, tells us:

[Their] guiding principles were always the same. No one was relativized in temporal terms: the old could not be regarded as superannuated, nor the young as modern. The young were at most frivolous, the old at least authoritative and powerful. There was no question of moving from a past that had been different into a future that would be different again.

Two thousand years later, we could not be more different from these ancient, tradition-bound Republicans. Almost everything and everyone is now “relativized” in temporal, as well as many other regards. For our young, we could only wish that frivolity was the worst that we could say of them; and of our elderly—what “authority” do they possess?

We are immersed in rapid change, social discontinuity and dislocation. We can expect even more of this in this new millennium. It will be our legacy. The forces of momentous change swirl about us. Futurology and science fiction seem hardly distinguishable. Customs, traditions and beliefs, insofar as they become established at all, are now quickly discarded—often casually, reflexively, with little understanding of what is being lost, what that loss means to us, and what the promises of the new ways really mean. Each emerging generation, in what seems to be a growing, collective narcissism, attempts to invent a new ethos and endows itself with a unique identity (the “me generation”, “generation X”) replete with a unique form of angst to indulge and a compelling set of grievances to nurture and refine.

It is difficult to imagine with anything but the most vague notions and
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uneasy feelings what the future holds for my young daughters as they make their way and live out their lives in the third millennium A.D. What will they believe about life's mysteries? Will there be any left to ponder? In what kind of work will they engage? Will they marry? Will they stay married? What will their political and social institutions be like? What will they expect from them and what will the institutions demand from them?

The grandparents and parents of those in my own generation, despite the cataclysms of a world-wide depression and two devastating global wars did not, I believe, suffer this kind of uncertainty. Traditional marriage and families, jobs and professions, and the traditional religious faiths were seemingly solid fixtures of a social and moral landscape that provided a somewhat stable foundation for hopes and expectations. But now for us, the graying baby-boomers, the very act of directing our electronically over-stimulated imaginations toward the future and envisioning a world of near complete uncertainty for our children in almost every avenue of social and personal life makes us realize how profound and irrevocable the changes in the last fifty years have been and how deeply in flux our society is and will likely continue to be.

What a challenge it is to capture and describe the enormous dimension of those changes I have witnessed even in my relatively short life time, particularly as I recall my conversations from years ago with my father and grandfather about the experience of their early years and their reflections on how different life was in the America they experienced as young men. Many aspects of our Western culture have been altered—some beyond recognition over just the last century. In part, these changes come from the tremendous advances in technology as well as from the transformations in our social and legal institutions: our families, schools, universities and churches are profoundly different than they were fifty years ago. Agriculture, medicine, education, and law have been drastically altered. The kinds of work we do, the ways in which and the extent to which we entertain ourselves have changed remarkably. Our institutions themselves have, even recently, been reconfigured. Our social etiquette and our manners and even our religious
practices have taken forms that seem to have little resemblance to those to which our grandparents were deeply attached. In just fifty years we have witnessed the most profound transformation in our social containment of sexuality—from an implicit, inhibited activity focusing on procreation to an explicit engagement in recreation.

The discovery of atomic energy and its application to the weapons of war in conjunction with the development of computer technology in the middle and late twentieth century also have helped to transform the nature of one of mankind’s oldest and most serious enterprises, armed conflict. But perhaps more important is the impact of the recently advanced technology for the graphical presentation of it, that is, the televising of it. By making the violent, gory realities of war directly and immediately observable in the homes of the mothers, fathers, and grandparents whose children and grandchildren may become its casualties, the moral burden of justifying and waging it has become a much more formidable political challenge than ever before. For modern states, the successful waging of war now includes the daunting task of managing its visual and visceral impact captured by television. Public relations failures in this arena may be more decisive than military victories. The Tet Offensive in Vietnam, militarily a failure for the North Vietnamese but politically a success, and Lyndon Johnson’s abandonment of the Presidency over thirty years ago made this quite clear.

We carry on our busy lives with a casual disposition toward change and innovation that now makes incessant movement seem natural and compelling. Movement and restlessness characterize much of our social existence. The quest for self-transformation infuses almost all aspects of our social existence: the quest is stimulated in large part by a mass-cultural immersion in a world of limitless opportunities for consumption, many of them opportunities for amusement. The diet and exercise industries, very young but now huge and enormously profitable, thrive through the appeal to Americans to change themselves physically, changes that are also often accompanied by adjustments in attitude, outlook, employment, and personal life style. We are constantly encouraged to embark on the
transformation of our lives. We re-engineer, retool, reorganize, and retrain.

This impulse for movement is evident in the accelerated career tracks that take us all over the country, the long distances over which many people commute to their jobs, and the rapidly shifting preoccupations of popular culture with its endless, dizzying succession of celebrities, most of whom exist for us only briefly as professionally marketed electronic images. Experts, who spare no efforts in their attempts to anticipate what will please and stimulate us, mediate and purvey the wares of popular culture.

Words that help convey sharp impressions of dramatic, spectacular change like “revolutionary,” “groundbreaking,” “innovative,” “unprecedented” and “unparalleled” have become labels of high praise and affirmation in a society where the ability to overturn a quickly stale status quo, to offer something new and different, are the highest marks of achievement. Computing technology drives much of our work and leisure and changes at a pace that constantly puts us up against the barriers of obsolescence in our work.

“There are no revolutions,” the astute French observer of American society, Alexis de Tocqueville, had written over one hundred and sixty years ago, “that do not shake existing belief, enervate authority, and throw doubts over commonly received ideas.” Our time would perplex and perhaps alarm a man even as thoughtful and perceptive as Tocqueville. The twentieth century has been, above all, a century of revolution, and in the final years of our second millennium we have witnessed a myriad of revolutions—political, social, technological, educational, sexual, and artistic. These revolutions ushered life-altering change into the daily arenas of our social existence. “Existing belief” is shaken to the core by these revolutions, if, indeed, any recognizable, solid, unchangeable core can actually be found anymore. As noted above, to be “revolutionary”, to bring about dramatic, observable changes in some institution or conventional practice, is the path to acclamation and success. Revolution is what we now deliberately seek to be a part of, to initiate, and what we praise: but with it, doubt invades and authority does indeed crumble. “Commonly received ideas” become more
illusive, more difficult to find and grasp hold of, and even harder to sustain. The enervation of authority of all kinds—parental, political, religious, moral—and the ubiquity of gnawing doubt are two of the destabilizing effects of revolution on society. Modern life has, unquestionably, been pervaded by them. Late twentieth century America, as a theater for revolution, finds itself pervaded by the dismal dyad of effects that Tocqueville observed follow in the wake of revolution—enervated authority, and belief destabilized by self-doubt, anarchy wed to skepticism.

A compulsive mobility has deeply imprinted itself on our personal and professional lives. The ease and facility with which we detach ourselves from friends, spouses, family members and communities is remarkable, and all of our affective associations are weaker and thinner than they were even fifty years ago. Social atomism grows. The state of human disconnectedness becomes normal.

We used to develop and sustain our personal and intimate connections in concrete, enduring associations—friends, husbands and wives. These associations had recognizable configurations. They carried readily accepted obligations and were underwritten with the norms of constancy and fidelity. They now deteriorate and give way to the pervasive and euphemistic “relationship,” a deliberately vague and abstract, nearly meaningless term that refers to human attachments with shifting expectations, impermanence and undefined or non-existent commitment. Being “in a relationship,” as it is commonly characterized now, as opposed to being someone’s friend or lover or husband or wife, captures aptly the passive, amorphous, and ephemeral character of nearly everything it has come to represent.

The traditional associations are more unstable and vulnerable than they used to be. They are immersed in flux because the thought and value structures underneath them have become like blowing, shifting sand, changing constantly and carelessly with an impersonal, unpredictable force. Those “fixtures” of belief—our articles of faith, attachment to moral principles, confidence in ideals—have given way to a serial immersion in philosophies, religions,
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ideologies, or the zealous pursuit of stimulation in the form of private diversion or amusement. “We are left, as the German social theorist Arnold Gehlen observed, “with a variety of practical, theoretical, moral, and existential viewpoints which can no longer provide a basis for mutual understanding.” As it is with our jobs, our communities, our spouses and our friends, we exchange our “deep” beliefs for more stimulating, exciting varieties when the current versions grow stale or fail to amuse or deliver the advancements we expect.

As we reconfigure our traditional institutions—dismantle them in some cases—and, as the exploration of self becomes the dominant focus of our moral efforts, the connections that give sustenance and meaning rupture and break away. We find ourselves alone. Loneliness—deep, pervasive, unshakeable—quietly, surreptitiously engulfs us as those things that we once imagined to endure dissolve under the corrosive acid of doubt, and as more of our endeavors are turned into the ephemera of amusement. This loneliness is one of the indelible marks of the desolation of our time.

The incessant movement means that more of us are from no place in particular with no special identifying features. The leaders of our educational institutions today proclaim their sincere intentions to educate and socialize the young for what must be an inevitable participation in a “global society.” Globalization, for all of its advocates’ good intentions, seems to press us ever forward toward a social homogenization which will eventually extinguish many significant cultural differences. “There is something protective about place,” wrote Southerner Richard Weaver, “it means isolation, privacy, and finally identity.” Insofar as we are shaped by and take a unique identity from the places and surroundings where we are born and grow up and die, we become in our growing mobility and in our irresistible participation in the voluble mass culture, increasingly without uniqueness, interchangeable talking heads, who think, look and even emote the same. We have forsaken Weaver’s protective, nurturing isolation of place, devalued our precious privacy and severed the connections to those places and things that have given us an identity. Our identity, something
other than simply a sociologically measured aggregate of current dominant preoccupations and impulses we absorb from the vapors of the mass amusement-culture, slips away.

