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Freedom and Identity. Social Perspectives

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FREEDOM'S FIRM FOUNDATION

Freedom is the pivot on which our culture turns. Our political culture promise to promote freedom; we compliment ourselves for having a culture of freedom. And yet a false view of freedom is abroad, one that seduces us into many forms of self-imposed bondage. It says that we're most free when we can live as we please. Freedom, in this view, is self-legislation, the freedom to give whatever meaning to one's life that one chooses. The dictatorship of relativism ministers to this view of freedom, as does the anti-metaphysical materialism many presume the outlook on life dictated by modern science. Both prevent anything from making a claim on our obedience, leaving us free to think or live as we please.

For a long time I tried to argue against this false view of freedom as unfettered existence, but with little success. I've become more and more aware that it must be confronted, not refuted. We need to inhabit the true freedom of the gospel of Jesus Christ in order to challenge the false freedom of our postmodern era.

Let's begin with the Rabbis, for they provide a striking definition of freedom. In the Old Testament there are two straightforward words for freedom. One is *chofesh*, the word used in Exodus 21:2 where God's law stipulates that a male Hebrew slave is to be freed after six years of service. The other is *dror*. For example, Leviticus 25:10 says that during the Jubilee year freedom shall be proclaimed to all the inhabitants of the land. The same word appears in Isaiah 61:1, which prophesizes that the Anointed One will bind up the broken hearted and proclaim liberty to the captives. But when it came to the Passover celebration, the great Jewish festival of freedom, the ancient rabbis employed neither word. Instead, they turned to *herut*. As a consequence, *herut* is the word most Jews associate with freedom.

At first glance, this is strange. *Herut* shows up in 1 Kings 21:8, where it is translated as elders or ministers. More literally, it means those dedicated to God's service. But that's not the most important verse. Instead, it's Exodus 32:16. There we find the account of Moses coming down from Mount Sinai, carrying the two stone tablets upon which are engraved God's ten commandments.

Here things get really strange, for in this verse *herut* does not appear at all! Instead, we find *harut*, the word that means to carve or engrave. Exploiting the fact that the Hebrew of the Torah is written with consonants only, the rabbinic tradition says one should substitute a different vowel, and the verse is to be read not as *harut*, but instead as *herut*. "Engrave" really says "dedicate," which really means "freedom."

Verbal tricks of this sort are common in rabbinic teaching, and in this case the word substitution in Exodus 32:16 provides a definition of freedom. To be truly free, we must obey God's commandments with a dedication and continuity of practice that engraves them onto our lives. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks points out, this view of freedom is implied in the divine promise in Jeremiah 31:33: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts." The New Testament promotes the same view. The Letter to the Hebrews makes Jeremiah 31 the key text for expounding the nature of the new covenant in Christ. In a more subtle way, St. Paul

uses Jeremiah 31:33 when he speaks of the faithful in Corinth as his “letters of recommendation.” God has written on their hearts so that the promise of Christ can be read by all. “You are a letter from Christ,” writes St. Paul in a direct evocation of the Rabbinic wordplay in Exodus 32:16, “delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”

In sum, the New Testament holds teaches that the freedom for which Christ has set us free means having the law of Christ engraved on our hearts. The greater our loyalty to his way, the more we enter into true freedom. The more perfect our obedience, the more perfect our liberty.

This seems paradoxical to the modern mind. How can loyalty and obedience be the basis for freedom? Isn't freedom being able to do what we want?

Well, yes, in this respect our false view of freedom has a grain of truth in it. But consider this: it's not so easy to do what we want. There are great powers in the world that wish us to do as they want. These powers are very much abroad today, and they meet with less and less resistance. The marketplace disciplines us. Advertising shapes our desires. Mass culture tends to make us all the same, so much so that ordinary people express their individuality in exactly the same ways. Tattoos!

We are accorded small zones of private freedom today. For example, our sexual freedom is carefully guarded. But to a very great extent we are slaves of worldly powers. Consumerism and careerism dominate us. We cower with anxiety about our health and safety. We accept the disciplines of calorie counting and regular exercise. Almost every minute of our waking hours are spent serving, in one way or another, the secular hearth gods of the West: health, wealth, and hedonism.

