

The Old Adam and the Last Man

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Friedrich Nietzsche described the Last Man in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, as a creature of “desire and reason” as opposed to the First Man who was bestial and consumed by the desire for recognition alone. The Last Man (*der letzte Mensch*) the man of modern liberal democratic society was a “victorious slave” enacting the secular version of the Christian Kingdom of God on Earth. This was a society that put self-preservation first and cultivated physical security and material plenty. Nietzsche’s Superman (*Übermensch*) would rise above this and would shed the shackles of conventional morality. But in the meantime we had a society where the weak could control the strong, but one that could become jaded by the experience of history; it could become bored with its own success.

Historia Termina

Francis Fukuyama shares this conclusion in the last section of his *The End of History and the Last Man*, a book firmly in the great tradition of the philosophy of history. He describes the weakness of modern society: “It is the danger that we will be happy on one level, but still *dis*-satisfied on another, and hence ready to drag the world back into history with all its wars, injustices and revolution.” But this assumes, as he does, that we left history in the first place. And the history he refers to is of course the blip at the end of human time that passes in an eye-blink at the end of an hour-long film of the human story.

Fukuyama joins the long list of thinkers who, since progressive time was discovered, have sought to predict its end. History may end eventually in the universality of capitalist liberal democracy in this view, but it will certainly be a bumpy ride. Translated into my own terms what he is saying is that the Old Adam—the tribal imagination or “human nature”—rebels against the egalitarian security of the Last Man, the epitome of civilization. So it does. The weakness of the liberal democratic society according to Fukuyama lies in the universal human need, recognized by Plato, for *thymos*—recognition. This as a profoundly tribal need: however egalitarian the tribe, the need of the warrior or the hunter to receive recognition for his effort in the praise of his fellows is certainly deep. Christopher Boehm has shown how egalitarianism is not the natural state of society but that egalitarian societies are engaged in a constant struggle to stay egalitarian. Boasting was a universal art in the tribal society.

Fukuyama contrasts *megalothymia*, the overwhelming desire for personal recognition (“legacy” as ex-presidents phrase it) with *isothymia*: the passionate desire for absolute equality in recognition (as in the “self-esteem” movement.) The success of liberal democracy for him lies in its ability to maximize the latter. Nevertheless, he says, *isothymia* “will quickly run into limits imposed by nature itself.” There will always be “thymotic individuals” who will have the urge to excel and the passionate desire to be recognized as superior.

The liberal democratic society of the Last Man is bound together largely by self-interest, but this too runs up against “nature.” “In contrast to liberal societies, communities sharing ‘languages of good and evil’ are more likely to be bound together by a stronger glue than those based merely on self interest.” He sounds here like Tönnies or Durkheim: he is describing *Gemeinschaft*, the world of mechanical

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solidarity, of status, of militarism, of the *gens*, of the collectivism of the Closed Society. He is describing the basis of nationalism, of patriotism and at its extreme the jingoism of the nation-tribe and its totems.

The boredom with peace and prosperity he says, at the beginning of WW1, gave rise to enormous upsurges of popular enthusiasm for the war throughout Europe. “Many European publics simply wanted war because they were fed-up with the dullness and lack of community in civilian life.” They took to the streets in their millions and rushed to enlist in the national armies. “The exuberance of these crowds reflected the feeling that war meant national unity and citizenship at long last, and an overcoming of the divisions between capitalist and proletariat, Protestant and Catholic, farmer and worker, that characterized civil society.” It was in his words—so reminiscent of Karl Popper’s, “a rebellion against middle-class civilization.”

This is a gloomy if honest picture of children of liberal democracy constantly facing the fearsome power of those atavistic tribal motives that their society is supposed to have overcome and rendered obsolete. But it is also a partial picture because the tribal imagination is, as we have been constantly reminded, still with us and still important, however much we might change our institutions in the direction of rational liberalism. Without the powerful motivations that the tribal mentality provides, we may not have the energy to sustain our novel creations, just as the neo-cortex cannot function without the urgent emotions of the limbic system and the stereotyped impulses of the brain stem.

Structure and Communitas

Victor Turner, who has perhaps done more than anyone to enhance our understanding of ritual, put this very well when criticizing Morgan’s idea that we were, in social evolution, moving to a “higher plane” of brotherhood, equality, democracy, and universal education. Turner says: “It is here that Morgan seemingly succumbs to the error made by such thinkers as Rousseau and Marx: the confusion between *communitas*, which is a dimension of all societies, past and present, and archaic primitive society.” We can leave primitive society behind, but *communitas* remains with us. (In *The Ritual Process*.)