The explosion of litigation over the last several decades suggests that our capacities for sorting out and coping with the difficulties, complexities and uncertainties of almost every kind of human relationship, even the most informal and intimate, have atrophied. Into the center of a great social void has quietly marched a permanently occupying army of lawyers and judges. Every conceivable grievance and cause of resentment falls under some purview of litigation and is a potential piece of legal grist to be slowly and expensively ground out by our legal mills. Now for the courts to thrash out within the dense and thorny thickets of legal arcana are the vagaries of personal injury, harassment, discrimination in an endless number of permutations, each with its own unfathomable configuration of penalties, settlements and payoffs. Judges and lawyers have become the ultimate arbitrators on how we are supposed to treat each other, a fact that is evidenced by their enormous proliferation and the general and widespread resentment and distrust of the legal profession that seem to have expanded in proportions equivalent to its phenomenal growth.

It has been observed that for civilization to endure there must be obedience to the unenforceable. This, I believe, is true and an important fact to contemplate. For a good society to persist and maintain itself people must be inclined, not coerced, to do what is right and proper and decent. Decency must be a common, unspoken part of their daily routines and characteristic of their dispositions. We have unfortunately moved toward the full legalization of moral conflict, the result of which is the de-moralization of our culture. As a consequence the rush to the courts is swift and predictable. Every "should" or "ought" must now be enforceable by some law, regulation, or judicial decree. This signals a terrible thing, a loss of confidence in public morality, conscience and common decency. Every moral crisis now likely will explode into a long, rancorous and indecisive battle of litigation.
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Our limitless engagement in litigation suggests the existence of a pervasive state of mutual alienation. The expansion of lawsuits over the last several decades has helped to concentrate substantial quantities of power in the most formally coercive organ of our society, the judiciary—judges make their rulings and render their decrees. The courts enforce them. We obey. The more we call upon the robed ministers of the State to adjudicate our differences and enforce their judgments, the more State power grows and intrudes itself deeply and pervasively into our private lives. That power becomes nearly irresistible and takes on, increasingly, an aura of naturalness and inevitability. Moral dilemmas are resolved by legal rulings and decrees. Such an expansion of indecipherable laws, statutes, rulings and regulations—measured literally in the pounds of paper taken to print them, produced in numbers that stagger the imagination and defy comprehension or mastery by any single individual—inevitably leads to disaffection, cynicism and, worst of all, a rampant corruption of political life. One recalls Tacitus's observation of the fading ethos of the Roman Republic, "corruptissima re publica plurimae leges" ('when the republic is at its most corrupt the laws are most numerous').

State power, unlike the power that resides informally in institutions and groups like families, churches, services organizations and the like, has a cold, pernicious anonymity about it. As it grows and settles itself insidiously into every social crevice, it helps mightily to entrench our mutual estrangement and makes us increasingly alone. We tum unhappily into dependent, petitioning creatures vulnerable to the caprices of faceless and bloodless bureaucracies, driven by legalistic and social scientific formulas.

Television in the course of two or three generations has achieved the indisputable status of being the centerpiece of our mass culture—its driving, sustaining force. Television is an invasive, ubiquitous medium of amusement and information that swallows up huge quantities of that most basic and precious substance of our existence—time. From its entry into our homes in the 1950s in black and white, television has relentlessly, inexorably expanded its presence from, initially, the living room into the kitchen, the bedroom, the classroom, and
into many public spaces, now, of course, in color. In airports, train stations, supermarket checkout lanes, lobbies and waiting rooms of every kind, television screens occupy our attention and envelope us in a docility that diverts us from the more active, individual engagements of our minds and bodies.

The extensive television watching of American children has the unintended effect for many of contributing to obesity early in life. The richest country in the world probably has the fattest children.\textsuperscript{7} The ingestion of junk food naturally complements television watching. Television in fact is a major propaganda vehicle for the promotion of high fat, high calorie, low-nutrition food, and the phenomenal growth in the percentages of obese American children in just the last two decades points to television watching as a major culprit.

Television is regarded as a basic utility much like heat and electricity: legislators speak of regulating cable television rates. Its physical expansion is also remarkable, another piece of limitless accommodation to the relentless pressure for its greater presence and intrusion. One can now place a 54 inch screen in one’s home, completely dominating a normal size room, making the presences on the screen ubiquitous, a palace of electronic amusement. Those feckless, characterless characters from \textit{Love Boat}, \textit{Charlie’s Angels}, and \textit{Gilligan’s Island} live, like some inferior gods or spirits, forever, and now mutate only by becoming bigger and more intrusive than ever before. The development of high density television will increase its attraction and make it an even more compelling and irresistible medium. The hours spent passively before the flickering, electronic tube represent a draining away of large portions of the lives of millions of people, hours that we once devoted to other interests and pursuits and to each other.

From television, a medium utterly devoid of subtlety and nuance, one that thrives on immediacy, forgetfulness and discontinuity, many people gather most or all of the “information” with which they form their opinions of and make their judgments about the world outside their communities. What they think about politics, science, art, international affairs, their very selves, is shaped by this medium which operates with a complete orientation toward immediacy. Unlike
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fifty years ago when it was relatively new, television is completely intertwined in
our culture. It shapes in some way most of our vital enterprises. Our family life,
education, sports, politics, recreation, and even religion, are difficult to envision
now or to practice without the influence of, or mediation by, television.

Our work, health, education all have quite insidiously, but inevitably been
revolutionized by the computer and telecommunications technology. So powerful
are computers in their capacities to store, manipulate, process and transmit
massive amounts of information that the computer itself has become the dominant
model for human thinking and intelligence, i.e., information processing. Most of
the basic economic and social facets of our lives have become dependent upon
computers, another increased dimension of change added to our existence because
the changes in computer technology are so rapid and relentless. We plan and
organize our work around them. They are the major instruments of education,
medicine and of amusement. The sheer technical intelligence and knowledge that
supports the rapidly developing infrastructure of computing technology is far
beyond the capacity of any single individual, no matter how brilliant. The extent
to which the economic and social infrastructure of our society is organized around
computing and digital technology means that we are all as individuals more
ignorant and helpless in the presence of technology than we have been at any time
in history. Our individual capacities to maintain and repair for ourselves those
things upon which we depend, the machines which carry us along in our modern
existence, are diminished, leaving us more dependent upon experts and
technicians.

The Internet establishes a worldwide communication capacity
inconceivable only a few years ago, linking individuals, even continents apart, in
an instantaneous electronic connection. It provides an extraordinary capacity to
gain access to once remote locations of knowledge and information and to move
about massive and complex intellectual documents, as well as other digitized
material, and change and interchange them as never before. This capacity to gain
access, manipulate and disseminate information and knowledge has
revolutionized the relationship of individuals to institutions. Much of the success that the mid-twentieth-century totalitarian regimes had in manipulating mass opinion and controlling thought was due to their capacities to monopolize the processes of disseminating information. “As in Lenin's Russia, the Fascist and Nazi parties imposed governmental monopolies on information,” writes historian Richard Pipes. Today's computing and telecommunications technology makes such a direct monopoly and control, by governments intent on enforcing ideological conformity, impossible. Information, particularly in its electronic form, is diffuse and difficult to manage. This has enormous implications for government, education, commerce, science and research that are just beginning to unfold.

It is worth remarking that as we approached the end of the millennium a preoccupation that generated considerable angst was with the "Y2K" problem in computing. The billions of lines of computer code that were reviewed and revised to accommodate the two digit values which represented the turn of the millennium presented an overwhelming challenge, and the most catastrophic events were predicted. The global interconnection of computing systems and its infrastructure character means that the glitch threatened disruptions of world financial markets, the delivery of basic services by governments and private enterprises and the administration of basic human necessities—the failure of technology would spell economic, social, legal collapse. The Y2K problem was the perfect combination of technology and apocalyptic religion with considerably apparent irony. Our own massive technology had become a powerful, global god that had seemed to slip out of our control.

II

The changes in early twenty-first-century America, however, that impress me the most are the changes in our values, or if I may state it with hesitation in a somewhat old fashioned way, the changes in our hearts. What is fundamental, revealing, and I believe most interesting about people is what they value, that is, what they appear to live for and what more importantly, if anything, they are
willing to die for. One of the more remarkable and interesting facts of human history—brilliantly observed and described by the eighteenth-century historian Edward Gibbon is the extent to which believers have died for their religious ideas, proof of a curious sort that human beings are not purely material beings. A person who will die, who will sacrifice everything for an ideal or an aspiration must be a strange contradiction for a materialist. The attack on America of September 11th all of a sudden brought the American people and their shopping mall, designer clothes, amusement-centered culture, into an encounter with fanatics who eagerly embraced death in order to act out an implacable hatred inspired by afterlife ideas of an ancient religion.