The ability to stand against these worldly powers is the foundation of freedom. If we can resist domination, we are indomitable. Freedom begins with the ability to say, “I will not.” We are free when we can say, with St. Paul, “I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

A “no” to worldly powers and their presumption to define the limits of the possible provides the basis for freedom's “yes.” The story of Saint Maximilian Kolbe provides a powerful example. He was a Franciscan friar. After the Nazi invasion of Poland was arrested and sent to Auschwitz as a political prisoner. It was a place that sought to destroy freedom by imposing a regime of suffering and death. An incident in the camp led the commandant to select ten prisoners to be executed. One of the young men chosen cried out, “My wife! My children!” Kolbe stepped forward, saying, “Take me instead.” *Herut*—having Christ's way engraved on his heart—was the source of his freedom. The regime of Auschwitz sought to make freedom impossible by making suffering and death omnipotent. Herut allowed Kolbe to say “no” that regime, and therefore he could say “yes” to Christ's way of love.

Few of us are Saint Maximilian Kolbes. But all of us live amidst regimes of suffering and death. We are slaves to market discipline because we wish to induce it to reward us—and because we fear its power to inflict upon us the suffering of want. We pursue success, seeking to pile up monuments of achievement that will somehow survive the annihilating power of death. Or we

simply try to squeeze as much happiness as we can out of life before death and decay dissolve us. There is an alternative, however. Faith provides a place to stand, the place that gives us the power to say “no” to worldly powers. We can see something of this freedom at work today. There’s nothing uniquely biblical about the view that marriage is between a man and a woman. It’s a widespread conviction in many cultures. Nor need faith have much to do with resisting the ideology of transgenderism. Common sense alone testifies against it. The same is true of the sanctity of life, which is not a theological claim.

All that’s true, but for the most part *only religious people today seem able to speak up today*. I can’t speak for Germany or other countries in Europe, but in the United States for the most part the only ones who dissent in public from progressive ideologies about sex, family, and gender. There are some courageous non-believers who speak up for life, but, again, it tends to be the faithful who step forward.

As we survey the cultural landscape, it seems that, in this historical moment, on many controversial cultural and moral issues, we alone are free. We alone seem able to stand strong against the intimidation and relentless indoctrination. This standing strong comes from our *herut*. We are able to attain a margin of freedom, because we have internalized the law of Christ. Let’s be sure not to underestimate the power of *herut*. Many are engaged in important efforts to protect human rights, which include important personal, political, and legal freedoms. They’re right to defend these freedoms. But in this time and in this place, *herut* matters more, much more. For as we stand strong, others can live in our leeward side, as it were. They are protected and encouraged by our boldness of speech and our refusal to be coerced. The one child who stands up to the bully secures freedom for the whole schoolyard.

Herut has the power to inspire others as well. Our fellow citizens feel their bondage. Over the last couple of years I’ve become more and more aware of how constrained people feel. We have no sense that tomorrow can be different from today. Our political systems seem frozen, immovable. Economic globalization is felt to be a fate, not a choice. Many treat the sexual revolution as inevitable. Progressives pronounce “history” as the agent of change, not people who gather to consider the common good and choose the means to promote it. In our political and cultural imaginations, tomorrow can only be today plus one. The future in the postmodern imagination of the West is more of the same.

In this context, I’ve found that many secular people desire to participate in our freedom, if only half-consciously. One of my evangelical friends has spoken out against gay marriage. He is a young professor at a large state university in the United States, an impersonal place that processes large numbers of students, many of whom are immigrants or children of immigrants trying to get a foothold in America’s already vulnerable middle class. These are students who know their bondage to worldly powers. They worry about covering their monthly rent, or about losing the jobs that pay their tuition. They half-know that they’re often dominated by their undisciplined hedonism. At this university, my friend’s public stances against gay marriage have brought him a great deal of grief. He’s been attacked again and again on social media. Activist groups work to get him fired. Moreover, nearly all his students are in favor of gay marriage. Yet his courses are full and popular. His students respect him, even admire him. They see that his deeply held moral convictions give him a place to stand. They recognize that his obedience to those convictions, an obedience profoundly deepened by religious faith, allows him to resist domination. With the law of Christ

engraved on his heart, he is free, free in a way they, too, wish to be free.

It's easy to be demoralized right now. Again, I can't speak for Europe, but in America the dictatorship of relativism slams us again and again. The sexual revolution wants to use the power the law to force us all to conform to its agenda, even to the point of compelling us to affirm the fantasies of men who wish to become women. The medical profession is being perverted by the culture of death. We're told that our faith has no place in politics.