What is Turner’s *communitas*? (He doesn’t italicize so henceforth neither shall I.) It is a little like pornography: hard to define but easy to recognize. It is of course “community” but not in the sense of an ongoing social unit. He contrasts it with “structure” in the sense used by the sociologists in “social structure” which is a system of statuses, roles and offices. But *communitas* is anti-structure: it is rather a *state of social existence* that involves “a

relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals” who have a “direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities” which involves “a model of society as a homogeneous, unstructured *communitas*, whose boundaries are ideally coterminous with those of the human species.”

It is those spontaneous or liminal states of society where people meet as equal individuals, where the usual structural boundaries are ignored, where there is a sense of transcendence and immersion in humanity. In primitive societies it occurs in certain ritual settings like initiations or communal, often orgiastic, increase ceremonies. In more complex societies it is there in formative religious movements, at the inception of revolutions, or in ecstatic movements like the Hippies and the Beats, for it is often, at least initially, a spontaneous activity of the marginal and dispossessed. You can see it somewhat in action in Sunday morning services in black churches and among charismatic sects, it was there perhaps at Grateful Dead concerts, and in things like the Million Man March, the crowds on VE and VJ days, and throughout the Civil Rights and Counterculture movements with its epitome at Woodstock.

I have personally felt totally spontaneous *communitas* in such things as the last night of the Proms in London, or the flying of US flags in every yard and from every house in my community immediately after 9/11. I felt it in the crowds of quiet weeping people who left their houses and went out into the London streets on hearing of the death of President Kennedy, just to be with each other. I felt it in the ecstatic crowd of forty thousand students, faculty, staff, players, townspeople, politicians, box-holders, cheer leaders and visitors that rushed and filled the football field after Rutgers’ seemingly impossible comeback victory over Louisville in 2006, to keep their unbeaten record alive. In these things we were all equals: individuals melding in a joyful or heartbroken mass that knew no boundaries or statuses, no structure. These were spontaneous attempts at absolute *isothymia*, in Fukuyama’s terms, often breaking out from the commercial or structured framework that was their setting.

But time, that old and cruel father, is relentless. This “spontaneous *communitas*” cannot last. It is one of those attempts to get out of time; time is one of the structures that must dissolve and disappear in the eternal present where we prefer to be but cannot stay. We want to prolong the beauty of the communing moment. But the ecstatic condition cannot last, and so if it is to exist in time it must be *routinized*—as Weber said of charisma, which can partake of the same emotions. This is the inherent contradiction of *communitas*: it is anti-structure, but for this pleasurable state to persist, it must develop a structure to which it is in fact antithetical. We see the results in all utopian experiments, including the Hippies (who became Yuppies) and in

the fate of charismatic religions, which become routinized as communes, sects, denominations and churches.

Turner chooses as an example the order of Franciscans in Europe, which could never resolve the problem of carrying on the *communitas* message of St. Francis—which was to abandon property and status and embrace egalitarian poverty, while having an organization within the Church that needed both. You cannot exist in a state of “permanent liminality.” Similarly in India with the Sahajiya movement of Bengal, there was an attempt to bypass the structure of marriage in a devotion to Shiva and his ecstatic but adulterous relationship with the Gopis. But you cannot have an ongoing society without property and marriage and rights in both, and so “ideological *communitas*” and its attempt to live outside of time is bound to fail, as the Hippies discovered.

It is however a “dimension of all societies.” It is there in tribal societies but it is not coterminous with them; it is a state of social being not a stage of social evolution. But Turner does not ask why this should be. It may be that the burden of structure is too great—like the strain of civilization, and that we periodically try to escape it; but why the escape to *communitas* as such? In a little-recognized article “Body, Brain and Culture” written some 14 y later, just before his death, he challenged the anthropological belief in the autonomy of culture and proposed that “our species has distinctive features, genetically inherited, which interact with social conditioning, and set up certain resistances to behavioral modification from without.” These features are located in the triune structure of the brain, which is invoked by Turner, along with the specialization of the hemispheres, to explain certain consistent features of trance and ritual.