What ideas, religious or otherwise, are we willing to die for? For what ideal might we even temporarily interrupt the serious pursuit of the good times? What aspiration would divert us off of the happy track of our careers? Would we commit ourselves or our young people to any kind of sacrifice? Would we today be willing to prosecute a war that would claim the lives of 600,000 of our men and inflict unspeakable devastation, as did our own civil war fought to end slavery one hundred and forty years ago? It is hard to imagine any cause sufficiently compelling so as to make us risk shedding the blood of our youth.

The changes over the last fifty years in the justification for the conduct of war have been enormous. Wars, to put it crudely, need to be sold: they demand convincing rationales. In our doubt-ridden, authority-resenting society such rationales are even more difficult to discover or invent. Moreover, in a society where therapeutically assisted self-exploration and self-expansion are regular pastimes and where passive amusement is ascendant, any course of action which promises sacrifice and asks for selfless dedication is more difficult to envision, much less pursue.

In the experience of World War II for Americans, despite the enormous sacrifice of so many men, there was a consensus of deep, solid support, a belief in the cause. When it was over there was a sense that we had done the right thing. Decency had prevailed: we revered our war dead as brave and honorable. The
sacrifice, we believed, was not in vain. The wars we have prosecuted since World War II have become in their rationales murkier and more confusing. They have been, with good reason, harder to sell. The rationales have been less clear and compelling. The ambiguity surrounding the conduct of the “police action” in Korea presaged the ambivalent attitudes and support for later wars. The real ambiguity and doubt descended upon us with the feckless Vietnam War. No consensus ever materialized, no overriding sense of purpose was ever operative. Those at the top who committed us to it were, we now know, liars and connivers. The lies regularly dispensed by government officials and the violent dissent which came from many of our most prestigious institutions helped make this tragic conflict, with 58,000 of our soldiers who perished far from home on Asian soil, one of the bitterest of American experiences. The politicians invoked the ideals of fighting for freedom and self-determination, and fighting against tyranny, but many saw the effort as nothing but arrogance, cynical manipulation and empty words. Public support collapsed. We watched the evacuation of our troops on television and let the country we had fought for over a decade to save disintegrate. President Nixon had earlier invoked the final and most cynical of the official Vietnam era euphemisms—“Peace with honor.”

The military engagements of the nineties, however, were the culmination of wars for which no convincing or believable rationale could be found. Neither the President nor Congress gave a clear or consistent rationale for the Gulf War even though it had the potential for escalation into a major conflagration. The war was, all at the same time, the exercise of American self-interest, an act of liberation (for Kuwait, that is), a protective action to guard the world’s oil supply, and a just confrontation with a brutal dictator, even though we co-existed, even consorted with many other tyrants around the globe. None of the rationales that were invented by the public relations experts and promulgated by the inarticulate President Bush were particularly convincing, but it did not matter. The war was easily won, and it turned out to be a grand opportunity to showcase our sophisticated computerized weaponry on television. With the “smart bomb” we
were able to destroy almost everything in Iraq except the homicidal goon who ran the place. The Gulf War was the first completely televised war, the first “amusement war”: it was far away, few of “our guys” got killed, and the twenty-four hour CNN television coverage featured impressive American hi-tech weaponry in action. In retrospect, it is difficult, in stark contrast with World War II, though, to recall what it accomplished, what American principles or ideals it upheld, or even what policy it advanced. But since this war was short, technologically impressive, and fatal for few Americans, the President who presided over it was wildly popular (a popularity in kind and duration analogous to that of some hot teen rock star) for about six months until the economy slumped.

As a result of the September 11th attack, we are now prosecuting a “war against terrorism,” a perfect post modern war to open the 21st century. Unlike our wars against Germany, Japan, and all of the others, this is a war against an abstraction, an “ism.” The “ism” is not confined to any particular place or group of people. There is no country whose defeat promises an end to the fighting, no tyrant whose demise will terminate the conflict. There are neither armies to vanquish nor generals of enemy forces who will sign documents of surrender and agree to terms of peace. It is a war than can never be concluded because we will never know if we have won or lost: abstractions don’t surrender, sue for peace, or give up and go home. The major sacrifices we will be called on to make to fight this new kind of war will be the sacrifice of our liberty to our own State in exchange for the increased security promised against a completely anonymous enemy who may strike with ferocity anywhere.

We live in a society heavily dominated and interpreted by the medium of television, one that now takes nothing but amusement seriously—witness the enormous amount of attention devoted to, and the adulation heaped upon, athletes, popular musicians and movie stars, not to mention the staggering sums of money now commanded by rock singers and television actors. Even the late-night television talk show host, whose singular contribution to air-way amusement is to
preside over chatter- and gossip-sessions with current celebrities, makes huge amounts of money. Indeed, the utter seriousness of the pursuit and practice of amusement is one of the many ironies produced by the current hordes of early-twenty-first-century antinomians, some of whom descended from Puritans.

Here is a question: are the fundamental values and aspirations of Americans so much different now than they were even fifty years ago? And if so, how? Edward Gibbon made the observation that:

There exists in human nature a strong propensity to depreciate the advantages, and to magnify the evils, of the present times.\(^9\)

However, one way to grasp the profundity of these late-twentieth-century transformations of the human heart is to draw some comparisons—to attempt to recreate those attitudes, feelings, beliefs and dispositions of a mere half century or so ago and hold them up against today’s spectrum of practices and ideals, recognizing of course that our backward glances are distorted by our present concerns. Such a comparison, though, might profitably unfold by reflecting upon, then and now, the objects of approval and disapproval and the boundaries of our toleration. What we approve and disapprove of is the real measure and reflection of what we value. What we tolerate provides an indication of the boundaries and limits of our values. By making that difficult comparison of approval and toleration—merely fifty years apart—we begin to experience an uneasy, unsettling sense of how much we have changed, how different our world is.

The end of the first half of the twentieth century coincided roughly with the completion of a colossal military achievement—the defeat of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan. The Western democracies were victorious over the forces of totalitarianism. This was the most massive, destructive and mechanized war of all times, a war waged upon civilians as well as soldiers. It was also an ideological war. The issues were, from the American perspective, relatively speaking, clear cut, completely unlike the way it would be with Vietnam a generation later. Fascism and Nazism were voracious, loathsome, and, by open and boastful self-proclamation, hateful and menacing social philosophies.
To conjure up the will and fortitude to resist the likes of Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo was relatively easy to do. What we were fighting for, or at least believed that we were fighting for, were basic, universal values. Germany and Italy were atavistic, historical aberrations, large and grotesque in their manifestations, but aberrations nonetheless. The mere existence of Hitler and his Nazi cohorts made our notions of right and wrong, good and evil, clear and obvious and made it easier to prosecute a long, massive and murderous war.

Well, almost. There was a dark underside to this. We had allied ourselves with Stalin, who, we realize now with the benefit of historical hindsight, was a most sinister creature with political and moral instincts equal to those of the Third Reich’s chief Nazi. Stalin and Hitler had made their 1939 tyrants’ pact that set the final stage for the beginning of the conflagration. Secretly they negotiated their deal so that between themselves they could ravage and devour, unmolested, Poland and the Baltic states. In 1945, while Americans were contemplating the smoking ruins of the Third Reich and just beginning to grasp the horrors of Auschwitz and Treblinka, Stalin’s Red Army was making the workers’ paradise of the Soviet Union a reality in all of Eastern Europe.

The U. S. emerged victorious from World War II over forces that were at once barbarous, but militarily and technologically powerful. The victory was due in part to American efficiency and technology but also, and more importantly perhaps, to a perceived moral superiority. America was the destination for millions of people who came to escape tyranny, restricted social caste systems, poverty and other hardships. Moreover, America offered more opportunity for freedom and prosperity than any other place in the world. We were a people of common decency who embraced individual freedom and a sense of fair play—the opposite of the ideologues we had just defeated.

America had proudly come to embody a unique social morality. It was a composite of values that emerged from both Christianity and the Enlightenment—the dignity of the individual and personal freedom and responsibility. Our history, our traditions, our values had been vindicated at mid-century through our fight
against a set of powerful but fundamentally benighted foes. From this vindication came a kind of confidence we Americans had in our institutions and a belief in the basic, fundamental decency of our people and of our society. In 1950, we believed in and practiced a civic-religion that had taken its origins from two powerful legacies that had made their way here from Europe, Christianity and the Enlightenment. The New England Puritans, inspired by a belief in the truth of the Bible and an unshakable conviction of their spiritual destiny, established our earliest permanent communities and laid the foundations for many of the social norms that would make the country free and prosperous. As Tocqueville observed, they came here not in quest of material advance or wealth, but primarily for spiritual reasons. They endured the hardships of leaving their homeland, braving an ocean, and settling a hostile wilderness in order to be able to practice freely a religion that was the center of their lives.

The Founding Fathers were impressed by the corruptibility of power and the fragility of institutions. They envisioned in America a set of political institutions that would somehow contain or offset that corruptibility. They wanted America to be different and better than Europe—to be freer and less corrupt. Those political institutions and the religious ideals of the people who came here made this country a very different kind of place than anywhere else. The remnants of that civic-religion that we seemed to practice until four or five decades ago embraced the following ideas: the human individual is the ultimate locus of moral worth. From the traditionally religious perspective like that of the New England Puritans, it is the human soul, with a unique value endowed by the creator. In the more secular vision of our own Enlightenment philosopbes like Jefferson and Madison, it is a free individual who makes moral choices and is accountable for them, and functions within a social, political community. This freedom, however, was primarily a negative one, a freedom from coercion, a prescription against external, arbitrary constraint, neither a promise of personal fulfillment nor a license for self-indulgence. Both the Christians and the American philosophers of the eighteenth century saw human beings as perennially flawed, with inherent
weaknesses and propensities for corruption and in need of the care and guidance of social institutions to keep them from self-destruction. In Christianity this flawed view of human nature came from the Fall; Madison’s famous Federalist Paper number 10 was a written with this assumption.