Taken as a whole, it feels as though we're being overwhelmed by a secular tidal wave. At every turn, our secular society wants to make us into *dhimmis*. That's the Arabic word for non-Muslims who are allowed to exist as long as they don't evangelize or challenge the supremacy of Islam. Substitute secular progressivism for Islam and one has a fairly accurate picture of the kind of future for faithful Christians that many powerful people today would like to bring about.

We need to resist being made into *dhimmis*. This will require defending religious freedom, a crucial human right. But I want to counsel against a purely or even primarily defensive attitude. Jesus Christ did not die on the cross so that we would be able to litigate for our rights. He did so that we might live and live abundantly. As we seek to enter into that abundance, we must properly understand what we face. Our age is profoundly impoverished, not empowered. It tends to tear down but it cannot build up. The postmodern gospel of freedom seduces, intimidates, coerces, and controls. But it *engraves nothing on our hearts*, and that's a profound weakness.

Again, speaking about the United States, there seems to be a growing hysteria among university students who feel so fragile and vulnerable that they want "trigger warnings" and rebel was faced with ideas or assignments that challenge them. These young people, many of them very accomplished already, may be on their way to success, but they don't seem to be advancing toward freedom. And then there are those who aren't lucky enough to be at fancy universities. In America, they're increasingly ground down by economic globalization and end up enslaved to addictions. Their inheritance is license and despair, not freedom.

This is a tragedy for our culture. We are in the constant danger that we will confuse the postmodern false gospel of freedom with the true gospel. But this false freedom is not a credible threat to the Church. Our faith is the firm foundation of the Church's freedom, and ours as well. If we have the law of Christ engraved on our hearts, we cannot be coerced, compelled, or dominated, however dire the outward circumstances. Faith gave Saint Maximilian Kolbe the freedom to make Christ's love define his future, not the world's false claims to ultimate power. The same is true for us, if we will but allow the Lord Jesus to engrave his way ever more deeply into our hearts.

I want to end by emphasizing the appeal of this freedom in our freedom-loving but freedom-lacking age. I'm more and more convinced that our witness to the world must one of freedom. It is what our age so desires and yet so sorely lacks. Let us by all means promote and protect our political freedoms, but as we do so let's learn from the rabbis. We best serve the cause of freedom when we obey God's commandments. If we reject the relativistic mentality of our time and binds ourselves to moral truths we cannot be compromised. This will make us free for love, and thus the herald of the fullest and most perfect freedom.

John Waters

THE MEDICATED SOCIETY

I need to confess to you that I am a member of a secret society. I may even, for all I know, be one of the leaders. We call ourselves 'The 55 Club', and we are all people – mainly men as it happens – who were born in 1955. The 55 Club was founded in 2010, the year those who were born in '55 became 55. There are other members present here in this room right now, but I cannot even look at them for fear of giving away their identities!

What unites us is our attitude to the 1960s, which is neither hostile nor enthusiastic. We were of the second wave of the 1960s freedom generation. The initiators of that movement derived from what is called the 'baby boomer' generation – they were the children of the immediately post-war moment who, propelled by the revolutionary spirit of the 1960s, gained cultural and political power from the 1970s onwards. This is the generation that initially responded to the "Awake!" of Elvis and staked its claim in the student rebellions of 1968.

Like my fellow 55 Club members, I have, for much of the past two decades, found myself belonging to the post-Sixties culture and yet troubled by it. Instinctively, I find most of its ideas appealing. The people of the post-1960s revolution have, for most of my life, seemed to me the most interesting, the most entertaining, the most creative, the most fun-loving. Confronted with a choice between accepting their entire worldview and inviting a return of the greyness that preceded them, you would need to be insane not to embrace wholeheartedly the changed world they ushered in. And yet, I have been troubled, too, by the inconsistencies of their prescriptions, by their own blindness towards the flaws in their beliefs and their denial of the strengths in some of the values they have devoted themselves to sweeping away.

We in the 55 Club, being younger than the first wave, had a more complex response to the Sixties Dream. We bought into most of the passions of our predecessor generation, but remained, generally speaking, somewhat detached. We participated but, because we were not, in the main, accorded positions of power and authority, we remained on the sidelines, observing and reflecting. We loved the music, the attitude and the clothes, but, being somewhat detached, spent a lot of our time hanging around sizing things up. As a result, we began to note some of the cracks in the guiding ideology, which caused us to ask too many questions for our own good. Very soon we acquired reputations for counter-revolutionary thinking.

