

*Family Values in a Historical Perspective*

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## LECTURE 1. FAMILY VALUES IN THE PAST

### *I. Introduction*

A year ago, the newspapers, TV programs, and airwaves of America were filled with gabble about traditional “family values.” Just what these values were was never clearly explained, but the argument evidently depended upon a theory of a Golden Age. According to this theory, somewhere in the American past, certain values had been held in high esteem, as a result of which the society as a whole had been peaceful, cooperative, hardworking, and virtuous, thus making America the greatest, the most prosperous, the freest, and politically the most stable republic on earth. The purpose of these two lectures is first to identify the history of these values and second to chart their rapid collapse over the last thirty years. In doing so, I want to put the American experience in its Western European context.

Let me begin by stating briefly where intellectually and morally I come from. I am agnostic, immigrant, moderately liberal, and meritocratic. Agnostic in the sense that I do not know whether God exists or not, and so far as I can see the only way to find out is to die, which seems too high a price to pay for knowledge that cannot be shared. I am also an immigrant, who spent his first formative forty years in England. Influences upon me were by no means limited to the family, where I spent relatively little time after the age of fourteen. I have been an American citizen for twenty-three years, but because of my lack of American acculturation I am not going to attempt to discuss in detail one vital aspect of family values in America, namely the problem of race. It is obviously of central importance, but is beyond my competence to speak much about.

On the one hand, I am a liberal in the English sense of being willing to experiment in change and anxious to support rights for the individual against the state. But at the same time I recognize the need for limited state intervention to curb the ugly aspects of capitalism, to operate an efficient welfare system, and to regulate society for the public good. I subscribe to the definition of a liberal offered by my much admired late friend Judith Shklar: “somebody who thinks that cruelty is the worst thing we can do.”<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, I share with conservatives their respect for tradition, as both a social glue and a source of wisdom. In short, I respect both Edmund Burke and John Stuart Mill.

I am a meritocrat in that I value inherent justice for the individual, and the benefit for the society, of a system by which all careers are open to talents, regardless of race, sex, creed, or status. This is why all my life I have fought both old boy nepotism and patronage and discrimination against women, Jews, and blacks in the admission to positions in academia, which is the only arena in which I have much influence. It also makes me very uneasy about racial or gender quotas.

I am also old: I am nearly seventy-five. And I am well aware that throughout history the old have tended to believe that the manners and morals of the young were going to the dogs. But I would point out that this does not preclude the hypothesis that occasionally they may turn out to be right.

I should warn you that I am singularly unqualified to give these lectures. I am an historian, not a moral philosopher, and my expertise lies in English history, not American. My first problem is that I am not clear about what “family values” are. As Ludwig Wittgenstein pointed out, a description of a fuzzy object is bound to be fuzzy if it is to be accurate: so what are family values? The best I can do is to summarize how the fight to appropriate the term first entered the American political arena. In 1976, the Republican Party platform lamented an erosion of “family structures and

<sup>1</sup> J. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), pp. 43–44.

family values,” which it attributed first of all to rising divorce rates. However, presumably because there was not a shred of evidence that Democrats were divorcing more frequently than Republicans, this argument was quietly dropped. But as we all recall, it was in the Republican Party Convention in 1992 that Pat Robertson and Dan Quayle seized on “family values” as a key to what Republicans stood for and accused the Clintons of planning to use the state to “destroy the traditional family.” Defense of “family values,” later softened to “traditional values,” was used throughout the campaign as a code word for opposition to abortion and homosexual rights in particular, as well as to the drug culture and changing moral standards about sexual behavior in general. It was the banner under which was to be fought the “cultural war” for which Pat Robertson summoned his followers.<sup>2</sup> By and large, it could be said that the Republicans floated to power from 1980 to 1992 on the family values raft despite the fact that all the data about those values showed them to be collapsing under them. It is evidence of the efficacy of Republican rhetoric that violations of “traditional family values” are today more frequently associated in the public mind with Democrats rather than Republicans. The political comedian Jay Leno has lent credence to the hypothesis by remarking: “With Democrats you joke about sex and drinking, with Republicans you joke about money and power.”<sup>3</sup>

A spokesman for the Family Values Research Institute recently observed that “our family values are a mom and dad rearing the child.”<sup>4</sup> The trouble is that this category comprises only a fifth of all households in America today. Nor were the figures much different centuries before, when high adult mortality created almost as many single-parent households as there are today, when a high adult mortality society has been replaced by a low adult mortality

<sup>2</sup> W. Safire, *The Definitive Guide to the New Language of Politics* (New York, 1993); I am grateful to Mr. Safire for permission to use this information in advance of publication.

<sup>3</sup> *New York Times*, July 26, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Knapp, cited in *New York Times*, September 30, 1993, p. C10.

one. All that had happened to the family unit before 1950 was that divorce came to serve as the functional equivalent of death, just a different way of ending a marriage. Nor is it true that families are havens of security in a heartless world. Except in America, whose inhabitants are so busy killing each other randomly that the normal rules do not apply, more homicides take place within the family than without, while battered wives and sexually molested children have always been numerous, if ignored. Families have always been centers of conflict over property, power, and effect, but not in the simplistic way of gender solidarity of men against women, as some feminists are anxious to persuade us. Nor is it true that the family is the sole medium for the transmission of "family values." In all societies and especially America, which is and has always been the most religiously oriented society in the West, the role of the churches has been of major importance, as have been the schools, which until recently were so central to creating the great American melting pot.

If we try to define family values, they seem to fall into five major groups affecting behavior in five different areas. First come attitudes toward the relative roles of the society and the individual and the socialization of the child to fit into the group; second, attitudes toward work and the accumulation of worldly goods; third, the rules and regulations governing all aspects of sexual behavior; fourth, attitudes toward religion. And finally, attitudes to race, a subject I shall largely omit because of ignorance and lack of time.

Taken instrumentally, these family values can be seen as the values needed for members of the lower middle class to obtain self-respect and to get on in the world: namely hard work, thrift, sobriety, self-discipline, delayed gratification, reliability, a sense of responsibility to the self, the family, and the society, and a competitive desire for one's children to obtain an education and to succeed.

In 1983, Mrs. Thatcher called on Britain to return to "Victorian values." By this she presumably meant the value of the respectable,

priggish, god-fearing, patriotic, ambitious middle and lower middle class from which she sprang — those who took their moral guidance from Horatio Alger in America, and from Samuel Smiles in Britain. The weakness of such calls, however well intended, is that, even if a moral sense is innate, the precise objectives are determined by culture and therefore are very variable.<sup>5</sup> A case can be made — and is made by conservatives like Paul Johnson — that what has happened in the last thirty years is a proletarianization of the middle classes, rather than the other way around. Unfortunately, it is the more socially disruptive, violent, and disreputable aspects of proletarian culture that seem to have won the day, rather than the sterling ones that are also part of it.

There is no doubt that in America, ever since Watergate, the Wall Street scandals, and the disintegration of the inner city family, ethics have now suddenly become fashionable again, at any rate as a subject of conversation and speculation among intellectuals and on campuses. Centers for Ethical Studies are springing up all over. Hospitals are hiring ethical advisers on triage. Medical schools and law schools are hurriedly introducing courses on ethics, if only to damp down malpractice suits. Harvard's new core curriculum includes, I am told, a category listed as "moral analysis." If the next generation is not more morally aware than the last, it will not be for lack of trying.

As a participant in this debate, I do have one thing going for me. I am among the few present-day historians always to have believed that history has a moral component to it. I have never agreed with the wholly relativist position taken by many of my colleagues. They have followed the anthropologists who have argued that any cultural practice, religious ritual, or political organization, however obscene, cruel, or murderous, whether it be the burning of wives in India, head-hunting in New Guinea, or

<sup>5</sup> *W. Kay, Moral Education: A Sociological Study of the Influences of Society, Home and School* (London, 1975).

clitoridectomy in East Africa, is as entitled to respect as any other, because it is part of native culture.

Nor am I one of those historians — all too common and influential these days — who carry the self-evident hypothetical and provisional aspects of truth to the point of claiming that there is no objective truth in history, but only a set of linguistic rhetorical constructions. Nor do I believe that any simple model of historical evolution will serve, whether it is based on class, as used to be so fashionable not so long ago, or even upon the now chic trio of race, class, and gender. History is too messy and complicated for such simple explanatory models. And the history of values is messier still.

The concept of family values is not a trivial theme for a historian to investigate. Emile Durkheim once said: “Tell me the code of domestic morality and I will tell you the social organization.”<sup>6</sup> Durkheim was here being boastful, but he and former vice-president Daniel Quayle share a point. They both see family values as affecting the social and political system.

## *II. Family Values in the Past*

### *1. Basic Principles*

In order to get a handle on the truth of this connection and put our present situation in its historical perspective, let us now go back 300 years and examine just what family values were and how effective they were in influencing behavior in the past.