In this he follows Laughlin and D’Aquili, the originators of *Biogenetic Structuralism*. Trance states, and meditative and mystical experiences, are induced when there is “spillover” between the two hemispheres resulting from the hyper-stimulation of one of them. The left is related to “ergotropic” or energy generating systems, and the right with “trophotropic” or energy maintaining systems. Trance practitioners, using techniques to stimulate the right hemisphere/trophotropic system (sonic, rhythmic, visual, photic) reduce the body to an almost baseline homeostasis, which results in the spillover to the left-hemisphere/ergotropic system and hence trance states. In these the sense of boundaries dissolves and the “trancer” feels a sense of wholeness with all being. It is described by those who experience it as like a prolonged orgasm, and involves the hormone *oxytocin* that is involved in sex, suckling and bonding. Meditation techniques achieve the same result in a more quiet form, and drugs can be used to simulate the same effect by a short cut to ecstasy.

The processes that underlie trance states seem very similar to those encountered in the extremes of *communitas*,

particularly the sense of timelessness and wholeness: the resolution of opposites and paradoxes. Lévi-Strauss taught us that myth and ritual serve to resolve “contradictions”—those between self and other, one and many, life and death, male and female, old and young. The primary feeling involved in both trance and *communitas*, and in the ritual of both, seems to be the dissolution of the boundaries and the contradictions: the embrace of opposites and impossibilities, as described by d’Aquili and his co-authors in *The Spectrum of Ritual*. The excitation of the hemispheres and the spillover between them, which causes them to fire together rather than alternately, produces “gestalt, timeless, non-verbal experiences” and this is perhaps its secret. It is the escape from language and the categories of language and particularly the categories of time, where we must exist but where we do not want to be. It is to live in the elusive eternal present, forever lost once consciousness and language planted us firmly in the grasp and tyranny of time and the foreknowledge of death: Swinburne’s complaint against God.

Turner did not make the connection I have made. Time caught up with him and he died before he could do that. But I discussed this with him briefly and he agreed that the neural processes underlying trance and ritual were there in spontaneous *communitas*, and that societal stress could stimulate the need for such an escape and so stimulate the same or similar processes in the brains of participants. It is “a dimension of all societies” because all society (or culture) is, as Freud and Popper saw, inherently stressful, *Unbehagen*, and because the response to it is a dimension of the neural system of all humans. It is one place we can go when we need to escape from structure, and we do.

After Turner died I had to take his place at a conference (on science and religion) where I presented what I summarized in *The Search for Society* on brain, memory and evolution. But I have had to wait until now to make this point, and to make it inadequately. He has much more on ritual, symbolism, play and archetypes, where he accepts Jung’s contention that for man: “The form of the world into which he is born is already inborn in him as a virtual image.” So be it. The torch gets passed. It is one way we beat time.

So *communitas* and structure are dimensions of all societies, not stages in societal development. Turner sees it as a dialectical process in which *communitas* opposes structure and the outcome is *societas*: “society” as part of a process of continual change. In the boring, micro-managing future *societas* that Fukuyama envisions for us, they will both be there, and we shall need them both. There is a flash of *communitas* in those huge crowds demanding war and feeling a sense of transcendence in national unity that makes them part of a vital organic whole. But there it is absorbed by nationalistic tribalism, which declares a separation from, and superiority to, humanity as a whole.

But the link is there; it was there at Obama's victory speech and the Inauguration. It is something that is always with us. It need not be so; we could have evolved differently; the brain could be other than it is. But this is the way it is because this is the way it evolved, and we are stuck with it. The tribal imagination and the civilized imagination are both lodged in the same brain and tap the same resources. We do not leave one behind as we develop.

Styles and Stages

Mary Douglas, another great teacher about ritual thinking, in her *Leviticus as Literature* makes a similar point. She compares the two books of law in the Torah, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. The former is written in a mytho-poetic style and is based on analogies; the latter is written in a rational logical style and depends on deduction and argument. (These correspond of course to the distinct functions of the right and left hemispheres of the brain.) The rules of sacrifice in Leviticus are not presented as utilitarian or logical commands, but rather as metaphors and analogies linking, for example, the body, the mountain (Sinai) and the tabernacle. The laws of Deuteronomy, like the moralistic Ten Commandments, are argued and rationalized. You shall honor your father and your mother *in order to* live a longer life, and so on. The injunctions in the ritualistic Ten Commandments (from the Book of the Covenant—see Fox 2006) seem more like Leviticus. You are not told *why* you should not seethe a kid in its mother's milk. It is simply inappropriate or incongruous; it contradicts the pattern. These are my examples not hers, but they make a point the reader will recognize.