One of the things we noted in some of our contemporaries and elders was a refusal to admit that freedom defined as the pursuit of desire in its most immediate, instinctual condition might have limits, or be other than the optimal and most correct path for human society. Having no ideological stake in the issue, we became interested in the effects of freedom on ourselves and were less afraid than the founder revolutionaries to admit when the promise remained unfulfilled or the pain gauge has gone into the red. We took to the revolution with at least as much zeal as its founding fathers (and mothers), but we did not have the same stake in its outcome. We were able to enjoy it without assuming proprietorship. We are therefore in a better position to describe its defects.

We tended to be misfits, people who never really came to take the world at face value but

nevertheless became immersed in it to the fullest extent. We also tended to look a little like hippies, although most of us had managed to stay clear of chemicals and so retained most of our mental faculties. We were not easy to anticipate or categorise, either in terms of attitude or situation on the political spectrum.

We knew about freedom, having enjoyed it as much as anyone. Yes, we loved Elvis, the Beatles, Hendrix, the Kennedys, Martin Luther King, and ‘hated’ LBJ and Nixon with the same fervour as our immediate elders. But the absurdities and contradictions of these positions were not lost on us either.

Although the baby boomer generation was – and remains – fanatical in its devotion to its own concepts of freedom, we of the subsequent generation were not. We enjoyed the experience of this freedom, up to a point, but had been perplexed by (a) its failure to deliver outcomes fully in line with the desires of the human heart, and (b) the failure of the culture to remark on this other than by way of occasionally acknowledging that, for particular reasons, there would inevitably be casualties of any attempt to make life better for everyone. Even the death of Elvis, from a collision of uppers and downers while sitting on his toilet, failed to alert the culture to the possibility that his ‘Awake!’ had not been an absolute and unprecedented injunction, but the first in what might have become a series of steps towards a better understanding of human freedom.

And so, we in the 55 Club” believe we have been presented with the responsibility for undoing the Sixties revolution in all of its absolutism and myopia. We are the same age as rock ‘n’ roll, which provided the soundtrack for the 1960s revolution, and our love for Elvis is possibly greater than anyone else’s, because we can see and understand the full meaning of his glory and tragedy. To us falls the responsibility to be utterly honest about what we encountered, mainly because nobody else is.

Back in the 1990s, I wrote that the topography of the present was defined by two horizons. Behind us was the horizon provided by the 1960s, in which we identified the beginnings of our then state or prosperity and awareness. In front, although not quite so clearly, was the horizon provided at that time by the millennium. Now, I recognize an error in this description: what we made dimly out in front was not so much the millennium as the imagined border marking the beginning of a utopian future. For much of the second half of the 20th century, the millennium seemed to represent that border, but in reality the line seemed – and still seems – to move ahead of us like a mirage.

And yet we continue to be convinced of its validity. Half a century after the 1960s, we continue to live in an age of post-Sixties self-congratulation and hubris: every day, in every way, things are getting better and better.

One of the symptoms of the society created by the Sixties revolution is that attitudes, energies and activities once rightly considered the province of the young are now embraced by the middle-aged and older – sometimes by the very people against whom, theoretically, these attitudes, energies and activities might properly be directed in the present. This is why it is so essential in this culture to continue seeming ‘young’. But this creates a problem beyond the obvious: if the mainstream culture had attained the optimum expression of idealism, what is there left for the young to say about anything?

And so, while in a certain sense the Sixties themselves were genuine, spontaneous and idealistic, the Seventies, Eighties, Nineties and Naughties were merely imitative, cynical, self-regarding and bored —and pretty much in that order. It was as though we had decided that no further effort was necessary because no further attainment of enlightenment was possible. The Sixties was the Final Revolution, the opening sequence of the End of History. From here on, nothing would ever again be required to change drastically. All that was required was that we fine-tune our civilisation in accordance with the most superficial of Sixties ideas and pour scorn on everything that had happened before.

And yet, if we think about this more deeply, it becomes clear that the ostensible coherence of our present dispensation is achieved by a series of evasions and withdrawals: into a kind of selective privatization; under the spell of the TV and the Internet, under the sedation of prescription medication, alcohol and ‘recreational’ drugs. The Sixties revolution, in short, has been allowed to proceed to the point of its own logical disintegration, largely unchallenged in a culture that quite seriously believes it possible to defy the very nature of man.