The origins of the system of values go back to the Early Reformation Humanists, that is, intellectuals such as Erasmus and Vives, writing in the 1530s. They developed a program of moral control and thus set the stage for the future. They demanded the inculcation in the home, the pulpit, and the school of obedience and deference, in order to modify behavior and prevent any re-

<sup>6</sup>Quoted by W. G. Runciman in “What Is Structuralism?” *British Journal of Sociology* 20 (1969), 257.



currence of destructive peasant revolts or rebellions of the poor against the rich. They demanded that the magistrates take a firm hand in crushing crime, robbery, and prostitution and above all inspire respect for the law; they threw in the need for a sense of community loyalty and cooperative behavior to provide a sense of citizenship. They proposed to help, by state-sponsored welfare, the old, the sick, and the unemployed. But they were prepared to hang criminals and to punish by incarceration at hard labor the idle homeless vagabonds. It was a program for moral control, constructed by both Protestants and Catholics, before Protestantism had taken hold in England or Germany. It was to be the blueprint of family values for the next 450 years.

Three hundred years ago, therefore, the overriding principle governing premodern societies was that of paternalism, shown by the reciprocal bonds of authority and deference. This is a very ancient doctrine, ideally suited to keep rough order in a precapitalist agrarian society. It was assumed as a given that God had created the domestic arrangements of society just as He had created that of the stars in the universe, that is, according to the principle of hierarchy, by which some were more powerful and richer than others, mostly through control of more property. This gave them a claim to unquestioning obedience and deference. Property was the key and personal patronage relations the cement.

The second principle was that all societies are authoritarian by nature, modified at the top in England and New England by the results of the prolonged seventeenth-century battle between king and Parliament for common law protections and ancient liberties. According to this, it was the right of the rich to live at ease, but in return, it was their duty to govern justly. The poor had a duty to labor and obey, while the rich had a duty to save them from starvation, provided that their plight was not caused by their own laziness. There was also widespread agreement on the application of moral concepts of justice to economic matters such as the fixing of prices, wages, and rents. Paternalism was thus a value system,

based on concepts of justice, perfectly adapted to a precapitalist agrarian society, and yet one that proved to be flexible enough to survive until the early twentieth century. It was not till then that it began to give way in the face of the problems thrown up by rapid demographic growth, urbanization, industrialization, the rise of a new middle class and its ideology of individualism, and the decline of religion in the face of Darwinian science and of skepticism.<sup>7</sup>

In the seventeenth century, everyone, on both sides of the Atlantic, followed Aristotle in believing that the family was a microcosm of society at large.<sup>8</sup> As John Milton put it: "The Constitution and reformation of the commonwealth . . . is like a building: to begin orderly from the foundation thereof, which is marriage and the family."<sup>9</sup>

Given this situation, what were the family values to which seventeenth-century thinkers were so attached?

## 2. *Piety*

Intense piety was a by-product of the breakup of Christianity at the Reformation, the success of the counter-Reformation, and the fissures among the Protestants into rival churches and denominations. In the late seventeenth century, in most family homes, there were "the daily performances of prayers and reading the scripture and repetition of sermons," all buttressed by attendance at church every Sunday and the taking of Holy Communion four times a year.<sup>10</sup> Not until the eighteenth century did these practices start to decline. Raised in a Calvinist family on a Connecticut farm, Lyman Beecher, who was born in 1775, recorded that when he was young "we always had family prayers, and I heard the Bible read every morning."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> D. Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England* (London, 1974).

<sup>8</sup> F. Dillingham, *Christian Oeconomie* (London, 1609); R. Cleaver, *A Godly Form of Household Government* (London, 1603); W. Gouge, *Of Domestical Duties* (London, 1622); W. Perkins, *A Christian Oeconomie* (London, 1618).

<sup>9</sup> J. Milton, *Works* (New York, 1931), vol. 4, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Autobiography of Alice Thornton*, Surtees Soc., 62 (1875), p. 217.

<sup>11</sup> *Autobiography of Lyman Beecher* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961).

Because of this stress on piety, before the mid-nineteenth century American universities were merely small colleges, each one dedicated to training clergymen and lawyers in its own particular sectarian branch of Protestantism. Innovation, experiment, and freedom of thought were the last things these institutions wished to encourage. Thus, in about 1870, the president of the Princeton Theological Seminary could remark with satisfaction: "Thank God, for fifty years not a single new idea has come out of Princeton."<sup>12</sup> According to these principles, undergraduates were strongly discouraged from thinking freely for themselves, for fear that they would come up with subversive thoughts. The value system was thus the exact opposite of what today we preach — and I hope practice — namely above all to encourage students to think for themselves.

### 3. *Obedience*

The second moral value inculcated incessantly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in church, in schools, and in the family, was obedience to superiors, expressed in overt acts of deference towards the father and husband and also toward all in official positions of authority.

Before insisting on the prime importance of obedience to superiors as the core of family values from the sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries, one caveat has to be made. There were at all times exceptional groups of radical religious sects, most prominent in seventeenth-century New England, England, and Germany. These radicals separated the original extremely egalitarian doctrines, as preached by Jesus Christ Himself, from the doctrine that magistrates and clergy imposed on the early church after the conversion of the Roman emperor to Christianity. This put the full backing of the state behind the imposition of a propertied, persecuting, and authoritarian church. Most of the radical sects were destroyed, but the best known of them, the Quakers, survived,

<sup>12</sup> George P. Schmidt, *The Liberal Arts College* (1935), p. 27.

although they still flatly refused to fight. Elements of these radical ideas are prominent in the American Constitution, but these were at the time exceptions to the rule.

The oppressive, prickly, almost paranoid insistence on instant obedience and overt marks of deference makes sense, given the instability and fragility of authority. It has to be remembered that Early Modern Europe was for over a century torn apart by mass peasant risings, aristocratic revolts, religious civil wars, and even a few radical social revolutions. Everyone knew that the state was weak, that society was unstable, and that nothing was more terrible than civil war, which led to horrible atrocities and physical and economic devastation on a large scale. The upper classes saw a Hobbesian world of disorder out there and had good reason to stress the doctrine of unquestioning obedience and respect, enforced by an ideology and by the ruthless use of coercion, as the only glue capable of holding the social and political system together.

The Reformation, by making the Bible freely available, positively reinforced the doctrine of family obedience. Never forget that John Calvin himself decreed the death penalty for children who were disobedient to their parents, and that all were convinced of the urgent need to crush Original Sin at the first sign of trouble.<sup>13</sup> In 1520, William Tyndale, an early translator of the Bible into English, warned children: "If thou wilt not obey, as at His Commandment, then are we charged to arrest thee; yea, and if thou repent not and amend thyself, God shall slay thee by his officers and punish thee everlastingly."<sup>14</sup> Autobiographies from the seventeenth century in America and England prove that in actual practice in most middle- and upper-class households, when the children came down to breakfast, the first thing they did was to kneel down

<sup>13</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes*, trans. H. Beveridge (Grand Rapids, 1962), vol. 1, p. 345.

<sup>14</sup> L. Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (London, 1977), pp. 173–77. (Quotation on p. 175).

to ask their parents' blessing. A New England book of etiquette published in 1715 told children always to bow as they entered the home and immediately to take off their hats; never to sit in their parents' presence unless invited to do so; and finally "Dispute not nor delay to obey thy parents' commands." Nor was this mere theory. Thus, the grown-up children of Jonathan Edwards of Yale were reported to have displayed exceptionally ostentatious acts of deference before their father.<sup>15</sup> In New England in the seventeenth century it was a crime for a child over the age of sixteen to curse or strike a parent, an act for which he or she could be publicly flogged.

These demands for ritual deference and unquestioning obedience did not of course come naturally and were the product of a massive use of both physical and psychological coercion. The beating of children began at an early age and did not end until departure from the university. Even undergraduates were flogged by the faculty. It would be hypocritical of me to pretend that I am sorry to have to tell you that Harvard was more backward than Oxford or Cambridge in abandoning this practice, not giving it up before the early eighteenth century. Psychological pressures were also applied. Parental blessing was withheld from the troublesome,<sup>16</sup> and young children were warned of the prospects of Hell and eternal damnation if they failed in obedience and deference.

If children were brainwashed and beaten into submission, so also were the grown-ups. In Early Modern Europe, men and women were constantly obliged to register their subordination to superiors by overt marks of respect: the women curtsying, the men removing their hats. This is what hats were for. Those in power (fathers, schoolmasters, clergy, university faculty, judges, JPs, noblemen, etc.) insisted at all times on receiving these marks of respect. For example, if in the seventeenth century you saw President Neil

<sup>15</sup> Stone, *Family, Sex, and Marriage*, pp. 171–72.

<sup>16</sup> *Autobiography of Lady Jane Halkett*, ed. J. G. Nichols, Camden Society (1875).