Most commentators (her main example is Ernst Cassirer) have seen this as evidence of a difference in time between the two, with Leviticus obviously being earlier because of its more “primitive” style. But, she says, there is no evidence of this. What is represented here is a difference in *styles of thinking* not in *stages of thought*. “Neither mode is more primitive or more evolved than the other, each serves different purposes, the former [Deuteronomy] isolates elements it deconstructs, while the latter [Leviticus] projects whole patterns.” She compares this to Suzanne Langer's distinction between “discursive” and “presentational” ways of thinking. Any society is capable of both, but as civilization advances the rational and deductive mode comes more into play.

There might seem to be a difference between us here in that I argued that the injunctions of the Book of the Covenant were indeed older than their Deuteronomic counterparts, originating in tribal taboos. But she would not disagree. It is just that the writer of Leviticus, using very often the older material, was contemporary with the

writer of Deuteronomy, and was not simply archaic but was continuing to use the alternative mode of thinking and writing that remains valid in its sphere. The discursive writer of Deuteronomy would feel it necessary to make some kind of argument about the fate of the unfortunate kid and would rationalize the need to keep it from the maternal milk. Something like “For the Lord did not create the sustenance of life that it might consume the fruit of its own womb...” Clumsy, but you know what I mean. The presentational author of Leviticus would see no such need; he would rather add an analogy: “Neither should the seeds of a plant be roasted in its leaves...” or something such. The injunction is not for him part of a logical argument, but part of an aesthetic design.

She quotes Marcel Detienne (*Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*) who tried to understand why the Greeks became the first to develop “secular, open, enquiring, temporal” thought on any large scale. He calls it “dialogical” thinking as opposed to “analogical.” He put it down to the development of a warrior class in Greece that was free from kin ties and forced to be rational and democratic in its conduct of war and military affairs. This is an intriguing idea, but as she points out, it was not that the mytho-poetic form was abandoned, far from it. Both forms of dealing with reality are firmly there in our mentalities and will both manifest themselves in, for example the different approaches of art and science, even to our own day (viz. the “Two Cultures” of Charles Snow.) It is the balance that makes the difference, and that balance, tipped initially by the Greeks, was to be shifted decidedly in Europe.

The Fate of the Turkey

The same distinction is there in Lévi-Strauss's contrast between “concrete science” and “abstract science” (in *The Savage Mind*.) Mankind did not shed the first as it developed the second. They both remain in play and Francis Bacon used the one to lead into the other. The point crops up in unusual places. Nassim Nicholas Taleb in *The Black Swan* contrasts two other thought worlds, “Mediocristan” and “Extremistan.” He illustrates the first by the parable of the turkey. The turkey is well cared for, fed and nourished for 3 y, day after day with no variation. The turkey has no reason to think it will ever be otherwise, and if asked, would no doubt predict an indefinite continuance of this blissful state. Then on Thanksgiving Day it is killed; so much for extrapolating from trends. One of my first seminars with Popper at the LSE (I was there unofficially but he didn't mind) was about social trends and extrapolation. You cannot simply extrapolate, he said, you must know *why* the trend is going the way it is. If we know the turkey is being kept as a pet, then we can perhaps

predict its kind treatment will continue. If we know about Thanksgiving Day, our prediction will be very different.

For Tabel human thinking is dominated by the logic of extrapolation and the normal curve: the world of Mediocristan. This is how we like to think the world works. We expect the world to be tomorrow like it is today, and for things to even out and converge towards the mean and for large numbers to make things predictable because they will fall along a normal curve. This is true for a large part of nature, but it ignores the probability of the highly improbable. The supreme law of Mediocristan is “When your sample is large, no single instance will significantly change the aggregate or total.” The supreme law of Extremistan is “Inequalities are such that one single observation can disproportionately impact the aggregate or the total.” As examples: the average height of a thousand humans gathered at random cannot be affected by any one individual, however huge; but if you take the average income of the same thousand, and one of them is Bill Gates, his income would account for 99.9% of the total and completely distort the average.

But Tabel suggests we are not mentally equipped to deal with conditions in Extremistan even though they dominate our lives in the modern world, since *we evolved in Mediocristan*. What is more, conditions there were “as close to utopian equality as reality can spontaneously deliver,” while those of Extremistan are “dominated by extreme winner-take-all inequality.” We have created the social world of the highly improbable and the inequalities and stresses that characterize it, but we delude ourselves constantly that we are still living in the utopian egalitarian world of the literal mediocre in which we evolved, where nothing any one of us did could much affect the outcome for us all.