Underlying freedom as a moral and political ideal was the notion that individuals were capable of finding and understanding the moral truth that was essential for guiding and disciplining one’s life. This was reflected in the Biblical prescription: “you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.”

Three values made up the core of our spiritual and moral world: truth, liberty, and individual responsibility. These were the defining features of the American eighteenth-century amalgam of Christianity and the Enlightenment. They persisted into the twentieth century. They were central beliefs independent of what any particular versions were of the religions we practiced: their assimilating power was enormous. Indeed, these values—the legacy of the previous three centuries—were those around which our social and political institutions had been built. They came heavily into play in the debate over slavery and the ensuing civil war. The moral revulsion with slavery in this country was aroused by Christian impulses and moral ideals, particularly belief in the value of all individuals before God. Our religious traditions stressed the moral primacy of personal responsibility—accountability to each other and to God. Our political institutions embraced the rule of law—the law was no respecter of persons or classes. Our colleges and universities were attached to veritas, the notion of objective truth.

The hold of these three values on our lives has diminished remarkably over the last fifty years. Confidence in knowing and applying moral truth or wisdom has given way to an intense subjectivism and moral relativity, a fact reflected by and expressed in the vocabulary and the locutions we find in common use whenever people talk now about moral and ethical issues. Our moral vocabulary has undergone a remarkable and rapid metamorphosis—from a preference for words that make reference to an external, even transcendental
location of norms, to a lexicon of self-reference, an expansive psychologically-oriented language of feeling, awareness and emotion, an idiom of the interior self that well accommodates the corresponding growth of subjectivity. Basic, simple, and direct moral words employed in the past like "right" and "wrong," "good" and "bad," "guilt" and "punishment," have given way to softer, personally reflective, and more complex interpretive labels and expressions like "appropriate," "comfortable" and the reflexive and subjective, "feeling good about yourself." Feeling good about ourselves is at the same time both a goal for which we mightily strive and the final measure of our success in achieving it. We likewise routinely hear expressions that emphasize the tenuousness and relativity of opinion—"that is just your opinion of what is right or good; mine is different." The emphasis is not on the substance of the opinion, but on the self, the subject, who holds the opinion; the act of self-affirmation is supposed to be sufficient to end discussion. An "opinion," it would seem, can and should carry no normative weight: it has no real authority. And since morality resides entirely within the subjective self, there can be no objective moral authority since such an authority must transcend the self and appeal to some objective standard everyone, or most everyone, upholds or acknowledges.

Even the forms of moral or prudential admonishment individuals may offer each other today, whether to do or not do some particular thing, are likely to be expressed in a highly subjective, personalized language—"You shouldn't do that because it makes others feel uncomfortable." Note that the admonition does not invoke a standard or appeal to a principle or a norm, but rather points to a feeling, a personal and often shifting emotion. This steady envelopment of our moral conversations by sheer emotion and subjectivity strongly suggests a loss of confidence in any objective standard of morals and thus a growing need to reformulate our discussions of moral and ethical conflict or disagreement in an ambiguous, tentative and subjective way that evades any firm, assured judgment. It also points to a major phenomenon in ascension in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century American life—the therapeutic ethos in which the
achievement of certain subjective states of mental comfort and satisfaction is the chief standard of self-assessment.

Our attachment to political freedom is more tenuous than it used to be. Since World War II, and especially since the late 1960s, America has come to resemble the welfare states of Western and Central Europe. Comfort and security play a much larger importance for us, as is evidenced in our willingness to trade away more of our freedoms for them. The more we rely on others to do things for us the more of our own power and control we must relinquish. Our institutions, such as the family, have weakened and our connections to others and our associations have thinned. We are thus left increasingly vulnerable and needy, requiring the protection, guidance and, very importantly, the stimulation bestowed by functionaries who operate the ever-expanding machinery of our amusement state. Indeed, as our vocabularies insidiously take on the metaphors of medicine (politicians promise “healing” and earnestly affirm their capacities to “feel the pain” of others) and therapy (criminals are now “sentenced” to counseling and therapeutic programs), moral and religious words like freedom, obligation, and responsibility take on an archaic ring.

Individual responsibility has been the casualty of a moral subjectivity that in the last fifty years has come to dominate our thinking and deeply affect our moral practice. To hold ourselves morally accountable and to adhere to interpersonal, commonly accepted standards of conduct becomes difficult, if not impossible, when we don't believe in the objectivity of our standards. “Can unbelieving men,” asked Philip Rieff, “be civilized?”

Behavior and its consequences for the individual are presented less as the result of moral character and the outcome of conscious choice than as the effect of external psycho- and socio-pathological causes such as child abuse, patriarchy, economic disadvantage, poor self-concept, and other disabling causes. People, with copious encouragement from our intellectual elites (“the anointed,” as Thomas Sowell calls them) increasingly view themselves as victims of social injustice. Solidly established, officially sanctioned victim-hood has become the
key for unlocking and throwing open the doors to the ultimate moral and social entitlement—unqualified, non-judgmental sympathy, support, understanding and care.

In 1950 we operated to some extent in our moral judgments about the world around us with the notion of evil. That is to say, evil was then a basic element of our moral vocabulary and we were willing to render confident judgments about certain kinds of conduct and certain kinds of people as being evil. Hitler and his collaborators were generally regarded as thoroughly evil creatures whose memories were painfully and rightfully the object of execration and detestation. Immediately concluding the war the contemplation of the horrors wrought by the architects of the Third Reich and the “final solution” seemed to make evil the most fitting category, indeed the only category, that could possibly be employed to describe the National Socialists, their ideology, and the effects of their programs.

Also, as we contemplated the rebuilding and reconstruction of war-torn Europe, it became obvious that the people in those countries under the political and military domination of the Soviet Union were subject to the same kinds of violence and degradation—concentration camps, one party rule, lack of basic freedoms, ethnic and religious persecution—that the National Socialists had practiced with such systematic thoroughness and enthusiasm on any unfortunates who became subjects of their reign. Winston Churchill in a small town in central Missouri bequeathed the compelling and enduring metaphor of the “Iron Curtain” that vividly symbolized the moral and political chasm that separated the communist world from ours.

The policies taken up by the U.S. with the dawning of the Cold War were based on a growing recognition that, despite the ceaseless rhetoric of liberation for the toiling masses emitted from its leaders, the Soviet Union was another totalitarian colossus run by a clique of cynical, power-worshiping cretins whose morals, mentalities and methods were indistinguishable from those of the National Socialists. But there is another, perhaps, more fundamental explanation
as to why evil was a part of our moral vocabulary at that time. Evil remains, essentially, a religious concept. To say that evil exists in any tangible manifestation suggests that there is some structure of reality in which evil resides and out of which it resonates. Evil manifests itself in forces and agencies that extend beyond those employed by human beings. Moreover, evil, in its fundamental theological or religious form, forever remains an inscrutable given: to explain it or interpret it in a form other than itself is to explain it away, that is, to convert it to something less than or other than evil. To take evil seriously requires of us a spiritual outlook or disposition. This disposition we have largely abandoned. James Agee, writing in the *Partisan Review* in 1950, said that:

> The modern mind denies its [evil’s] existence.... Many non-religious people are convinced of the existence of evil as something quite distinct from mere error, stupidity, unenlightened self-interest, neurosis or environmental causality, and such people cannot subscribe to the still popular assumption that all the wrong in this world is only a little worse than a bad cold; but it appears that only the religious are equipped to take the existence of evil very seriously, or to act in relation to it very intelligently.\(^{12}\)

The managers and enthusiasts of the amusement state persistently encourage us to relinquish the category of active, personal evil and to think of human wrong doing as the result of impersonal causal forces, out of our individual personal control, manageable or extinguishable by sufficiently empowered experts and technicians.

Our moral vocabulary of a mere fifty years ago reflected, at least in a remnant form, a religious, and specifically a Judeo-Christian view of the world. Excluding a number of our intelligentsia, we viewed communism and Christianity as antithetical moral realms, representing a basic conflict of moral forces in the universe. In 1951, ex-communist-turned-Christian, Whittaker Chambers in his book *Witness*, interpreted the time as a "turning point in history." We, as the victors over fascism, as leaders of the free west were to determine,

> whether all mankind is to become communist, whether the whole world is to become free, or whether, in the struggle, civilization, as we know it, is to be completely destroyed or completely changed.\(^ {13}\)
Chambers presented his readers with a picture of a world with the starkest of moral and spiritual contrasts, a picture that now must seem strange to us. *Witness* was an extremely compelling, widely read, and highly controversial piece upon its arrival in the early 1950s. Prominent American intellectuals such as John Dos Passos, Hannah Arendt and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. wrote reviews.\(^{14}\) Fifty years after its publication the book has sunk sadly into oblivion, "a buried classic," as Hilton Kramer has called it,\(^ {15}\) its compelling indictment of communism having faded into a quaint, incomprehensible relic of American Cold War ideology.