Rudenstine advancing toward you in Harvard Yard, and you failed to snatch your hat off when he got within a range of fifty yards, then God help you! You were in trouble,

It must now be clear that the difference between the moral atmosphere of the Early Modern period and that of today could not be greater. We in America above all encourage individualism and self-esteem, whereas the former inculcated “the great principle of subordination” as Daniel Defoe called it. It is interesting to note that the identical methods of brutal upbringing, and the same hostility to any spark of individualism, are still alive and well in present-day China, where the deputy director of child development remarked recently: “Parents like best for their children to be obedient. I think parents are worried that if children are too individualistic they might face trouble later on.” The Chinese to this day therefore teach children to “rely not on themselves but on an outside power, whether parents or society.”<sup>17</sup>

As for women, deferential patterns between husband and wife were based on the solemn promise by the wife at the marriage ceremony to “obey” her husband. Male commentators all reinforced the message. For example, in 1617, a clerical pamphleteer on ethics urged wives to admit that “mine husband is my superior, my better; he hath authority and rule over me. Nature hath given it to him, . . . God hath given it to him.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed antifeminist zealots declared that “subjection and obedience to husbands is required as peremptorily as unto Christ himself.”<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, wives also had reciprocal rights, such as to be maintained financially and not to be beaten unmercifully, and it is astonishing how, within the boundaries set by the paternalist model, wives so often managed successfully to maneuver so as to get their own way.

Even in the choice of a spouse, the principle of obedience to parents was still preeminent before the late eighteenth century.

<sup>17</sup> Dr. Wu Fenggang in *International Herald Tribune*, July 1, 1993, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> W. Whateley, *The Bride Bush* (London, 1617).

<sup>19</sup> J. Sprint, *The Bride-Womans Councillor* (London, 1699).

One very popular tract, often republished, had this to say about children's need for parental permission in the choice of a spouse: "Children are so much the goods, the possessions of the parents, that they cannot, without a kind of theft, give themselves away without the allowance of those that have a right in them."<sup>20</sup>

As we have seen, in the eyes of contemporaries, all this deference and obedience within the family was for centuries directly related to authoritarian deference and obedience in the state. It is therefore no accident that the American Revolution was accompanied by a collapse of paternalist family values and quickly followed by an explosion of violence on many campuses, including Princeton and Harvard. The students had read too much Tom Paine and had taken the first lines of the Declaration of Independence too seriously.

#### 4. *Lack of Ambition*

The third family value instilled into all children was passive acquiescence in one's lot in this world. It was obvious that a few were born rich, with golden spoons in their mouths, while many were born penniless beggars. This was regarded as the natural order of things, as designed by God, and every institution in society, including the family, carried the same message: accept your lot in life without attempting to better your condition, or worse still taking up arms to try to seize the power and wealth that has been denied you. If it seems unfair, justice will be done to you in the next world, but not in this. Defoe defined "the general plague of mankind, whence . . . one half of their miseries flow" as "not being satisfied with the station wherein God and Nature has placed them."<sup>21</sup>

#### 5. *The Calling*

The way out of the paradox of hard work and diligence without any ambition to rise above one's station in life was solved by the doctrine of "the calling." Hard work was valued, not as a

<sup>20</sup> R. Allestree, *The Whole Duty of Man* (London, 1663).

<sup>21</sup> P. Bakscheider, *Defoe: His Life* (Baltimore, 1989), p. 417.

means of advancement in life, but rather as a means to avoid idleness, which was thought — probably rightly — to lead directly to sin.

### 6. *Sexual Repression*

The last family value commonly impressed upon all classes, although largely ignored by aristocratic males, concerned concepts of honor and shame as they relate to sexual repression, especially for women. To enforce this indoctrination there was wide use of humiliating punishments for transgressions, such as being forced to stand naked in a white sheet before the whole congregation on a Sunday morning, while confessing to the sin of fornication or adultery. Inhibiting practices of this emotional intensity, backed up by both legal force and moral and religious proscription, induced profound feelings of sexual guilt. Here the authoritarian family, the authoritarian church, and the authoritarian state were reciprocally reinforcing.

The regulation of sexuality was of particular concern to the New England Puritans of the seventeenth century. The family values applicable to a woman were to obey her father or husband, to be a good wife and mother, and above all to remain sexually faithful — a ban that did not apply to men.

In the eighteenth century, the American and English working class, without the benefit of advice from their betters, adopted a more permissive attitude, routinely permitting sexual relations after engagement instead of waiting till marriage. Marriage thus followed intercourse, rather than the other way round.

You may well ask why I have not included abortion as an issue at the core of family values in the seventeenth century. The simple answer is that at that time it was hardly ever discussed, although it was undoubtedly fairly widely practiced, as we shall see tomorrow.

### *III. The Self-Improvement Model of the Enlightenment*

As we have seen, the ethical code of paternalism, inculcated by family, school, church, and state, was ideally suited to an



agrarian and lightly populated society, fearful of outbreaks of physical violence from below. By 1720, the beginnings of commercial competition and the rise of a professional middle class resulted in the development of a second set of family values, more applicable to the new economic and social conditions.

It was still paternalism, but stripped of its emphasis on piety, less oppressive in demanding deference, and stressing self-improvement. It still held up as the ideal a society based upon concepts of honor and shame, principles that Bernard Mandeville in his *The Fable of the Bees* in 1714 put as the first requirement of a civilized man and that he believed could be acquired by “early and artful instruction.” His model of family values applied only to males. It demanded a good knowledge of the classics and the avoiding of “gross vices, as irreligious whoring, gaming, drinking and [dueling].” This is a set of moral values based not at all upon the tenets of Christianity, but rather upon the values of classical authors, especially Cicero and Cato.<sup>22</sup> An example of his paradox that private vices can lead to public virtues involved those who were attempting to suppress prostitution. He called them “silly people,” since in fact a plentiful supply of prostitutes was the best, and perhaps the only, protection of respectable wives from rape by lustful men.<sup>23</sup>

The key to Mandeville’s world was a code of individual self-improvement, based on behavior that made use of personal self-interest and passions so as to benefit society. It consisted of diligence, hard work, deferred sexual and other gratification, self-discipline, sobriety, thrift, punctuality, cleanliness, and obedience to legitimate orders, all operating to satisfy the greed of the individual, but thereby creating wealth for the society. Where the doctrine differed from that of the calling was that these values were specifically designed to enable the individual to better himself in the world.

<sup>22</sup> B. Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, ed. I. Primer (New York, 1962).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71, 83–86, 122.

The code was brilliantly illustrated by William Hogarth's great set of engravings *Industry and Idleness*, published in 1747 and deliberately intended to be widely available and to set an example for the Atlantic world. The idle apprentice slept on the job, recovering from some sexual and alcoholic debauch of the night before; he spent his leisure hours gambling in the churchyard during divine service; he was fired by his master, failed to find employment, took to a life of crime as a highwayman, was arrested, tried, convicted, and hanged at Tyburn. The industrious apprentice, however, attracted the attention of his master by his hard work and other good qualities, was encouraged by him to marry his only daughter, and so obtained the necessary capital to go into business. By skillful use of the capital he grew richer and richer and rose to higher and higher status, ending up as lord mayor of London.<sup>24</sup>

Hogarth regarded himself as a moral prophet, whose engravings were "calculated for use and instruction of youth." Between them, Defoe, Hogarth, Mandeville, and others set up a self-improvement model that was ideally suited to the growing urban bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century, was eagerly adopted by Benjamin Franklin, and became the foundation of the American dream. The dream is that anyone, by personal exertions, can rise from a log cabin to the White House or from the assembly line to president of General Motors. Although it is no longer entirely true, of course, the myth is still alive, and America today is still remarkable by the standard of other Western countries for the ease of access up to the top, increasingly nowadays by the means of education. President Clinton is a perfect example of how the individual self-improvement model of family values is still flourishing in the late twentieth century. It is a code that ran parallel with that of paternalism right through until the late 1950s.

The family code for women was unaffected by the individualist self-improvement model, except to the extent that in the eighteenth

<sup>24</sup> *Hogarth: The Complete Engravings*, ed. J. Burke and C. Caldwell (Secaucus, N.J., n.d.); R. Paulson, *Hogarth's Graphic Works* (New Haven, 1965).

and nineteenth centuries more and more aspiring middle-class men chose educated women who could be a social asset in their upward climb. From the eighteenth century onward, there was a slow improvement in the education of middle-class women. Inch by inch, women were slowly beginning to get a toehold up the educational ladder, even if the object was still to catch and keep a husband, rather than to prepare themselves for participation in the public sphere.

#### *IV. Conclusions*

The first major conclusion is that the most highly prized of family values in the past was not at all ours of individual self-improvement and independence of thought, but obedience. This stress on obedience in the past was based on the sheer fragility of social bonds, and the ever-present threat of a relapse into anarchy, chaos, and civil war, a collapse of law and order, the appalling consequence of which is only too visible today in Bosnia, Somalia, and Haiti.