Taleb gives us the systems of delusion by which we try to stay mediocre (in the strict sense): we commit the “error of confirmation,” as Popper saw, in seeking always to confirm what we know rather seeking where we might be wrong. We commit “the narrative fallacy” in which we fool ourselves with stories and anecdotes. We also commit the error of “silent history” that Bacon first identified in the *Novum Organum*. The fact that someone prayed and survived is taken as evidence of the power of prayer, ignoring the many that prayed and were not saved. We hear it after every hurricane. The survivor proves nothing except what Goethe recognized as the power of wrong ideas.

Again, we do not shed the one mode of thought as we progress; we rather strive to maintain it and judge and govern the world by it however inappropriate it might be to our contemporary circumstances. Mediocristan reduces our sense of time and the urgent passage of time and the unreliability of the future. It is our natural world, our tribal default system, where we want to be, and we rationalize

constantly to keep ourselves there in spirit. We want it both ways: the potential benefits of Extremistan, and the safety of evolutionary mediocrity. We cannot resist the drumbeat sounding from Mediocristan and in social processes like *communitas* we seek to regain that lost world of utopian egalitarianism: a sense of the oneness of mankind rather than the drastic division of it into extremes of status or wealth or power.

But as Taleb shows, we seek the same safety at the highest levels of intellectual, political and economic thinking. The free-market liberal democracies of the Last Man do not keep us safe in Mediocristan. Rather they thrust us further into the world of large improbabilities and lopsided differences: look only at the growing inequality of wealth, at the mal-distribution of recognition (*thymia*) despite liberal democracy, at the booms and busts of the market. And we cannot predict the future. That if nothing else we should take from Popper, and Taleb does take it.

He puts it this way: “to understand the future to the point of being able to predict it, you need to incorporate elements from this future itself.” He gives the example of the Stone Age predictor of the future who would have to have known about the wheel. But if he knew about the wheel it was not part of the future, it was already present. We are not easily able to conceive of future inventions; if we were they would already have been invented. We cannot predict the future, says Popper, because we cannot predict technological innovations: we cannot predict change in the conditions of change. Think of predictions of the future by people who did not anticipate the computer.

Rules of Order

So *communitas* lives with structure, Leviticus with Deuteronomy, presentational thinking with discursive thinking, analogic thought with dialogic thought, concrete science with abstract science, Mediocristan with Extremistan. These are not stages of thought (the “pre-logical” to “logical” of Lévy-Bruhl) but modes of thought, the second mode coming to dominate the first over time, but not erasing it. And if they are constant aspects of all societies it is because they are constant aspects of all human brains. We cannot operate without involving both.

The contrast is there to some extent in the sacred-versus-profane distinction as seen in Durkheim, Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell. If we take Durkheim’s definition that the sacred is “things set apart and forbidden” then it works. These things can be infused with the supernatural but they don’t need it; they have their own life. The Stars and Stripes is revered with or without religious support. Sacred things are “forbidden” in the sense that they cannot be treated casually in a utilitarian or secular fashion; they

are “set apart” and they must be revered. Nothing that happened to the dead soldier who is the silent hero of the unusual film with Kevin Bacon, *Taking Chance*, was religious. Yet his journey across America to his burial in Montana was a profoundly sacred experience. I have just watched the careful and moving ceremonies in Normandy commemorating the sixty-fifth anniversary of D-Day. (I remember the original well: my father was there on D-2.) Apart from a brief invocation by an army chaplain in military uniform there was no religion, and yet the whole event was soaked in sacredness. These two are “aspects of all societies” and the profane is cradled in the sacred, even in those societies that claim to be the most secular.

The binary contrast keeps cropping up. The poles suggested are not totally isomorphic by any means, but the idea of a polar contrast is persistent. Historically it was there in Nietzsche’s contrast of Dionysian and Apollonian (in *The Birth of Tragedy*) that so influenced Ruth Benedict. More recently the medieval historian Daniel Smail, in *On Deep History and the Brain*, introduces us to two different “psychotropic mechanisms”—basically mechanisms that stimulate the production of those mammalian brain chemicals that make us feel good. He calls them *teletropic* and *autotropic* (cf. Turner’s *ergotropic* and *trophotropic*.) The first involves altering the moods of others, the second altering one’s own moods. The first characterized traditional society with its ranks and hierarchies where ruling elites manipulated moods and the very order of society had a soothing effect on the brain. This shifted in the “long eighteenth century” (1660–1820) with the rapid growth of individualism, to the second or autotropic system in which there was a massive effort by people to alter their own moods by substances obtainable on an increasingly unregulated market. Tobacco, chocolate, coffee and gin were the original popular forms of autotropic satisfaction. Both mechanisms are there and available, but changing social conditions tip the balance. It is a familiar story. Smail thinks we should consider “deep history” in order to understand this shift: a history that would include the whole of prehistory and beyond into the history of the hominids and primates, and the formation of the brain.