Both John Kennedy and Richard Nixon embedded Chambers' morally antinomous view in their own political rhetoric a decade later in the 1960 Presidential campaign. In one of the Nixon-Kennedy debates Senator Kennedy struck a stark moral contrast between "us and them."

> We set a very high standard for ourselves. The communists do not. They set a low standard of materialism. We preach in the Declaration of Independence and in the Constitution, in the statements of our greatest leaders, we preach very high standards; and if we're not going to be charged before the world with hypocrisy we have to meet those standards.\(^ {16}\)

Vice-President Nixon was even more emphatic and antithetical.

> Also as far as religion is concerned, I have seen Communism abroad. I see what it does. Communism is the enemy of all religions; and we who do believe in God must join together.\(^ {17}\)

These words near the end of 1960 must have still resonated strongly with the American people, even though the sincerity and integrity of the men who uttered them is questionable. No main stream politician after 1970, with the exception of Ronald Reagan on a few occasions, would or could talk like this. To those who embrace the secular and relativist-conditioned perspectives that have been spun out of the turbulent 1960s, such rhetoric in the 1980s and 1990s would sound parochial and completely unenlightened. Public figures have ceased to moralize in such strong traditionally religious terms because the ideas underneath the
language are no longer meaningful to the public and thus make no moral connection with the American people. Rightly or wrongly, our affirmation of the values of individual freedom, personal autonomy, and responsibility had vital linkages with our religion and the ideals of our Founding Fathers—"the ashes of [our] fathers, and the temples of [our] gods," to paraphrase Macaulay. We called the Soviet leaders "godless communists," an epithet that by the 1970s would become a piece of derision by our own anti-anti-communists who mockingly recreated that declamation as the predictable uttering of a paranoid, nativist bumpkin.

But the godlessness, from the perspective of those who uttered it sincerely, was the real indictment of communism. It was the atheism and materialism of Marxism-Leninism, the rejection of the transcendent and the arrogant disdain for an objective moral order, that made it so evil, and that attested to the benighted character of its proponents and the moral and spiritual desolation that its enforcement and practice brought to large portions of the world. Communist theorists since the middle of the last century had been confidently proclaiming socialism's inevitable triumph over a decadent capitalist order and with it the extinction of traditional religion. Religion, Marx had announced and his progeny still proclaim, is the opiate of the masses, a considerable irony in that Marxism, in spite of its discredited predictive and explanatory apparatus and its grotesquely failed practice, has long been the preferred ideological narcotic for many twentieth-century intellectuals. Anti-communists were outside the new faith, objects to be ridiculed and despised by the new believers. "An anti-communist is a dog," Stalin-adulating Jean Paul Sartre proclaimed. "I don't change my views on this, I never will."

Many Americans at mid-century were keenly aware that communism threatened us politically, militarily and ultimately physically. These threats emerged from an ideology that was profoundly hostile to traditional religion. When Stalin's immediate successor and long-time understudy Nikita Khrushchev visited the United States in 1959, he shocked and angered the American public.
with his statement that Soviet communism would "bury us," that is, the capitalist West. He said later that he meant it only figuratively, as if that made much difference. With considerable unintended irony Khrushchev denounced Stalin in 1956 before the twentieth Communist Party Congress for his terrible crimes against his own people. Yet, he remained Stalin's lieutenant and ideological heir, and he well understood what many of our own progressively minded intellectuals wanted to forget—that Soviet communism and the United States remained enemies, and inevitably so. The premises upon which the moral and political systems of both countries were based were antithetical.

The perception by Americans of communism as a fundamental evil, however, gradually subsided for many as the Cold War ran its course. By the late 1960s anti-communism was being successfully sneered away as a political-religious residue of 1950s anti-Soviet paranoia and McCarthyist posturing and bullying. Serious liberal anti-communist intellectuals like Sidney Hook and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. dwindled down to a lonely few. The anti-communists clerics who managed to build popular followings were bible-beating rustics like Billy James Hargis, whose Oklahoma-based "America Crusade" played to the yahoos out in the hinterlands, or clamorous "right-wing" radio preachers like Carl MacIntyre and Gerald L. K. Smith who excited the paranoia of the Fundamentalists. Ronald Reagan had the bad form early in his Presidency to castigate the Soviet Union in one of his speeches as an "evil empire," a remark which gravely offended many of our illuminati and certified him as a hopeless unsophisticate and a panderer to the illiberal, benighted religious right. But the Soviet Union was an empire based on naked coercion, as the events of post-1989 have confirmed, and, if it was not an evil one (thinking of its concentration camps, mass deportations, its systematic religious and political persecution, and its single-party dictatorship), then evil was not to be found anywhere on this planet. And that is the point: evil had been banished from our moral and political vocabulary and our President was convicted by the sophisticates of slipping into the old time religion and sounding embarrassingly like some parochial anti-
It was not because we in the West had come to see, somehow, that communism was not really evil, although we had a highly articulate professoriate that was largely successful in pleading the case that our fear of and antipathy for communism was a kind of crude religiously-inspired paranoia. The prevailing interpretation of that period is that anti-communism represented the ultimate in irrationally-based fear, strongest in those who listed toward religious simple-mindedness or reactionary authoritarianism, and that it was a perverse overreaction to a political system that we did not understand and was just different, and even in some ways better, than ours.

Subsequent history, however, belies the paranoid interpretation of anti-communism, particularly now that we have gained access to many of the Soviet archives since the collapse of Lenin’s seventy-year Great Experiment in 1989. The Rosenbergs, we now know, were espionage agents for the Soviets, and the dapper, urbane and well-connected Alger Hiss was indeed the liar and traitor that the dumpy, corpulent and morose Whittaker Chambers accused him of being.

Alger Hiss’s attorney employed a prominent psychiatrist, Dr. Carl Binger, who personally observed Chambers during the two trials and then testified as a defense witness in the second one. Chambers, he claimed, was a mentally unbalanced man. (Dr. Binger on the witness stand: “I think Mr. Chambers is suffering from a condition known as psychopathic personality, which is a disorder of character, of which the outstanding features are behavior of what we call an amoral or an asocial and delinquent nature.”19) Hiss embraced a strategy in his defense early on in the Cold War that came to be frequently employed by anti-communists to discredit anti-communism: anti-communism was unmasked by doctors of psychiatry as a mental illness or derangement. This is a huge irony in that the Soviet communist leaders used psychiatrists to silence dissidents. Chambers was to be dismissed as a psychopath, a social misfit who was striking out irrationally at a prominent figure in order to get attention and act out his anti-social impulses. Thomas Murphy, the government prosecutor, routed Dr. Binger
under cross-examination. In the court transcripts of the testimony Binger comes off as a fool. Murphy's masterful cross-examination remains as a textbook illustration for how to impeach the testimony of an "expert witness." Yet, Binger's clinically fabricated defamation of Chambers' character became the post-war model for dismantling anti-communists and rendering anti-communism pathological. It remains so. An added footnote of bitter irony: Alger Hiss's name is attached to an endowed chair at Bard College. It is occupied by Marxist-Green Joel Kovel.

In 1966 another prominent psychiatrist, Dr. Jerome D. Frank, testified before the Foreign Relations Committee of Senator J. William Fulbright. Fear of communism and fear of the Soviets was, Dr. Frank opined, an irrational fear. Anti-communism was a kind of collective sickness. Anyone who showed concern about the future that communists were openly planning to bring about was obviously unbalanced and disturbed. Lyndon Johnson smeared Barry Goldwater in the Presidential campaign of 1964 as an anti-communist extremist yearning to plunge the world into nuclear holocaust. ("In your guts you know he's nuts.") "Experts" subjected anti-communists to psychological analyses that reduced their thinking, ideas and arguments to a mental pathology. From the "proof" of the pathology of their personalities flowed the automatic nullification of their ideas and arguments. The reasoning and emotion behind anti-communism could thus be discarded as the worthless mental debris of psychologically unbalanced cranks, delusional paranoiacs, or individuals who could never come to terms with their fathers or mothers. The anti-communist messenger was sick: therefore, the message was just another symptom of the psychic malady. The content of the message could not be taken seriously. Here then was a medicalized and devastating version of the ad hominem argument—diagnosis substituted for argument.

The revulsion with communism, however, seems neither as irrational nor as religiously bigoted as it was made out to be, considering the historical record of communist atrocities. If the anti-communists were paranoid, the anti-anti-
communists were naive. Lenin had always been open and vehement about his detestation of religion and had made the extermination of it one of his highest priorities immediately upon the Bolshevik seizure of power late in 1917. The Russian Republic’s Criminal Code of 1922 made the teaching of religion to minors, whether in public or even in private schools and other establishments, a crime which could be punished by up to a year of forced labor. The ex-seminarian Stalin emulated his mentor and strove mightily to eradicate religion in the Soviet Union—except for an interlude during World War II when Orthodox Catholicism served to bolster the Russian people with greater nationalist and patriotic energy to resist the invading German armies. Stalin’s imitators in Eastern Europe after World War II energetically followed his example, and Mao’s Red Guard mercilessly persecuted Christians and other religious groups in China.