A big problem for historians is how during the course of the eighteenth century the Americans, brought up like the English as obedient servants of a monarchy and of its agents down to the patriarchal father, and living in an hierarchical society where everyone knew their place and stayed in it, first rebelled and then turned themselves into the free citizens of a turbulent democracy.<sup>25</sup> The democracy excluded women and black slaves, but that was only to be expected at that time; so, after all, did Classical Athens.

Today the ideology guiding family and social values in the West, and especially in America, is one of rugged independence, individualism, and frantic pursuit of personal happiness, and a deep faith in the American dream of upward social and economic mobility as a result of hard work and cutthroat competition.

<sup>25</sup> J. Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (Cambridge, 1982).

We accept that we should ride our children with a loose rein, encouraging them to find things out for themselves, stimulating their desire for enquiry, praising their independence of thought, and developing their capacity to defend their own positions. We also insist that life is a competitive struggle to get ahead and better oneself, the battle being fought on a level playing field for both sexes, an idea that would have horrified our almost universally sexist forefathers.

Two conclusions stand out. First, there is no Golden Age somewhere out there, where all the values we most prize were both fully accepted and implemented. Second, value systems, being aspects of a culture, are constantly on the move, although only twice—or possibly three times—in the long history of the West have there been major value revolutions. The first was imposed on the barbarians and Roman West by the slow pressures of early Christianity, backed by the power of the Roman emperor. The possible second was the result of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution in the eighteenth century. And the third was the one that swept over the West, and above all America, in the 1960s.

How successful was this tremendous effort in the Early Modern period to use the family as an instrument to turn out generations of pious, God-fearing, obedient, deferential, sober, industrious, but unambitious and uncompetitive citizens? The short answer is that we are not really sure. Martin Luther himself was disappointed in Germany, and a modern scholar has concluded that after a century of efforts “Lutherans had not succeeded in making an impact on the population at large.”<sup>26</sup>

The American and British evidence seems to tell a different story, at any rate concerning piety, obedience, and sexuality. The historical evidence for the success of religious and moral indoctrination in inculcating family values in Early Modern Anglo-America is a strong one, but most of them are not exactly the values for

<sup>26</sup> G. Strauss, “Success and Failure in the German Reformation,” *Past and Present* 67 (1975), 35–36, 40–41, 59.

which Pat Robertson and Dan Quayle are so anxiously seeking.<sup>27</sup>

Tomorrow I will try to show how in the 1950s and 1960s both forms of paternalist family values current between the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries quite suddenly collapsed. As a result, we are living in an age of unprecedented cultural conflict between generations, between the old and the new, the outcome of which is still uncertain. This cultural shift is one of the most striking examples of Stephen Jay Gould's theory of "punctuated equilibrium" of which I know. Why it happened, and with what consequences, and what we can do to guide, encourage, or mitigate those consequences will be the subjects of my lecture tomorrow.

## LECTURE 2. FAMILY VALUES IN 1993

### *1. Introduction*

Yesterday I talked about the past, a subject about which I do know something. Today I want to talk about the present, and particularly the young, from whom I am distanced by a huge age gap and by having lived a sheltered life in academia for half a century. This lecture is a jeremiad by an old man, lamenting the corruption of the times, and it may well be I have got many things wrong.

There was a time, back in 1961, when a president of the United States could say, in his inaugural address: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country" and could reasonably hope to be reelected. Thirty years ago, the result was a flood of idealistic youths into the Peace Corps. Today any politician who dares to suggest sacrifice for the common good by raising taxes is certain to be punished in the polls, as happened to Governor James Florio in New Jersey. What seems to have happened is that the sense of responsibility for others, which used to go along with a strong sense of personal rights and liberties, has been severely eroded. The civil society is collapsing and the quality

<sup>27</sup> S. Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York, 1992).

of life in the cities is unquestionably deteriorating. All that remains are excessive, almost antisocial, demands for total liberty for the individual to pursue the gratification of his or her own entirely selfish wishes, whether social or financial or sexual, without regard for the interests of the community as a whole or of anyone else. Many serious observers have claimed that the American family has been dying before our eyes over the last twenty-five years and that the values rightly or wrongly associated with it have in consequence also changed sharply for the worse.

If I seem critical of recent trends in America, please don't misunderstand me. I expect many of you are critical too. I have lived in America for thirty years. I have been an American citizen for twenty-three, and I propose to retire and die here. I would not live anywhere else in the world, despite the fact that it is not the same America as the one to which I migrated in 1963.

## *II. The Cultural Revolution of the 1960s*

### *1. The Facts*

What has gone wrong? John Updike has recently talked of "the pain of feeling we no longer live nobly."<sup>1</sup> This is a reasonable reaction as we nervously walk the filthy streets of New York, stepping over the inert bodies of the homeless. It is obvious that the way people treat one another in public has grown more callous. Good Samaritans are harder to find in the streets of big American cities these days than they used to be. And if you get mugged or stabbed in public, don't count on bystanders coming to your rescue.

Up to the 1950s, the old family values still held, as I explained yesterday. They included religious piety, obedience to parents and superiors, hard work, optimism about future upward mobility, and the deferment of gratification in coping with sexual passion. All these were still part of the inherited culture of the baby-boom gen-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in J. W. Bennett, *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators*, Heritage Foundation (Washington, D.C., 1993), p. ii.

eration, the largest in American history, who had been fathered by the veterans of World War II.

It was in the late fifties and very early sixties that the first signs of trouble made themselves felt, as electronic music from the Beatles burst over the airwaves, deafening and bewildering parents, preachers, and teachers; as Elvis Presley sang and strummed his guitar to throngs of hysterically screaming teenagers; as the pill was invented and marketed; as kids who had everything, thanks to the endless growth of more and more consumer goods churned out by a rapidly growing economy, now wanted more, but were prepared to give less in terms of obedience and hard work. The one, possibly traumatic, anxiety was the fear of the evil empire of Russia and its capacity to launch a nuclear war. People dug air-raid shelters and stocked them with food and drink — and also guns to protect them from their neighbors — while charlatans like Senator Joseph McCarthy stalked the land to rout out closet Communists.

By 1964, the rebellion against the 1,000-year-old culture of inculcated obedience to superiors broke out on the Berkeley campus and then spread elsewhere. To the astonishment of parents, teachers, and bureaucrats, kids no longer obeyed orders. Dr. Benjamin Spock admonished insecure parents, anxious only to do the right thing, not to reach for the hairbrush no matter how obnoxiously their children behaved. The children of the professional class took to dressing like beggars and, at the university, to enrolling in basket-weaving instead of economics, which drove their parents wild. These trends culminated at Woodstock, where the counter-culture composed of free sex, drugs, and opposition to the Vietnam War reached its peak. By the 1970s, the many who still subscribed to traditional family values were facing severe competition.

Today not only does the idealism of the 1960s generation appear naive in the extreme, but the consequent trashing of the traditional cultural norms and the rejection of all social, religious, and sexual controls can be seen to have had devastating consequences,

which may turn out to be long lasting. Soon after 1960, most of the key social indicators began to rise on the charts: divorce, venereal disease, illegitimacy, teenage pregnancy, abortion, child abuse, one-parent families, single-person households, drug abuse, high-school dropouts, teenage suicide, violent crime, and homicide all increased dramatically after 1960.<sup>2</sup> The quality of life in all the big cities began visibly to deteriorate, and nobody seemed to know what to do about it. And, quite suddenly, despite the fact that most Americans continued to believe in life after death, belief in the existence of Hell went away.<sup>3</sup> Once it was there, and then it was gone. Nobody was afraid of it anymore. At the same time, the words “dishonor,” “shame,” and “sin” disappeared from the vocabulary.

Over the past thirty years, many liberals have thought — naively as it turned out — that permissiveness and “doing your own thing” would lead to social harmony and personal happiness. It has therefore been left to the conservatives to marshal the data and offer the conclusion that, as Mr. William Bennett put it recently, “the constitution of America is not good. . . . Modern day social pathologies . . . seem to have gotten worse.”<sup>4</sup> He is absolutely right in seeing a serious deterioration in standards of social, sexual, and educational behavior among the young. Mr. Bennett is also right to claim that “our injury is self-inflicted,” issuing partly from the shift from a world of apparently inescapable poverty into a world of unprecedented affluence, and partly from a hedonistic ethic of immediate gratification and self-fulfillment, regardless of the cost to others. Where Mr. Bennett goes wrong, however, is on two points. First, he fails to point out that all Western European coun-

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, *Index*, *passim*; the proportion of single-person households grew from 8 percent in 1940 to 22 percent in 1980 (B. Arcand, *The Jaguar and the Anteater: Pornography Degree Zero* [New York, 1993], p. 158). By 1983, these single people were spending more time watching TV than working (Arcand, n. 13, p. 277).