He could not be more right. We never lose anything in evolution; we constantly reproduce that which produced us. The savage mind lives with the civilized, the Old Adam with the Last Man. The Open Society needs its Closed elements; the autotropic tends to run wild unless constrained by the security of the teletropic. The profane is nurtured by the sacred. Ted Hughes has the two poles of the “mythic” and the “realistic”—two modes that evolve at different rates but can find their unity in ritual drama as in fifth-century BC Athens and Elizabethan/Jacobean England “where the mythic plane itself tilts and pours down the historical cataract.” We may be due for another such period,

which could help explain the persistence and expansion of ecstatic religion. These opposites then compliment each other and they should respect each other, for if they do indeed face the End of History then they will have to fall back on each other to tackle the unpredictable consequences. In the end they are all each other has got.

Francis Fukuyama, with the absolute honesty that is characteristic of his thinking, has come to understand this fully. In *The Great Disruption* he challenges his own conclusions on the End of History, and gives us some slender room for hope. His subtitle tells the story: *Human Nature and the Reconstitution of the Social Order*. While he had seen, in his first book, the Old Adam rebelling against the society of the Last Man, here he sees the disruptions in the inevitable liberal-capitalist-democratic society only being repairable and redeemed by the virtues of the Old Adam. The miracle (Gellner) of industrial-scientific society succeeded, but at a cost. The cost was, as the early sociologists taught us, the dissolution of social bonds with the growth of individualism and the isolation of the individual. Even so, for Fukuyama’s end-of-history thesis, these societies meet Hegel’s criteria for the universal extension of *thymia*, recognition, and so there is, at least in the world of ideas, nowhere else to go. But what about the costs?

I was moved when initially thinking about Fukuyama’s thesis to ask: even though the liberal-democratic-capitalist societies may meet Hegel’s idealistic criteria, could it be that they have simply become too complex and too expensive to sustain, despite this virtue? Could it be that the authoritarian capitalism of Singapore and China, or the traditionalist and familial capitalism of Japan offer more viable alternatives? They simplify life at all levels and restrict freedoms we Americans cherish; but they also seem to reduce some of the chaos and hence the costs that inevitably go with such freedoms.

There is nothing in Islam that is inherently incompatible with capitalism as such, and it could be that some form of theocratic capitalism might emerge in the Muslim societies. Capitalism emerged from a puritan ethic in the first place; it could happen again. This is a cost benefit situation, and the costs of unrestricted capitalism could be too great, as we are finding in the latest financial meltdown. If Communism and Fascism were not the right answers, and if Welfare Socialism as in Europe (the “Third Way”) staggers and falters under its mountain of expense, history may look elsewhere before it decides to rest on its thymotic laurels.

Fukuyama understands the problem. He notes that we in the capitalist West originally expanded individual choice at the expense of social bonds. The Industrial Revolution forced this development further, and the tight moralism of the Victorians, under the last gasp of which I was raised, was the response of society to that challenge. But we have,

he argues, recently gone through an even greater disruption: the displacement of the industrial society by the information society (Daniel Bell's "post-industrial" society.) The result is evident in the rise in crime, decline in fertility, collapse of the family through easy divorce, illegitimacy and co-habitation, and the general precipitous decline in trust in government and social institutions generally.

The catalogue is familiar and the causes much debated; he deals with all this very thoroughly. But what is interesting is Fukuyama's assertion that there is a reservoir of human action that is not the product of legislation or rational choice or culture or anything but the evolved need of human organisms to be social: to live in groups according to rules, just as they speak languages according to rules, both of these tendencies rising spontaneously. This does not mean we are spontaneously angelic and cooperative any more than we are cunning and competitive. It does mean that like our primate ancestors, and those tribal ancestors of the Stone Age, we are intensely social animals and we need society and we create it and re-create it to meet our needs.