It is an undeniable fact that everywhere in the world where communists have come to power they have ferociously persecuted religious believers. Cuba, North Korea, North Vietnam, Cambodia—everywhere communists have been in charge they have sought to eradicate religion—directly and savagely, or more indirectly and insidiously, depending upon the kinds of political and social constraints they had to try to maneuver around. Cambodia is perhaps the most awful spectacle of communist hatred and persecution of religion. Of the 40,000 to 60,000 Buddhist monks in Cambodia prior to Pol Pot’s ascent to power, it is estimated that only 800 to 1,000 survived the relatively short but horrendously murderous reign of the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s. The communists also destroyed ninety-five percent of the temples in the country as well. Thus, it is quite easy to understand why religious Americans, in spite of the scoffing and disdain of so many establishment intellectuals and sophisticates, were highly distrustful and loathing of communism and all that it promised and represented.

The decline of belief in the reality of evil and the concomitant dissipation of earnestness in resisting it are directly related to the vast expansion of our practice of tolerance for many kinds of conduct heretofore proscribed. We tolerate much more today than we did a short fifty years ago. Remember: what we tolerate
defines the boundaries and limits of our values. The entire spectrum of personal
human expressiveness has opened up to a much greater span than ever before.
Morality has become, so to speak, more relaxed. It is now easier for the dissolute,
the betrayers and the predators to maintain or recover their positions in society
and go about their business, particularly if they enjoy some sort of celebrity
status.

One of the values we now treasure most as we open the twenty-first
century is toleration. We practice it assiduously. Toleration is an undeniably
important virtue, particularly for those in a highly mobile, heterogeneous society,
because it enables people who hold incompatible or mutually antagonistic moral
and religious values or ideals to coexist. Thus, expansive tolerance for us is now
virtually an article of faith, a given: intolerance is costly and often destructive,
and in many ways.

The elevation of toleration, however, as a primary value is necessarily
related to the decline of the notion of evil. Evil is a notion that gives rise to
conduct that is in fundamental conflict with the practice of toleration. What ideas
and practices you believe to be evil, you oppose categorically and
unconditionally. You do not tolerate evil if it is within your power to resist it; not
resisting evil when you can gives you complicity in it. Proponents of liberalized
abortion laws, for example, want those who oppose them to be tolerant—
tolerance is a fundamental element of their (those with the liberal) outlook. But
those who oppose liberalized abortion laws do so because, quite frankly, they
regard the practice as murder, as categorically wrong, as evil (no one in their right
mind would ask anyone to tolerate murder): they cannot morally tolerate it
without changing their beliefs, without relinquishing their conviction that abortion
is an unmitigated evil. Toleration for them in this matter means moral abdication.
The appeal to toleration in this highly charged moral conflict has never worked,
and never will. This is why abortion is such a pivotal, volatile issue, and why it
has helped to launch what James Davison Hunter has called the “culture wars.”
The culture wars are nothing less than a struggle to define and establish standards
of public morality. These "wars" pit liberal, secular-oriented Americans against traditionally religious ones. The two sides operate with incommensurable moral assumptions.\textsuperscript{23}

The more we regard the things and people around us as evil, however, the more inflexible and intolerant we must become. The logical and practical corollary of evil is condemnation—what is judged to be evil \textit{ought} to be condemned and cannot be tolerated in any way. Toleration, however, moves against the disposition of condemnation. Condemnation, with the ascendancy of toleration, must give way to a softer stance of mere disapproval. Logically and practically, we can only tolerate what we disapprove of, but toleration, if it is sincere, commits us to the relinquishment of condemnation, to a disposition which though disapproving of a practice, is yet willing to permit it. Toleration starts off being very hard to do; with practice, it becomes easier. At some point toleration transforms itself into something else. The two poles, pure intolerance and complete toleration, are equally unacceptable. We have to be tolerant of some things; intolerant of others.

Do we want to set ourselves on a course that will lead us to embrace tomorrow (or someday) those beliefs and practices we can barely tolerate today? What we tolerate, no matter how reluctantly today, our children or grandchildren may embrace tomorrow.

Toleration, for as much as we may value and practice it, presents us with two related problems. These problems are not obvious because of the fact that enthusiasm for toleration has grown to a point where the word itself has become a conversation-stopping incantation. Its mere mention bestows immediate sanctity and virtue on the speaker.

The first problem is a practical one: how to establish the boundaries of toleration? What, in fact, \textit{should} we tolerate, and what shouldn't we? Simply put, toleration as a prescription for the treatment of others provides no self-generating, logically-driven formula for determining what should not be tolerated. Even the most enthusiastic advocate of toleration does not and could not (morally and
logically) argue for the toleration of everything, because that would involve the embrace of a self-defeating paradox, namely the toleration of intolerance. A world in which everything was tolerated would be grossly immoral.

Perhaps we should strive for a state of mutual tolerance, that is, we tolerate everyone who tolerates us: others can do whatever they want as long as they let us do whatever we want. This, however, does not take us far. The moral-social world has never worked this way. As the philosopher Bernard Williams has remarked, "We need to tolerate other people and their ways of life only in situations that make it very difficult to do so. Toleration, as we may say, is required only for the intolerable." 24

Also, toleration remains hugely problematic with devoutly religious people. Tolerance and deep moral and religious conviction are hard to reconcile. This is true, and ironically so, even with the secularized religion of Marxism in the twentieth century. The communist societies of Stalin, Mao, and Castro have been one-party theocracies that tolerated much less religious and moral dissent than any of their liberal western capitalist rivals.

In our own highly secularized society we strive to tolerate nearly everything but strong, traditional religious belief—another huge irony which is often lost because the enthusiasts of toleration fail to recognize the inherent difficulties in finding the limits of toleration. Our secular culture rightly prides itself on its open, accepting and inclusive character. Yet it finds itself at odds, at war, with a large segment of its people who are believers in traditional religion, people who take their religious beliefs seriously. These believers are, ironically, intolerable to the tolerators, an observation which perhaps helps us to understand where Chesterton was going with an observation on modern life that today sounds quite shocking: "In real life, the people that are the most bigoted are the people who have no convictions at all." 25

The second problem is related to the first one and highlights the paradoxical practical predicament of the advocate of toleration. It is a theoretical problem, what I call the consistency-self-destruction problem. This problem is
best illustrated by considering the formulation of what logicians call a "self-referential paradox," an affirmation of toleration in its most emphatic form: "I will not tolerate intolerance," declares the advocate of toleration. The form of this statement resembles the liar's paradox: "Everything I say," utters the liar, "is a lie." Both statements are self-referentially paradoxical, that is, the speaker at the same time seems to affirm and to deny what he is saying. The point of introducing this paradox is to show that toleration is a problematic human value with practical limits that are difficult to determine and with no easy theoretical solution. Bernard Williams notes that, "All toleration involves difficulties, but it is the virtue that especially threatens to involve conceptual impossibility."26

Toleration, as noted above, has greatly expanded in just the last half century: to be tolerant now means that one should approve of things he used to disapprove of; toleration is approval. An intolerant person essentially has become someone who disapproves. This expansion of meaning is reflected in a word that has become over the last thirty or forty years, an indispensable piece of the American vocabulary—"life-style." This well worn, much relied upon word is of twentieth-century vintage. It was invented by Alfred Adler, the famous psychotherapist and disciple of Freud in the late 1920s to denote the basic character of an individual as it was established in early childhood. (To Adler we are also indebted for the greatly fertile "inferiority complex"—once a piece of technical, psychoanalytic nomenclature, now a mass-culture cliché long past its technical prime.) "Life-style," however, has become an extremely useful, malleable and popular word. Its popularity of use began in the 1960s and has since come to refer, as the Oxford English Dictionary states, to a "way or style of living." It cites a 1973 usage from the London Times: "The Council of Churches wants freedom for students to create their own life-styles." What a superb, paradigmatic example of usage! You had to have lived in the West in the 1960s and 1970s and experienced the antinomian, nihilistic drive of the Cultural Revolution that transpired to have a chance at figuring out what that insipid sounding sentence really means and what enormous mischief it portends. The appeal to "freedom" in
the sentence illustrates an insidious degeneration of moral language. Life-style is a word behind which lies an inherently expansive concept, always running over boundaries and constraints, as dimly suggested by the above example from the *OED*.

Life-style is also the consummate expression of a society whose members seek limitless toleration, toleration as approval. One’s life-style might be appropriately characterized as the sum total of one’s preference or tastes, all of which are proper objects of easy, gentle toleration. But tastes and preferences cover not just those things that these words used to refer to like one’s affinity for fashion in clothing, the choices in hair care or laxative products, or a favorite baseball team or musical composer. Tastes have expanded to include almost all of life’s decisions, including moral and ethical choices. What was once a rather large moral domain—sexual morality, for example—has become the cheery matter of “life-style,” of taste or inclination, so to speak. So, if you live with someone “in a gay relationship,” or if you co-habit with someone you are not married to, or if you have a traditional marriage, or if you just sleep with people you happen to take a casual and passing fancy to and dispose of the coital residues in some abortion mill—these are equally “valid” options, any one of which might comprise your particular life-style. To express disapproval is to be intolerant.