<sup>3</sup> The shock to Roman Catholics of the disappearance of Hell is well described by David Lodge in his novel *How Far Can You Go?* (London, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> Bennett, *Index*, p. i.



tries are going through the same experiences as those now prevalent in America, although to a lesser degree. The deterioration of all the social indicators I have mentioned seems to go along with Western capitalist civilization, as the inhabitants of Eastern Europe and Russia are discovering, somewhat to their dismay. Homicide is the only area in which America stands alone.

It would be grossly unfair to leave the impression that there were no positive gains won by the generation of the 1960s in both the pursuit of individual happiness and the establishment of a more democratic and egalitarian society. Both men and women were finally released from their thousand-year-old grim Puritan straightjacket of prudery and suspicion about sexuality. Millions had been deprived of much sexual pleasure by these severe inhibitions. The coincidence of the removal of moral inhibitions with two technical breakthroughs — penicillin to cure venereal disease and the pill to block unwanted pregnancy — clearly increased the sum of human happiness, but it also had its dark side, which I will come to in a moment.

The other great achievement of the cultural revolution of the 1960s was to pose a challenge to all kinds of authority, from the father in the family to the tyrant or monarch in the state. Deference almost disappeared; there was a massive democratization of the power of all authority figures, who could no longer expect to be obeyed without question. This was a long process, which began in the mid-eighteenth century, and was observed by contemporaries like Dr. Samuel Johnson, but the great leap forward came in the 1960s. The most positive achievement of the generation — both black and white — that came of age in the 1960s was its success in liberating the Afro-Americans in the South from the web of Jim Crow laws that deprived them of political power and cultural equality and self-respect. That same generation also forced the authority structure at last to give equality of opportunity, both educational and in the marketplace, to blacks and women. Nor was the process a slow one. The drive began in the 1960s and

today, in 1993, blacks and women are gaining access to some of the highest and most important positions in the land. These are major achievements in which, along with the defeat of Nazi Germany, my generation can take some pride.

Furthermore, if we take a close look at Mr. Bennett's depressing graphs of social and cultural indicators, it becomes clear that a significant number of them are showing signs of flattening out and stabilizing, admittedly at a level much lower than the norm back in the 1960s. Contrary to popular belief, the homicide rate per 100,000 peaked in 1980, fell to 1985, and then started rising again, but has not yet reached the 1980 level.<sup>5</sup> The number of children on welfare has been flat at 8 million since 1980. Divorces per thousand married women have actually been falling a little since 1985, while the number of children affected by divorce has also been going down. SAT scores, although lower than they were in 1960, have been more or less the same since 1975. Although the proportion of high school dropouts, after falling sharply in the 1960s, has continued to decline, it has been at a much slower rate.<sup>6</sup> The usage of all kinds of drugs has also been dropping in high schools since about 1980. The proportion of the population who own their own homes, and thus have a stake in the economy, has been flat ever since 1973, and perhaps before. Finally, charitable giving as a proportion of GNP is rather higher than it has ever been since 1960, which suggests that many still have faith in the community.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, against the narrowing of responsibility and the cult of egotism in the "me generation," one has to set the rapidly growing power of the environmental lobby, which suggests that, at a broader level, more and more Americans are now thinking in universal terms about the planet itself and the limits that need to be

<sup>5</sup> *Newsweek*, August 15, 1994, p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> For example, the products of Mr. E. D. Hirsh's Core Knowledge Foundation (*New York Times*, OPED, September 4, 1993, p. 19).

<sup>7</sup> Bennett, *Index*.

placed on the exploitation of natural resources for individual benefit. And, finally, there are signs, here and there, admittedly few and weak, that some citizens, prodded by charismatic women social workers or by black clergymen, are beginning to band together to recreate community units and to take back the streets from the gangs, the thugs, and the drug-pushers.<sup>8</sup> It is not much, but it is astonishing that it is happening at all in view of the grave personal danger such work involves and the near-helplessness of the police, some of whom in some cities are on the payroll of the drug-pushers.

There are therefore, here and there, some faint signs of stabilization, although at a very low level. But today over a quarter of all children — that is, 17 million — live in single-parent homes, a proportion that has doubled in the last twenty years. Moreover, the proportion of pregnant unmarried teenagers has already reached the 10 percent level and is still rising.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. *The Causes*

There are many reasons why the cultural revolution occurred when it did in the 1960s. There was the coming to maturity of the pampered baby-boomers, who had lived through the longest economic growth period in American history; the concomitant explosion of the universities thanks to generous government subsidies; the steady empowerment of women; the entry of married women on a large scale into the work force; the sexual revolution, driven by new technology and an ideology of personal pleasure without responsibility; the sudden availability of drugs; and the profound distrust of all authority engendered by the disaster of the Vietnam War, followed by the scandals of Watergate, Irangate, and so forth. These revelations of government incompetence, corruption, and abuse of power have deeply disillusioned the American public, and especially the young. The Gallup poll shows that

<sup>8</sup> D. Terry, "Around U.S., Citizens Fight to Take the Streets Back," *New York Times*, November 21, 1993, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> *New York Times*, November 19, 1993, p. 41; Bennett, *Index*, p. 15.

even as late as 1970, 70 percent still had “a great deal of” or “a fair” trust in their government. By 1992, the proportion had slipped to a dismal 42 percent?<sup>10</sup>

It was fourteen years ago that Christopher Lasch first castigated American culture for its moral failure — caused by carrying “the pursuit of happiness” embodied in the Declaration of Independence “to the dead end of narcissistic preoccupation with the self.” He blamed excessive individualism for the growth of selfishness, permissiveness, lack of civility, and other signs of what he perceived as a civilization in decay. Lasch saw not only a decay of public life, but also a concurrent decay of private life. This caused personal bonding to become so fragile that it broke under the slightest strain, an observation proven by the astonishing explosion of the divorce rate between 1970 and 1985. But the key mental shift was that the young no longer accepted responsibility for their own actions — a position increasingly also taken by juries in criminal cases. Lasch’s recommended solution was of course a return to all the aspects of the traditional family values — the Puritan ethic of hard work, discipline, and obligation to the civil society. But how this was to be achieved he never made clear.<sup>11</sup>

James Hunter, in his interesting recent book *Culture Wars*, sees a comprehensive battle in progress between conservatives and progressives, extending over the family, education, the arts, the law, and electoral politics. I do not accept this unified vision of cultural conflict, and he himself constantly admits that there is a huge group in the middle who are not being heard.<sup>12</sup> The key unifying factor common to all these cultural wars is a clash of generations.

Of course, these middle-class cultural revolutions are not responsible for the plight of the inner cities and the inability of the

<sup>10</sup> *Washington Post Weekly*, November 8–14, 1993, p. 28.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York, 1979), pp. 18–19, 388–95.

<sup>12</sup> J. D. Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Defend America* (New York, 1991), pp. 59, 105, 161, 170.

underclass — mostly Afro-Americans — to escape from it. For them the major factor has been economic — namely the very high level of male unemployment and the debilitating experience of prolonged dependency on welfare.<sup>13</sup> In the inner city ghettos, black unemployment of male youth today approaches 100 percent. It is almost impossible to imagine the state of misery and despair induced by a situation in which the only male jobs available are the dangerous and evil ones of violent crime and drug pushing. In some ghettos, the street gang has become the substitute for parents, school, and church, as the sole purveyor of values. A whole generation of young blacks is in danger of ending up in prison or dead.

To make matters worse, in the last decade the distribution of wealth has been shifted by government action: the very rich have gotten much richer and the poor poorer. Meanwhile, our economy ceased to grow after 1973 and so has the real income of the middle classes.<sup>14</sup>

I want now to discuss what I regard as the most serious and deep-rooted crisis in our society, that of violence in the streets, itself a product of a collapse of parental control. Then I will deal with problems arising from the sexual revolution, for some of which I believe that solutions may be in sight.

### *III. The Symptoms of Pathology*

#### *1. Violence in the Streets*

In terms of violent crime, it is impossible to deny that everything is getting worse. When I was a boy, I could walk at any time of day or night down any street in Europe without any apprehension of danger. Today I can barely walk at night in Princeton,

<sup>13</sup> These are, of course, familiar conservative arguments. A good recent analysis of these is M. Magnet, *The Dream and the Nightmare: The Sixties' Legacy to the Underclass* (New York, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> Data published by the Census Bureau, cited in *New York Times*, October 10, 1993, p. E5.

New Jersey, or Oxford, England, without looking nervously over my shoulder. Of course, teenage males have always been violent. At that age they are flooded with hormones that provoke aggressive behavior, but in the past this was normally worked off by hard physical labor to earn a living or by service in the military. But although Europe shares the growing violence in the streets, the level of such violence in America is in a class entirely by itself. By 1980, the violent crime rate in the United States had reached a level that is many times higher than in any other society in the West today, and probably higher than at any time since the Middle Ages, to judge from statistics of homicide.<sup>15</sup> Eight out of ten Americans will be a victim of one or more violent crimes during their lifetime. What makes the situation so alarming is that it is growing worse far more rapidly than the size of the juvenile age cohort. Over the past forty years, violent crime and homicide have multiplied sevenfold in America and after a fall in the early 1980s are rising again.<sup>16</sup> Half of all 16-year-olds admit to having committed at least one violent crime, but teenagers are also the victims, and over a million of them have experienced rape, robbery, or assault.