As Thomas Jefferson and the Moral Sense school maintained, and as Darwin himself argued and Henri Bergson repeated, and as James Q. Wilson has recently re-affirmed in *The Moral Sense*, we are social creatures imbued with a need for morality: not goodness necessarily, but some kind of normative order in which to exist. Consciousness demands no less, for without rules we cannot predict each other and we cannot order our lives. Thus no matter how great the disruptions, we will draw on this reservoir to repair our societies and produce some kind of rule-driven behavior to govern ourselves, whether in poetry or society. This is human nature; it is the way we are.

This is what some of us have been saying for years, in the teeth of moral relativism (and for that matter what Aristotle said two-and-a-half thousand years ago.) Fukuyama handsomely acknowledges all that, and summarizes the findings of evolutionary biology in a masterful way. To translate him again into my own language, we might say that the Great Disruptions are the blips at the end of the blip that is history as we conceive it through our chronomyopic lens. They are the results of the convulsions caused by the huge increase in population and rapid technological development in the brief interglacial period in which we are living. Our default system of social behavior has not changed from that of the Upper-Palaeolithic savage. We are that savage, with all his tribal strengths and weaknesses.

The history that may be going to end is an extension of the millions of years of time in which we evolved. Evolution is history with time for genetic changes to take place. That history will not end and cannot end, unless we

are wiped out or wipe ourselves out. Civilization can disrupt itself in many ways and in doing so move our behavior further and further from the Palaeolithic baseline (*Search for Society*.) But in the end what is there is the savage mind, and in the end that is us, and is both our limit and our hope. We shall never be freed from the tribal imagination as we might be freed from a particular form of economic or political experiment. The result of these experiments in civilization that we call history is still in doubt, and the experiments may well come to an end, but the savage mind is with us forever. The Old Adam will have the Last Word.

The Religion of Humanity

It is generally agreed that the founder of Sociology as a specific science—the inventor of the Latin-Greek hybrid word itself (*socius-logos*)—was Auguste Comte (1798–1857.) Comte understood the limits of rationality in a very profound way. Thought for Comte evolved in three stages from the theological (magical-religious) through the metaphysical to the positive. This last stage of Positivism was thinking and action based on hard science, and Comte's vision of the future was that of a social utopia based on humanism and science: the heir to the Elizabethans and the Enlightenment. But he knew not to trust science or humanism *as such* with the handling of a future society. He invented a "Religion of Humanity" complete with its own secular saints (Caesar, Dante, Shakespeare) and its secular calendars and rituals, to handle social order and social cohesion.

In the London of the nineteen fifties that I knew there was still an active Positivist Church. Harriet Martineau had expanded Comte's influence with her famous rendering of his *Cours de philosophie positive*. A national Positivist Church still exists in Brazil, where Comte's ideas fueled the developing universities and where Lévi-Strauss cut his ethnographic teeth. (The Brazilian flag carries a Portuguese derivation of Comte's Positivist motto: *Ordem e Progresso*—"Order and Progress.") Comte understood, as did Weber and Durkheim, that a purely rational society would not work. There had to be some framework of belief and ritual that was unchallengeable and that inspired a reverence for common goals, in order to motivate a collectivity of strangers to behave as if they were close kin: to hold them together, to produce that *socius*, that bonding which is the essence of association, of society. The rational *logos* alone would not do it.

This is what Edmund Burke so intensely understood, and strangely he shared this conservative understanding with his nemesis Rousseau, who invented the term "Civil Religion." Both of them saw this as a necessity of human

nature, although they did not have the time perspective to see the actual and deep historical context in which that nature was developed. But Rousseau would have been pleased with our conclusion that it is ultimately the wisdom of the savage mind (noble or ignoble) that we must trust, if not in the rather quaint form that Comte modeled it, to give us an anchor in the sea of rational possibilities where we seem to be floundering.

The trick lies in getting the balance right—as between rational and sectarian activity in science for example, the sectarian pushing along the rational without overwhelming it (Fox 2006.) It is there in the balance between the free rein for the accumulation of wealth in a free market system, and the re-distributive impulse of the tribe, where, to quote the Bantu “The chief’s granary is the granary of the people.” Progressive taxation and public welfare show an understanding of this, as do the Guggenheims, Carnegies, Fords and Rockefellers. Perhaps the best example is the role of constitutional monarchy in the evolution and preservation of democracy, especially in ensuring the legitimacy and continuity of government and the peaceful transfer of power after elections. The monarch provides the fixed center of legitimate authority that is unchallengeable, and thus leaves the politicians free to be politicians and vulnerable to challenge.