The subjectivity of morality is obvious. The toleration in play is consummate and represents a great expansion from just a few years before. What used to be regarded as objectively immoral—promiscuity, adultery, homosexuality—are now “alternatives.” Life-style also is a heavily resorted to word in the contemporary world of advertising where refinements and innovations in consumption are always in progress. Products and services are strenuously pitched with great care and study to restless, fickle consumers primed with high expectations. These products and services are presented to potential consumers as the material reflections or expressions of their ever changing, personally unique life-styles. All of life’s choices are perhaps taking on an easier, morally neutral character and coming to resemble a vast array of purchase-options.
Ironically, questions of immorality in this more casual, flexible life-style way of viewing human conduct arise insofar as they might pertain to expressions of intolerance toward departures from what were once the conventional standards of morality. Disapproval itself has become the object of condemnation, a regression, if you will, to a pre-1960s atavistic practice commonly referred to as "being judgmental," an act of, well, near intolerance. Life-style is a vague and elastic term, and perhaps purposely and happily so. Its chief utility is as a "non-judgmental" piece of modern, value-free argot that can propel discussion "comfortably" along without anyone having to render any problematical moral or ethical assessments. Being non-judgmental also advances the now ubiquitous quest for higher self-esteem since being judged and found wanting or culpable in any basic way might lead to lower feelings of self-worth or a state of inadequacy that needs to be rectified. For these reasons the word has become such an important, frequently-resorted-to addition to our vocabulary.

The life-style notion also works well with the penetration of therapy into almost every corner of our lives and with the concomitant medicalizing of our moral perspective. Thus, one now frequently hears references to healthy or unhealthy lifestyles, which make those who so opine, again, sound less judgmental and moralistic. Such an understanding, sympathetic posture also makes it much easier to open up and explore the many possibilities for the application of counseling and psychotherapy.

Moral relativity and the expansion of toleration are indeed natural complements, and over the course of the last fifty years what confidence, naive or not, we had in our understanding and interpretation of an objective moral world has evaporated. Belief in the objectivity of moral value or principle has been exchanged for a new dogma of moral subjectivism. Our only "ultimate" value has become tolerance itself, a paradox of considerable significance as we have seen. Much of this is the result of secularization. Traditional religious ideas, for the most part out of necessity, have softened. Even religious institutions, in competition for members, have been co-opted by the behemoth amusement
industry with its affinity for making us feel good, and religious passion has in
many ways declined or seeped away. It is argued, at least by many of our cultural
elite, that religious and moral values are and should be personal and private
because they are ultimately and radically subjective.

Inter-religious marriage—Catholics with Protestants, Jews with Christians—an issue of considerable interest and significance in the 1950s and
even into the 1960s is today of relevance to a few. In 1964 Time magazine
reported on what it called “the first officially sanctioned Protestant-Catholic
wedding in the United States.” “Such ecumenical experiments,” wrote the author
of the Time article, “may well prove one way to end a continuing source of
Catholic-Protestant conflict.”27 What “conflict,” thirty-some years later might
possibly remain between many Catholics and Protestants? From what “source”
would it emanate? Doctrine? Theology? Religious or ethical practice?

The mainline faiths are certainly less distinguishable from one other than
they once were. To distinguish yourself doctrinally or in creed from anyone today
openly is the ultimate social faux pas, an act of exclusion, a manifestation of
bigotry at worst, parochialism at best. The differences between the faiths are not
supposed to matter much anymore. Only Fundamentalists—Fundamentalist
Christians, Fundamentalist Jews, Fundamentalist Muslims, and so on, as they are
now characterized by the secularized elites—now make such invidious
comparisons. Moreover, for these elites who run the amusement state and
interpret and dictate the nuances of the prevailing secular ideology, it would be
difficult to find a more contemptible name to call someone than a fundamentalist.
“Fundamentalist” has lost most of its historical and descriptive meaning. It has
become primarily a derisive appellation for anyone who takes their religion too
seriously. Our amusement culture, for many, has ground the sharp edges off of
serious traditional religion.

A little over two hundred years ago a corpulent little Englishman, Edward
Gibbon, completed his life’s work, a vast but entertaining account of the
melancholy spectacle of pagan Rome’s demise. The Decline and Fall of the
Roman Empire, a long, erudite book, incidentally, has never been out of print since the first volume of it was published in the year of America’s declaration of independence, 1776; and it still intrigues to this day. Part of the intrigue, aside from its literary delightfulfulness, historical richness and devastating ironical insinuation, is that Gibbon’s achievement set an inviting precedent for thoughtful speculation on periods of decadence and collapse of great civilizations, particularly for speculating on how the moral practices of people are related to the overall fortunes of their society. Gibbon’s artful depiction of decadent Rome, under assault from barbarians, without and within, offers some awful, troubling comparisons with our own civilization.

Like ancient Rome, our country threw off a king and became a Republic. Our Republican ancestors of the Revolutionary period, like the Republican Romans, attempted to practice republican civic virtue as a protective strategy of social conservation and saw any erosion of it as a prelude to moral and political disaster. Out of civic virtue came public morality and an ideal of political freedom and independence. But our Republic, like the Roman one, has now become a militarily powerful world empire with all of the countless affinities for decadence that befall a people who live under a growing Imperium, governed by individuals vainglorious and consumed, alas corrupted, by their worship of power.

The citizen of the Roman Republic inevitably became the subject of an Emperor. Citizens are active, self-governing and self-supporting. Subjects by contrast are passive. They require supervision and maintenance and are perpetually, relentlessly needy—recipients of the largess of the emperor, administered by his mandarins. Which of these two types do we in America resemble most today, citizens or subjects? Which of these two types do we think our children and grandchildren in a few short decades will be? Near the end of The Decline and Fall, of an empire in dissolution, Gibbon muses:

In Rome the voice of freedom and discord is no longer heard; and, instead of the foaming torrent, a smooth and stagnant lake reflects the image of idleness and servitude.  

Idleness and decay are Gibbon’s evocative, still images of decadence and decay—
a once active, energetic and virtuous people were eventually content to watch their freedom slip away, let their virtue deteriorate, and sink into their private pleasures.

Gibbon did not dissimulate his lamentations for the collapse of the Roman civilization, and he aroused the ire of his eighteenth-century readers by laying the blame for it in large part upon the radical, destabilizing faith of parvenu Christians. Their unrestrained enthusiasm for a single faith had served to undermine a society in which the pagan cults, with their own particular gods and their own special rituals, had tolerated each other.

The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world, were all considered by the people, as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful. And thus toleration produced not only mutual indulgence, but even religious concord.  

According to Gibbon, the early Christians were, above all, intolerant of their pagan contemporaries. They were, to be blunt, religious fanatics of the most uncivil, irrepressible sort. There was, as their version of spiritual reality would have it, one true God, one true faith, and one true religion. If Christianity was true, as they believed it surely was, then the religions of their fellow pagans were false—peaceful co-existence was eschewed. The logic and the psychology of monotheism were inevitably fatal to the “religious concord” of the paganism eulogized by Gibbon. The Christians would neither countenance nor respect the gods and rituals of their religious competitors. Gibbon’s early Christians were intrepid, inflexible universalists—spiritual truth was true for everyone or none.

This supreme, overweening confidence was what enabled an initially small and almost powerless sect like Christianity to endure persecution and ultimately to prevail over the traditional pagan cults in Gibbon’s estimation and to emerge as a world religion. Since the ancient religious practices were so completely interwoven into the social fabric of pagan society, the Christians’ fierce antagonism for the traditional rites and ceremonics could not but be regarded as an assault on the society itself. Christianity, Gibbon argued, was a large
instrumental force in the moral and political erosion of the Roman empire.

Two hundred years after Gibbon’s eloquent lament, we face a profound and ironic reversal of his dramatic portrayal of paganism and Christianity in their deadly conflict: an enervated, thoroughly modernized Christianity now confronts a resurgent, invigorated modern paganism—new-agers, hedonists, sexual athletes, animal rights activists, spiritualists of various stripes, eastern religionists—confident in the particularity of religious and moral values and openly disdainful of Christianity’s imperial claims for the universality of its message.

Christianity’s major rival for the last one hundred and fifty years has been the secular religion of socialism. “Scientific socialism,” wrote the Bolshevik intellectual, Anatoly Lunacharsky, “is the most religious of all religions, and the true Social Democrat is the most deeply religious of all human beings.” At one time universalist in its own claims (promising a world-proletarian revolution unfolding according to the objective laws of history, culminating in a workers’ paradise), in the late-twentieth century socialism has splintered into religious-like movements such as radical feminism, environmentalism, and other particular and specialized, collectivist, fanatical (true-believing) sects. Each of these sects, like their Marxist parent, identify a decadent, corrupted oppressor class set against an emerging oppressed class (possessed of a requisite superior virtue forged through its suffering) that will arise, overthrow the oppressors and implement, at last, a morally superior order. Marx’s doctrinal promise of an end to capitalism and the social evils it spawned—Marxism’s primary energizing force—has undergone a spate of ideological mutations. Each of these new sectarian collectives plans the launching of its own society-transforming revolution and polishes its own ideologically customized promise of delivery from the oppressors’ chains—from patriarchy, sexism, ecological destruction, etc.

With the ascendancy of so-called multiculturalism and the invincible subjectivity in which it is ensconced, Christianity’s once-professed universality and its cultural dominance in the West are now considerable cause for embarrassment and self-inflicted castigation. The doctrinal-moral “hegemony”
that it once imposed on the Western world, as well as other parts, is now held to account for many of what are now characterized as social injustices, including sexism, racism, and many other forms of domination, exploitation, and oppression. European Christianity in its long, varied, and complex historical unfolding, nevertheless, makes up the ideological wrapper for the Pandora's Box of Western imperialism. Its virulence and rapaciousness express themselves in various manifestations ranging from sexual repression and destructive self-denial, to the destruction of the environment, to greed and compulsive accumulation of wealth, and to the devaluation and degradation of women.