At the same time, despite the public demand for punitive action, the length of time actually spent in prison by violent criminals is only half what it used to be, because of the grotesque overcrowding of courts and prisons. The courts are so choked with cases that they can only cope by the use of arbitrary plea-bargaining, while the prisons are so short of beds that dangerous criminals have to be paroled to make space for others. Willie Horton was just one example among thousands. We already have nearly twenty times as many people in jail, relative to the population, as does Britain. The numbers have increased fourfold in the last twenty

<sup>15</sup> Bennett, Index, p. 2; L. Stone, *The Past and the Present Revisited* (London, 1981), fig. 1, p. 279.

<sup>16</sup> *New York Times*, News of the Week Section, August 22, 1993; *Newsweek*, August 2 and 15, 1993, which offer an extensive overview of the situation.

years, with no visible effect at all on crime.<sup>17</sup> We also already have a larger proportion of our black population in prison than did South Africa under apartheid.

We have a good idea of the main causes of the explosion of street violence. The first cause is parental negligence, when both husband and wife have exhausting full-time jobs or there is only a single working parent. This situation is exacerbated by the failure of schools to adapt their hours to the new social reality of two working parents or a single working parent. They still close at the traditional hour of 3:00 P.M., and as a result today 80 percent of all schoolchildren return to an empty home. They are easy prey for the mass psychology of the street gang, which becomes a substitute for the family and is geared to collective acts of violence. The second cause is that this void is filled with watching TV, which is closely associated with the display of more and more, and more and more brutal, acts of violence, a slide that started with the movie *A Clockwork Orange* in 1971. Television alone has to be primarily responsible for kids as young as eleven starting to kill one another. It has been estimated that by the age of twenty-one the average American child will have witnessed no fewer than 8,000 murders on television.<sup>18</sup>

The third cause of violence is the ubiquity of handguns. America today is a society armed to the teeth and therefore accustomed to a level of homicide quite unknown in any other industrialized society, or indeed in the West since the sixteenth century. The family has to be deeply implicated in this situation, since so much of the killing is perpetrated by youths. The facts are as follows. There are now 13,000 handgun homicides a year in America — compared with 22 in all of Britain in 1990 — admittedly in a population only a fifth that of America.<sup>19</sup> Total homicides amount to

<sup>17</sup> *Economist*, October 2, 1993, The exact figures are 1,740 per 100,000 for America and 95 for Britain; *New York Times*, November 12, 1993, p. A29.

<sup>18</sup> M. Medved, *Hollywood v. America: Popular Culture and the War on Values* (New York, 1992); W. Bennett, *Index*, p. 20; *New York Times*, August 30, 1993.

<sup>19</sup> *Newsweek*, October 11, 1993, pp. 33–34, using data supplied by the FBI.

37,000 a year. This is the tenth largest cause of death in the nation, and since 1978 has been the leading cause of death among both blacks of any age and youths between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four, both male and female. Blacks form the majority of the perpetrators and of the victims. In at least one in three American households there is today a gun in working order, along with ammunition, so in case of family quarrels, a spouse no longer throws a plate at the other. He shoots her, or she shoots him. The fixation of Americans upon guns is for foreigners the most amazing, inexplicable, and horrific aspect of late twentieth century United States culture.

Nor is the situation a stable one. Between 1979 and 1989, there was a 60 percent rise in homicides by guns, and the rise of violent crime has merely stimulated more and more people to arm themselves, as shown by the current rush to buy guns by young women made unnecessarily fearful of rape by grossly inflated statistics produced by a redefinition of rape by radical feminists as any kind of sexual act done reluctantly and under persuasion.<sup>20</sup> It has recently been shown, however, that having a handgun in the house almost triples the chances of homicide within its walls. The reason for this is that most gun homicides in the home are carried out by a family member, rather than by a prowling burglar or rapist.<sup>21</sup> Most disturbing of all, over a quarter of a million youths are believed to take guns to school with them every day.<sup>22</sup>

It is hard to escape the conclusion that this explosion of homicide and violent crime, so unique to America, and so destructive to its quality of life, can be attributed primarily to the existence in private hands of some 200 million handguns. Their use is caused by the collapse of the family, the public schools, and the churches as institutions of moral and social control. High schools cannot

<sup>20</sup> The TV program *60 Minutes*, October 10, 1993.

<sup>21</sup> *New England Journal of Medicine* (October 1993). The safest thing for a respectable citizen with a gun in the house to do is to turn it in to the police.

<sup>22</sup> These figures are taken from *Violence and Youth: Psychology's Response*, American Psychological Society (Washington, D.C., 1993).



be expected to teach ethical behavior to children from negligent homes, especially when some 14 percent of students are armed, and when “a disturbing number of parents are vanishing not only from schools, but also from the lives of their kids.”<sup>23</sup>

Things have gotten so bad that foreign visitors to Florida go in fear of their lives, while the mayor of Washington has appealed — without success — for help from the National Guard, to try to recapture control of the streets of her city.<sup>34</sup> Combine that with the rapid increase in reported rapes, killings, and muggings, in the recounting of which the media seem to wallow, and you have a picture of a society in the process of full disintegration. As will be seen, the officially proposed remedies will, with the exception of more police on the beat, do no good at all, and may do positive harm.

## 2. *The Sexual Revolution*

The most visible sign of a sexual revolution is the end of modesty. The other day I saw an otherwise respectable-looking young woman walking along a city street, wearing a mini-skirt that barely covered her buttocks and a T-shirt with the logo “Just do it.” What is odd about this is that her appearance did not raise so much as an eyebrow, much less provide incitement to a rape. This is, I believe, a unique situation, unique in the sense that such a scene could never have happened before in the West, except perhaps at the height of the French Revolution.

The most serious consequence of the sexual revolution is structural, that is, the rise of the single-parent family. We have known for decades now that single-parent families consisting of a mother alone are more prone than those with mother and father together to fail to train the child to fit into the society. The majority of these single parents are poor, female, and also black, the leftovers of decades of successive generations of teenage pregnancies, unmarried mothers, and multiple divorces. The percentage of chil-

<sup>23</sup> Thomas French, “Parents Are the Real Drop-outs,” *New York Times*, August 22, 1993, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> *New York Times*, October 27, 1993, p. A23.

dren living in single-parent homes has trebled since 1960, to reach nearly a third of all families with children.<sup>25</sup> The consequence of this development was pointed out nearly thirty years ago by Senator Daniel Moynihan, and since then has only gotten worse.<sup>26</sup> Mr. Bennett is right to argue that these deep-seated factors making for disintegration of both the family and the school, together with the decline of the influence of the church, have created a situation that seems to be remarkably resistant to social engineering, whether by government or by private agencies.

When the combined effects of the pill and penicillin first arrived in the 1960s, they made a major impact on sexual behavior by removing both of the two adverse effects of sex, pregnancy and venereal disease, thus opening the way for what has been called a culture of sexual license.

If one wanted to place this sexual revolution in the worst possible light, one would point out that it has resulted in a rise to historically unprecedented levels in the proportion of illegitimate children born. Before the twentieth century, the percentage was everywhere below 10 percent, but today in America it has risen to 30 percent, with projections of a rise to 40 percent by the year 2000. It has also led to one and a half million fetuses being aborted each year; to the spread of a new, lethal, and so far incurable venereal disease, AIDS; and to the collapse of family stability, because of the increase of divorce to a point that today, if the statistics remain steady, half of all marriages in America will end in the divorce court. Serial polygamy is becoming the model of the American family.

#### *IV. Possible Solutions*

##### *1. The Concept of Limits*

The most promising solutions to deal with these radical changes in family structures and values since 1960 are all based on the

<sup>25</sup> Bennett, *Index*, p. 15.

<sup>26</sup> *Newsweek*, August 30, 1993.

Aristotelian theory of limits. It is an area where philosophy and theology are sometimes more of a hindrance than a help, and the enacted law is often no better, since all three are based on logic and principle and thus tend to push toward extreme nonnegotiable positions. The way most of us live our moral lives is in an illogical muddle, and only measures that recognize and cope with confusion and contradiction have a hope of doing any good. Compromise is the great art of politics.

In recent years, thanks to the focus of the media on the sensational, extremists have increasingly dominated the airwaves. Organizers of panels for discussion of public affairs inevitably search for figures with strongly held antagonistic views. This means that the moderate middle — sometimes the silent majority — gets short shrift.

To explain what I mean about limits, I propose to take three highly contested family value issues related to the sexual revolution, which are, I believe, now being quietly settled: first abortion, then homosexual rights, and last pornography.