The American elective monarchy does not work very well in this respect. The President has to become an unholy trinity of man, politician and office. We can despise the man and hate the politician, but we must revere the office. This can become an impossible balancing act. For example, if he falls morally he can fail politically. Constitutional monarchs (kings and queens with only symbolic powers) on the other hand, are pretty well immune from this fate. “The Queen reigns but does not rule.” We do not feel responsible for monarchs since we did not elect them. What is more since they partake of the divine (“The king is dead, long live the king”) they can behave as badly as the gods have always behaved and still be worshipped.

The old gods (think of Zeus, Aphrodite, Wotan, Krishna, Trickster) were amoral, selfish, scandalous, violent and adulterous, and their worshippers loved them, just as democratic and republican people love the royal families today. The funeral crowds for Princess Diana (appropriate name) in the London streets, with their massive display of genuine grief and the invented ritual of flower throwing in the path of the hearse, were pure *communitas*. Puritans and rationalists have never understood this unreasonable, and for our argument tribal, appeal of royalty. Douglas MacArthur understood the appeal of the tribal imagination when he insisted that the Japanese, after their devastating defeat in WWII, be allowed to keep their emperor, who was then incorporated into a constitutional monarchical system that has been an obvious success. The Spanish understood it equally

well when to heal the wounds of their caustic civil war they restored the monarchy on the death of the dictator Franco. Freely elected socialist governments in Europe live perfectly happily with their hereditary monarchs.

The American substitute perhaps lies in the intensity of Civil Religion in the USA as a platform for the democratic ideal, as Robert Bellah reminded us. Walk down the Mall in Washington DC and look at the larger-than-life monuments to the Founders and the reverence of the crowds filing by; listen to schoolchildren reciting the pledge of allegiance and re-telling the myths of national origin; see the totemic reverence for the remaining copies of the Constitution and the Declaration, and the original Stars-and-Stripes; watch the crowd at a sports event singing the national anthem and saluting with solemnity and genuine feeling, that totemic flag; take part in the national rituals of Thanksgiving and of Super Bowl Sunday (which has replaced Easter Sunday as *the* national festival.) Be involved in a Presidential Inauguration or the ceremonies for the nation’s warrior dead on Memorial Day vividly captured in the Durkheimian ethnography of W. Lloyd Warner’s *Yankee City* series.

Experience these and the deep emotions they can arouse, and Comte’s ideas don’t seem so quaint after all. Civil Religion is the infrastructure of Civil Society. Even the most atheistic and ruthlessly secular of regimes realize that they need their rituals and ceremonials, their prophets, saints and heroes, their sacred books and doctrines, their titles and hierarchies and systems of honorific rewards. The gruesome versions of these regimes can frighten us to the point where we reject the whole package; where we see it as nothing but the Closed Society closing in on us with its uniformed thuggery. But then we see the gentle ceremonies of Inauguration Day or the State Opening of Parliament, or a Royal wedding or funeral, and are perhaps reassured that there is a benign form that taps the virtues of the tribal and avoids its brutalities; that is patriotic without being jingoistic; that as President Obama said, will use the power of its influence, not the influence of its power.

Comte wanted of course to have all humanity united in his secular religion, and perhaps the United Nations could take time from its practical activities to develop the international equivalent of a Civil Religion: to become less of a bureaucracy and more of a priesthood. It would be up against the elemental pull of tribal identification that fuels the national versions, but the tribal imagination can always be trusted to fool itself. It wouldn’t be the first time: nations themselves fool us into imagining we are large families; the imaginative Family of Man might not be such an impossible idea.

It would have on its side the indisputable advantage of being true. The work of evolutionary geneticists like Luca Cavalli-Sforza (*Genes, People and Languages*) and Spencer Wells (*The Journey of Man*) on human DNA shows us all to

be descended from a small band of people in Africa some sixty thousand years ago. Perhaps the flag of the United Nations should be based on Cavalli-Sforza's diagram of world genealogy. This would be more meaningful to the idea of the unity of mankind than the bleak abstraction of linked circles. The Family of Man is no longer a utopian slogan but a genetic fact. But this profane fact needs to be cradled in a sacred Religion of Humanity, as Comte saw in his touching way, if it is to be effective as a symbol of human unity; if it is to help the floundering Last Man tap the oxygenating energies of the Old Adam; to tame but not extinguish the bright flame of the savage mind.

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