Christianity, on the brink of its third millennia, finds itself falling on the defensive against its modern pagan critics on the outside. From within, it is eviscerated by a hedonistic amusement culture and a therapeutic ethos that find the old operative notions like guilt and sin "uncomfortable" and unworkable. The "old time" religion of Christianity that preached salvation and warned of damnation and demanded repentance would be an impossible sell for most of today's clerics—even if they had an interest or desire to pitch it—who have to contend with parishioners who arrive at the chapels and churches completely saturated with the secularized amusement culture of television and the movies, a culture of relativism, hedonism and near limitless toleration.

Thus it would seem that Gibbon's horrendous epic of cultural cataclysm—Christianity's conquest of pagan Rome—is replaying itself two thousand years later, only this time with the tables turned, with the Christian culture crumbling from forces within and without, sliding into the historical abyss. The conflict, I believe, is every bit as historically significant and momentous as the previous encounter which Gibbon characterized as the "greatest, and perhaps most awful scene in the history of mankind." The universality of both Christianity, as well as the Enlightenment that followed it, is embattled by the particularity of the modern pagans. The believers in an objective universal order defined by eternal, transcendental ideals find themselves in spiritual and moral warfare with the subjectivists whose whole locus of moral reference is found either in the identity
of some victimized collective, energized in its suffering and resentment, or in the interior recesses of an illusive, ever-mutating self.

Perhaps, though, what we are observing is less of a battle or struggle than the playing out of a moral and cultural end-game, the final death throes of a decadent culture that has lost its dominance—its entrails devoured by parasites of its own manufacture. The freedom and prosperity that for the last two-hundred years were a legacy derived from the establishment of the rule of law and limited, representative government have been a high, culminating point of Western civilization. But out of freedom and prosperity themselves has come an erosion of those sorts of virtues and dispositions that originally led to the building of institutions that gave us freedom and prosperity. The great freedoms, of speech and expression, that have for long been political and moral ideals in the West have degenerated into institution-withering instruments of skepticism, license, and ultimately of nihilism and hedonism.

We are now confronted routinely in public life, particularly in our venues of amusement, with the most horrendous manifestations of coarseness and vulgarity. The prosperity and affluence generated by the rationalization of work and the development of technology has stimulated a nearly limitless appetite for amusement. Our technology has made it possible to serve that appetite, both in scope and depth, in ways that were never before possible. Amusement, when it becomes the ruling preoccupation, dulls the critical capacities and depresses interest in work and self-sacrifice.

The attachment late-twentieth-century Americans once had to the values of personal independence and self-rule—self-rule in both the personal and political sense—seems to be greatly waning. Self-rule or autonomy has been relinquished for the administration of specialists; self-reliance for other-reliance. The specialists are the ones, the only ones who are supposed to be able to translate their official "care" into action. The concession of the realms of moral life to the specialists also helps to advance the exchange of a reliance on principle (the rule of law) for reliance on benevolence, (the rule of compassion), of responsibility for
victimization, of individualism for tribalism.

The late twentieth century with its immersion in the relativity of morals and subjectivity of knowledge rendered agreement even on the basics of ethical conduct and personal responsibility nearly impossible. From Roxana Ng:

Feminist scholarship has challenged the notion of objectivity and demonstrated that so-called objective universal knowledge is constructed by men for men. Adrienne Rich contends that the ‘detachment’ and ‘disinterest’ that constitute objectivity in scientific inquiry are the terms men apply to their own subjectivity.31

Only in academe, where guaranteed lifetime employment is a major perk and where seldom must one have to suffer any consequences from officially promulgating personal stupidity, would we routinely find such absurd and preposterous proclamations. But the subjectivity of this extreme nature has, nevertheless, filtered down into the popular opinion—an indication that there really is something to the theory of the “Big Lie”—and the result is the disappearance of any chance of a public morality.

In our moral discourse we used to be inclined to say: ‘x is wrong because of y’ (substitute for ‘x’ some kind of conduct and for ‘y’ some external standard or reference point, such as the will of God or some such thing). Now judgments to the effect that ‘x is wrong’ cannot be argued for but only felt or intuited. Moral disagreements or differences turn into an ever escalating “emoting contest” with the victory going to the one who evinces the most intense feeling, produces the harshest invective or extracts the most pity. It often turns out to be a chaotic and grimly disingenuous enterprise that is conducive to dissimulation, hypocrisy, and the most wretched, detestable extremes of self-righteous self-delusion.

As a medium with a near monopoly for the presentation of public events and issues, television plays almost exclusively to the emotive side of problems greatly to the disadvantage of detachment, perspective and quiet thoughtfulness. As an amusement oriented, visual medium, television is more effective—makes more of an impression—in serving up the issues as personalized theatrics.
Appearances of sincerity, depth of expressed feeling, attractiveness and comeliness of course, are usually more compelling and influential than more abstract considerations of consistency, cogency or integrity. Appearing to be genuinely compassionate is a theatrical skill. Yet that appearance is a major requirement for political success. The rhetoric of compassion drives the therapeutic ethos, and the appearance of compassion, politically, indicates to the potential voters how generously the entitlements will flow. Television, in its aspiration to be a neutral presentation medium, can never effectively escape its nature as a powerful vehicle for amusement. It will always be difficult to present public issues in a way that will avoid the incoherence, superficiality and emotionality that conditions almost everything that appears on television. These limitations are imposed by the nature of the format.

The moral relativity in which we find ourselves thoroughly immersed promises to bring even more uncertainly, tension and irresolvable moral tension and conflict. What we believe about ourselves and the world determines our course in it. In this modern secular society we cannot make do with the Christianity of our ancestors any longer; but, alas, it also seems, we are unable to do quite without it either. This ambiguity of belief creates an ever greater ambiguity of moral practice. The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre made this observation some thirty years ago as he reflected upon the impact in the West that the vast secularizing forces of modernity exerted upon our religious thinking and, ultimately, our conduct.32

Our confidence in making ethical judgments has been eroded by our radical, reflexive subjectivity. The fragmentation of our institutions expressed in greatly increased rates over the course of the last century of socially disintegrating practices like illegitimacy (a ten-fold rate of increase since the beginning of 1900), crime (an eight-fold rate of increase in murder since 1920), and divorce (a three-fold rate of increase since the beginning of 1900) reflects something that might be called “moral fallout.” We experience moral fallout when we cease to believe in any kind of fixed and objective standards of conduct, when we can
agree on no regular, consistent principles to govern our action.

The religion of our ancestors gave us fixed standards and regular principles: its abandonment brings on a moral and spiritual crisis and inevitable moral fallout. The loss of our religion impales us on the horns of this dilemma described above—we cannot seem to live with it; but its loss plunges us into chaos. Material comforts and high-tech diversions are insufficient to make that brief span of our existence complete and significant. Without certainty on the questions of how we should live and what ideals we should embrace, our lives must remain empty and our actions futile. The rational, scientific and secularized orientation of our daily existence puts us into conflict with the claims of traditional Christianity for a transcendental reality in which human beings enjoy a relationship to their creator and its priority over everything temporal. It is difficult to discover and to cultivate that relationship in a modern, amusement-oriented world. Our preoccupations and interests are with the things of this world. Caught up as we are in a material world which offers so much, it is difficult to know what to make of those once important spiritual beliefs that shaped the lives of those from whom we inherited our institutions.

Yet, the denial of or indifference to a transcendental locus of meaning beyond ourselves and our immediate material interests plunge us into an atomistic and ultimately morally desolate state of affairs. Our moral world has indeed become a bleak place. Facts and values have been split asunder: the former are impersonal, inescapable building blocks of reality, the basis for scientific understanding and explanation; the latter are personal, subjective forms of experience that express only the self, a self that is always mutating and must constantly struggle to acquire esteem. Once people cease to believe that there are objective moral standards, against which they can measure their conduct and judge each other, the edifice of civilization begins to crumble. Radical subjectivity renders us unable to deal with each other morally since morality is about determining what is right and wrong, and since subjectivity renders agreement on how to make such determinations impossible. Each individual
speaks for and, ultimately, to himself. The failure of such agreement means that our efforts to create any such thing as a public morality or ethic will come to resemble the construction efforts on the Tower of Babel. The practice of morality requires a shared vocabulary which in turn appeals to an objective standard for both the praise and condemnation of human conduct. Such standards are increasingly difficult to find as the possibility of moral objectivity is plunged into doubt. Radical subjectivity creates a moral vacuum into which unfettered power asserts itself. Morality itself becomes tribalized. The attempts to sustain public conversations in which individuals grapple with the complex ethical and moral issues of our time seem destined to fail. Illumination and guidance, even from the wise, are difficult to attain. Antagonism, resentment and cynicism grow.
Chapter Two: Endnotes


8. Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, 244.


19. *Thomas Murphy’s Cross-Examination of Dr. Carl A. Binger in U.S. vs Alger Hiss (Hiss II)*, Minnetonka, MN: Professional Education Group, [1987], 45.


28. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, III, 1058.

29. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, I, 56.