## 2. *Abortion*

As I said yesterday, questions about the ethics of abortion were virtually unknown before the nineteenth century. Before that, it was a topic almost entirely neglected by theologians or moralists or lawyers. In the United States abortion before “quickenings,” that is, during the first five months before the fetus begins to kick, was not regarded as a crime in law or practice until the 1860s.<sup>27</sup> This neglect was not because there was no abortion going on. Partly effective herbal abortifacients were known,<sup>28</sup> and alternatives included violent jolting activity to detach the egg from the womb.

<sup>27</sup> For America, see *Brief of Two Hundred and Fifty American Historians in the Case of Planned Parenthood of S. E. Pennsylvania v. Robert Casey*, argued before the Supreme Court in 1991 (I owe this reference to Professor H. Hartog); for England, see A. McLaren, *Reproduction Rituals* (London, 1984), pp. 113–44.

<sup>28</sup> J. M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993).

Antiabortion morality is therefore no part of “traditional family values” associated with religion and is only a little over a hundred years old.

Public opinion today seems to be hostile both to pro-choice extremists who claim the absolute right of the mother to abort a fetus whenever and for whatever reason she pleases and also to those who hold that any abortion is the equivalent of murder. The fumbling attempts of the Supreme Court to find a middle ground in *Roe v. Wade*, despite their lack of philosophical, biological, or even legal logic, are, I believe, in practice successful. They allow both unmarried and married women, including teenagers, to terminate a pregnancy at will in the first three months, but only for good cause in the last three. In any case, the introduction of the pill RU 486, used shortly after conception, has the potential of replacing up to a third of the 1,500,000 abortions a year now being carried out in the United States.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. *Homosexuality*

The current solution to the problem of homosexual orientation and activity is to include it in the principle of acceptance of the right of consenting adults in private to do what they like to or with each other’s bodies, as long as no harm comes to others. This seems to be morally an entirely satisfactory position that is in accord with American concern for both individual rights and public decency.<sup>30</sup> It allows for general tolerance, as well as for the application of the principle of the limits. Thus one can support this position while being morally revolted at the sort of practices in the San Francisco bathhouses that killed Michel Foucault by giving him AIDS. This involved first orgies of anal and oral copulation with strangers; and second extremely brutal sadomasochistic practices taken from

<sup>29</sup> M. Klietsch, *RU 486: The Science and the Politics*, Alan Guttmacher Institute (New York, 1989), pp. 10–11. By 1989, RU 486 was the method of choice for early abortion of a quarter of French women, with a success rate of 95 percent.

<sup>30</sup> For a thoughtful analysis of the whole problem, see A. Sullivan, “The Politics of Homosexuality,” *New Republic*, May 10, 1993, pp. 24–36.

the Marquis de Sade, who in some quarters now seems to be being taken for a deep philosophical thinker. Moral revulsion against these practices is largely inspired by the total separation of the sexual acts from the slightest hint of personal psychological contact or emotion.<sup>21</sup>

The compromise now adopted in the U.S. military — the military don't ask, the volunteers don't tell — is in principle a totally illogical solution and is probably illegal, since it punishes free speech.<sup>32</sup> In any case no homosexual scandal could possibly exceed the squalor of the Tailhook Convention of 1991, which was a purely heterosexual occasion. If the compromise is declared illegal, the U.S. military will have to fall into line with the policy already adopted by all the allies in NATO and openly admit homosexuals, while still punishing ostentatiously homosexual behavior. None of our allies seem to have found that this policy leads to a collapse of good order and discipline.

#### 4. *Pornography*

Pornography must be the only kind of written or visual material that, according to the tastes of the customer, elicits either passionate disgust or passionate excitement or just plain boredom. There is general agreement that it is potentially dangerous stuff that should probably be kept out of the hands of minors. There is also agreement that displays of sexual violence should be banned, just in case it inspires anyone to imitate it, for which there is still no hard evidence. To be banned as obscenity, it has to pass three tests: it has no redeeming value; it obviously appeals to prurient interests; and it offends accepted local community standards.<sup>33</sup> The current solution to pornography is thus one of controlled tolerance,

<sup>31</sup> For the full story of Foucault's secret life and death, see J. Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (New York, 1993).

<sup>32</sup> It should be pointed out that the number of homosexuals in society is not the 10 percent reported by Kinsey, but only 2 percent. See J. A. Reisman and E. W. Eichel, *Kinsey, Sex and Fraud* (Lafayette, 1990).

<sup>33</sup> Arcand, *The Jaguar and the Anteater: Pornography Degree Zero*, p. 72.

which also conforms to the principle of the limits. This is, of course, not to the liking of either radical feminists or religious fundamentalists, but most people seem to accept it as a reasonable compromise.

What I have been trying to point out by offering you these examples of compromises, based on conflicting values in this country in the twentieth century, is first that they are illogical, incoherent, unprincipled, and lacking in philosophical bite. And second that they hold us precariously together and enable us to steer our way through what are undoubtedly very difficult times. The only principle worth holding on to is that of choosing moderation in all things, especially the passions, that is to say, the principle of the limits.

It has to be admitted by liberals that it is difficult to identify what social engineering programs will work and what will not. The only thing that seems clear is that, without the active cooperation of the community, no amount of money and goodwill is going to change the situation.

It has certainly proved possible by state action to reduce the proportion of the poor in the population from 23 percent in 1959 to 11 percent in 1973 — and then for Republican administrations to allow it to go back again to 14 percent.<sup>34</sup> But giving wholly amoral children a moral sense, or a sense of responsibility for their acts of violence or their reproductive behavior, is a different matter. The experts say that treatment of the wholly amoral child should start at three or even earlier, if it is to have any hope of success, and that after that it is probably too late. The American Psychological Society boldly claims that “there is overwhelming evidence that we can intervene effectively,” but the data in the fine print show that in fact there is virtually no evidence to prove the efficacy of any program for modifying aggressive behavior.<sup>35</sup> The only

<sup>34</sup> *New York Times*, November 7, 1993, p. E3.

<sup>35</sup> *Violence and Youth, Psychological Response*, American Psychological Society (Washington, D.C., 1993).

hopeful sign of progress in treatment is the discovery of a genetic hereditary defect — an aberrant gene — that seems to be linked with violent behavior.<sup>36</sup>

Obviously no one individual has all the answers, and especially one who is not a specialist in the field of modern social engineering. I am also well aware that many of my proposals are very unlikely to be taken up in the near future because of political, economic, and mental constraints and opposition, as well as lack of money. In this sense many are utopian. Many of them may turn out to be ineffective or even counterproductive. I am also aware that several proposals may be in violation of the current constitutional protection of individual freedom, something that makes me very uneasy. But the problem of violent crime today and the looming crisis of an AIDS epidemic will both need drastic measures that may include curbing both some of our liberties and our passion for endless litigation. So, let me spell out what seems to me to be the courses of action most likely to bring about the changes in those mental attitudes which underlie all our present problems.

### 5. *The Family*

Both liberals and conservatives agree that the root of our social problems lies in the disintegration of the family as an instrument of moral and social control.

1. Keep pressing for equal pay for equal work as an act of simple justice for women.
2. Introduce more part-time, and above all flex-time, jobs for working mothers (and fathers) with young children.
3. Give tax breaks to employers who provide well-run day-care centers for their employees.
3. Provide federal funding for preschools and day-care centers on the French model.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup>D. Brunner in *Science*, 1993, summarized in *Economist*, October 23, 1993; *Newsweek*, November 1, 1993, p. 57.

<sup>37</sup>*New York Times*, November 14, 1993, magazine section, pp. 59–62.

5. Legislate maternity leave for up to five years with some right to reemployment and retraining at the end.
6. Make maximum use of the technological revolution in communications (telephone, computer, FAX machines, etc.) so as to allow millions more young mothers to work from home.

Then there are a series of measures to prop up the family itself and to reduce the number of divorces of couples with young children, and thus of single parents:

7. Restrict access to divorce for parents with children at home (by demanding a waiting period, marriage counseling, etc.) in order to try to keep the family together until the children have left home. But keep divorce of parents whose children have already left home cheap, easy, and on demand (this is what John Locke advocated back in the 1690s).
8. Garnish salaries of divorced husbands who fail to pay alimony (and also fathers of illegitimate children).
9. Keep the provisions of access to abortion as they are at present according to *Roe v. Wade*.
10. Step up sex and birth control counseling for teenagers, even if the evidence so far is that it is of little practical use in preventing premature and unprotected sexual relations.

## 6. *Drugs*

1. Cut back severely on the totally futile attempts to shut off supply, which have never worked, all the way back to Prohibition.
2. Decriminalize, and heavily tax, marijuana, which is said to be used by one-third of the population and appears to be a no more dangerous drug than alcohol and less addictive.