If there is any public function that is urgently required to be carried out by those of my generation, it is surely to render these pernicious tendencies visible and to start the process of dismantling them.

In large part, the modern obsession with the Sixties is a consequence of television, and of the apparent ‘coincidence’ of the eruption of youth culture in that decade with the globalization of television. Television made us self-aware in a way that we had never been before, and effectively wiped out our memory of previous forms of awareness. The TV set endowed all previous means of communication with a profound pathos. The Sixties was therefore a New Beginning based on the creation of a technologically achieved parallel world, into which humanity could retreat when reality became too much – and which caused us to look to all previous efforts at achieving freedom with condescension and pity.

A few years ago, on American Independence Day, in an op-ed piece, *The Downside of Liberty*, in the *New York Times*, the novelist Kurt Andersen recalled a question posed by an audience-member when he addressed the Woodstock Writers Festival the previous spring: ‘Why had the revolution dreamed up in the late 1960s mostly been won on the social and cultural fronts – women’s rights, gay rights, black president, ecology, sex, drugs, rock ‘n’ roll – but lost in the economic realm, with old-school free-market ideas gaining traction all the time?’

It’s a baby-boomer’s question and Andersen, born 1954, responded in what most baby-boomers would regard as a counter-revolutionary manner. ‘What has happened politically, economically, culturally and socially since the seachange of the late ‘60s’, he postulated, ‘isn’t contradictory or incongruous. It’s all of a piece. For hippies and bohemians as for businesspeople and investors, extreme individualism has been triumphant. Selfishness won.’ Laying into greed and hedonism with equal fervour, Andersen approvingly quoted Thomas Jefferson: ‘Self-love is no part of morality’.

He described the ‘tacit grand bargain’ forged following the 1960s revolution “between the counterculture and the establishment, between the forever-young and the moneyed”, leading to the outright unleashing of American individualism. ‘Going forward, the youthful masses of every age would be permitted as never before to indulge their self-expressive and hedonistic impulses.

But capitalists in return would be unshackled as well, free to indulge their own animal spirits with fewer and fewer fetters in the forms of regulation, taxes or social opprobrium.’

The Right, he noted, blame the 1960s for anything goes sexuality, multiculturalism etc., whereas the Left regard the 1960s as delivering freedoms now unambiguously defined as progress. ‘But what the Left and Right respectively love and hate are mostly flip sides of the same libertarian coin minted around 1967.’

Though Andersen’s sketch is broadly accurate, his short-circuiting into moralising about greed and selfishness risks a misdiagnosis. The problem is less straightforward than he perceives and more fundamental than he might like. There are clues in the way he sets out his case, in the assumptions behind it.

‘Why’, he asked, had the revolution dreamed up in the late 1960s mostly been won on the social and cultural fronts — ‘women’s rights, gay rights, black president, ecology, sex, drugs, rock ’n’ roll’ — but lost in the economic realm, with old-school free-market ideas gaining traction all the time?’ There are three things I observe immediately about this formulation: one is that it is highly ideological — an undilutedly contemporary left-wing analysis of how the world ought to be; secondly that Anderson assumes the unambiguous validity — and indeed equivalence — of all the categories he mentions — ‘women’s rights’ — we know what that means more or less: the right of women to postpone pregnancy until middle-age, and so forth... But is this truly freedom if it means the woman risks childlessness or becomes doubly burdened by domestic responsibilities on top of her career? ‘gay rights’ — is that the same as women’s rights — just as valid?; in what sense?; how far should it go? ‘black president’ — is this turning into some kind of 1960s bucket list?, what about a black Pope?; ‘ecology’ — of what, oh yeah I know what that means: green stuff!... which bin you put your garbage in. It doesn’t, interestingly, appear to include what Pope Benedict XVI called ‘the ecology of man’. ‘sex’ — what, that as well, the human race could have sex at last after all these centuries!!! wow!!!!!!; ‘drugs’ — this is a win?; ‘rock ’n’ roll’ — sorry, what was the question?

In this list of ‘demands’ we can detect the shadow of something that is not immediately visible. There is no objective sense of unity between the headings, and yet we take for granted that they belong together. Why is this?