3. Make a careful study of Holland, which has decriminalized *all* sale and possession of drugs both soft and hard.<sup>38</sup> Marijuana is treated as a recreational substance, like alcohol, and drug abuse as an illness, not a crime. What have been the results?
4. Follow the British by experimenting with supply of methadone or even their drug needs to hopeless drug addicts.
5. Greatly increase the number of centers for addicts seeking help in detoxification. At present there is everywhere a long wait, which is absurd.
6. Provide detoxification programs for prisoners.
7. Provide tax breaks for corporations that test, treat, and educate their workers.<sup>39</sup>

These measures should both decrease the profits of the drug lords and reduce the need of drug-users to take to violent crime in the streets. But we still have to change the minds of the young and their attitudes toward drug-taking, which is today seen as just another way, like irresponsible sex, to carry on the pursuit of unbridled happiness.

### 7. *Violent Crime*

The principal perpetrators of violence in the streets are unemployed black teenagers and gang members, and their weapon of choice is the handgun.<sup>40</sup> The key to change, however, is mentality. As long as guns are not only for self-defense but also serve as symbols of respect, self-esteem, empowerment, and a ticket for admission to the companionship of a gang, so long will juvenile killing continue to rise. A whole generation of black urban male

<sup>38</sup> *New York Times*, November 26, 1993, p. A12.

<sup>39</sup> Some 13 million Americans (13 percent of the work force) are already in such programs (*New York Times*, October 10, 1993).

<sup>40</sup> *New York Times*, October 20, 1993, pp. A19, 23; October 25, 1993, pp. A19, 23.

teenagers is in danger of being wiped out. Hopeful signs of stopping the carnage are that the Reverend Jesse Jackson has begun to crusade openly against black teenage auto-genocide;<sup>41</sup> that President Clinton has started speaking publicly about it; and that Senator Moynihan has revived his old argument about the disintegration of the black family.

But the current anticrime bill, which has bipartisan support, including conservatives, demands more police, armed with greater firepower from semiautomatic weapons, more prisons, longer prison sentences, tougher judges, fewer paroles, and more executions. This last proposal — more executions — wins public approval because most of those condemned to death are vicious killers, but there is no historical or current evidence whatever that capital punishment has ever acted as a deterrent. In about 1750 the magistrate Henry Fielding remarked that “we sacrifice the lives of men, not for the reformation but the diversion of the public.”<sup>42</sup> As for increasing the number of prisoners, who is willing to pay taxes for more courts and more prisons? Nobody is. But even if they were, not only are prisons schools of crime, which make felons worse rather than better, but the efforts at rehabilitation, such as they are, are doomed to failure. The numbers in prison have increased fivefold in the last twenty years, but crime and violence have merely increased almost as fast.<sup>43</sup> This is because imprisonment fails to attack the larger social, economic, and psychological causes of the crime in the first place, while every day each prisoner faces a Darwinian world of amoral brutality and the survival of the fittest. He therefore ends up as a more hardened and embittered criminal than when he went in. My proposals are rather different. I would lock up indefinitely the incorrigible 7 percent of violence-prone recidivists who are responsible for a half of all violent crime and subject them to intensive therapy. It was discovered

<sup>41</sup> *Economist*, October 16, 1993, p. 34.

<sup>42</sup> M. D. George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1924), p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> *New York Times*, November 24, 1993, p. A24.

that in Philadelphia, between 1945 and 1958, 7 percent of violent criminals committed two-thirds of all the crimes of violence, including three-quarters of the rapes and robberies and most of the murders. A test carried out in 1987 at Oxnard, a California town of about 100,000 people, showed that violent crime fell 38 percent in a single year, simply by keeping thirty pathologically violence-prone men behind bars.<sup>44</sup> To make space for these incorrigibly violent criminals, I would empty the jails of *all* nonviolent criminals; punish them in other, more rehabilitative ways (such as releasing them with electronic anklets for remote supervision, sending them to boot camp, or seizing any assets, etc.); this will relieve the intolerable pressure on prison space and save money and might change mentalities for the better, which prison certainly will not.

#### 8. *Guns*

We will never reduce our wholly unprecedented addiction to violence until we take drastic measures to control and reduce the guns in our homes. I would propose:

1. Ban *all* sales of handguns and semiautomatic weapons and register all ownership of guns, just like cars. This modest proposal would bring America into line with all other developed societies. This will allow a start to be made to recover the 200 million guns already in private hands.
2. Confiscate all guns and knives found on teenagers and gang members.
3. Sell only rifles and shotguns to hunters.
4. Put a huge tax on the sale of all ammunition.
5. Publicize the recent discovery that a gun in the house increases nearly threefold the danger of shooting for the

<sup>44</sup> *Newsweek*, September 13, 1993, p. 12; a recent Dutch investigation shows that violence may have a genetic component transmitted from generation to generation (*Newsweek*, November 1, 1993, p. 57).

<sup>45</sup> *New England Journal of Medicine*, quoted in *Economist*, October 16, 1993, p. 34.

6. Install metal detectors in all schools and confiscate any weapons found.
7. Support all proposals to ban assault weapons.

What I am saying is that somehow or other the population has to be disarmed. Otherwise we will end up like Mogadishu.

#### 9. *Other Measures*

1. Ban violence from TV during daylight hours and restrict it after dark.
2. Make property crime more difficult by strengthening the defenses of the home and the car (by locks, burglar alarms, etc.); one of the causes of increased crime is the flood of expensive consumer goods left unprotected.
3. Increase the number of courts and judges, so that punishment becomes a reality, something that is inevitable, and not subject to plea-bargaining before prosecution or easy parole after sentencing.<sup>46</sup>

#### *V. Conclusion: The Breakdown of Civil Society*

What has broken down in recent years is not only the family, but also the civil society, what Alexis de Tocqueville called “private societies, held together by similar conditions, habits, mores.” No solution to the present desperate situation will work without family, church, school, and community involvement in order to change destructive mental processes and physical habits.

1. Pass legislation ordering all schools to stay open till 5:00 or 5:30 P.M., so as to avoid turning children out into the streets with no one at home to greet them.

Over 80 percent of all American high school students are today latch-key kids! The extra time could usefully be devoted to super-

<sup>46</sup> In Washington, D.C., things are so bad that a third of all homicide cases are just dismissed without coming to trial (A. Knight, “Clogged Courts, Slow Justice,” *Washington Post Weekly*, November 15–21, 1993).

vised homework, sports, gym, remedial classes in literacy, and learning a skill or a trade.

2. Provide more federal funds for schools for gifted children.
3. Demand that no pregnant unmarried mother gets additional welfare until she discloses the name of the father.
4. Offer these women free long-lasting contraception, such as Norplant or Depo-Provera.
5. Build in inducements to work and provide more jobs in the inner cities.

I fear that it is impossible not to end on a pessimistic note. The traditional family of mother, father, and children is certainly shrinking as a proportion of the whole, comprising now only one household in five. The proportion of singles living alone and of single-parent households with children have both undoubtedly grown enormously as a proportion of all households. More and more couples are cohabiting without marriage, and the proportion of illegitimate children is far higher than ever in our history. It is thus undeniable that marriage as we have known it is a declining institution. This is a moral disaster, not just an expansion of multi-cultural options. Furthermore, our civic culture and our courtesy, in both the public and private sphere, are both dissolving, and in our passion for guns we are killing each other on a scale wholly unknown in any other civilized country.

Equally serious is the possibility that our economy will never again produce enough jobs to put the whole adult population, now both male *and* female, to work again. If this is so, the 10 percent to 15 percent of the population who today constitute the underclass may never escape from the poverty trap in the inner city ghettos of the North and the forgotten rural villages of the South. It is also clear that because of the conflict between the sexual revolution and the threat of an AIDS epidemic, our sexual behavior is in need of a major overhaul. Unprotected promiscuity is no longer a safe option. By far the highest divorce rate in the Western world

(50 percent) does not seem to have done much to increase the sum of human happiness, and it has certainly resulted in many children being seriously damaged and neglected.

On the other hand, the illogical compromises adopted on three highly contested issues, abortion, pornography, and the treatment of homosexuals, all seem to satisfy the majority of the population. And do not forget one thing. Every ill that is responsible for the decay of family values in America — except the unique salience of murder by gunfire — is visible, if to a lesser degree, in all major cities in the industrialized West. Moreover, things were nearly as bad in the past among the urban poor. Victorian London, as Charles Dickens described it, was a place of filth, cruelty, prostitution, and crime, and in Elizabethan England the homicide rate was close to that of America today. We have been living in a century of very unusual domestic peace, which is now over.

What is needed to turn our society around is a politics based on hope, not fear; a moral code based on the acceptance of personal responsibility for one's actions; and greater family and community cooperation, rather than the selfish pursuit of the mirage of individual happiness, regardless of its effect on others. When Thomas Jefferson asserted that the function of the new Republic was to protect life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the last thing he had in mind was an egocentric dash for consumer goods and sexual pleasure, both of them acquired, if necessary, by violence.