Because we have become accustomed by persistent repetition to the idea that all these concepts qualify as symptoms of ‘freedom’. Really, this list is unified not by any commitment to the human rights or interests of any group, nor by compassion, nor by any true human impulse, but by a desire to align with issues which are ‘cool’, and which therefore have the benefit of portraying those who espouse them in a virtuous way. What they have in common is that each of them would suggest itself as an appropriate slogan for a T-shirt, guaranteeing the ‘wearer’ with an identity booster which can immediately be interpreted as righteous and moral by a society which has become saturated with propaganda on behalf of this agenda.

But, when you stop and think about it, there is no particular moral coherence to this agenda. In fact, when he begins to think about it more deeply, the objectives of the 1960s ‘idealists’ begin to

strike the sensible observer as actually far more abstract than the bourgeois values of their fathers might have appeared to these same people back in 1967.

Kurt Andersen is drawing attention to a rather different question to the one he supposes himself to be asking. Really, what he's asking is: why does there appear to be an incoherence not merely in the outcomes of the revolution but perhaps in the very kernel of its thinking?

Andersen was validly connecting the present state of disarray in the world to the anti-ethic of unfettered capitalism, but he appeared to discount the turmoil being generated by the 'social liberalism' of the sixties generation, and he overlooked the most worrying connection between the two: a blindness – or, rather, a numbness – to consequences.

At the heart of both the capitalist system and the liberalism which nowadays underlies most conventional notions of social progress lies a misunderstanding of human freedom. With the capitalist, the misunderstanding is self-interestedly deliberate; with the 1960s revolutionary it is hypocritical. Far from counter-cultural, the listed objectives of the 1960s 'idealists' are the dark matter of the modern consumer society, fuelling notions of 'rights' and 'equality' which in turn propel the economic system onward to wherever it thinks it's going. Gay marriage, surrogacy, the shuffling of the mores of family life, fractured identities – all these syndromes generate activities which stand to be monetised, while also rendering those affected more amenable to distraction and anaesthetization.

The 1960s placed at the centre of Western culture the idea that the shortest path to satisfaction was along a straight line between instinctual desire and its intuited target. Freedom was the enjoyment of what came naturally, and the handbook suggested that this also came without consequences once you shook off the guilt imposed by the greybearded naysayers from whose grasp society and its instruments had been snatched.

In his NYT article, Anderson sketched out his ambivalence, looking back at his own times and those of his father. 'Consider America during the two decades after World War II,' he wrote. 'Stereotypically but also in fact, the conformist pressures of bourgeois social norms were powerful. To dress or speak or live life in unorthodox, extravagantly individualist ways required real gumption. Yet just as beatniks were rare and freakish, so were proudly money-mad Ayn Randian millionaires. My conservative Republican father thought marginal income tax rates of 91 percent were unfairly high, but he and his friends never dreamed of suggesting they be reduced below, say, 50 percent. Sex outside marriage was shameful, beards and divorce were outré – but so were boasting of one's wealth and blaming unfortunates for their hard luck. When I was growing up in Omaha, rich people who could afford to build palatial houses did not and wouldn't dream of paying themselves 200 or 400 times what they paid their employees. Greed as well as homosexuality was a love that dared not speak its name.'

Then everything changed. The hippies and bohemians overthrew the bourgeois conformism of Kurt Andersen's Republican father because they came to see his values as existing largely as abstractions, devoid of a context other than social control. They missed that these apparently imposed rules and strictures were the encoded wisdoms of human trial and error through the ages. The 'rules' emanated from within the human person, defining both the limits of human searching for satisfaction and proposing safeguards against potential encroachment on or from

others. They were not so much rules as laws laid down by the facts, characteristics and limits of human capacity. In this schema, every desire has a set of potential consequences, which must be considered before the cost of 'freedom' can accurately be assessed. For the sake of shorthand, these consequences were enshrined in a series of strictures, which unfortunately read as simple prohibitions, but in essence they amounted to succinct reminders of the true nature of the human edifice: if an action of mine is likely to hurt myself or another, then it is 'wrong' according to a calculus of ultimate consequences, which is really what morality amounts to.

The elders and greybeards were not wrong. Although they did not articulate a specific alternative version of 'freedom' – at least not in so many words – they stood, as Kurt Anderson acknowledged, for good things: truth, restraint, values, loyalty, responsibility, postponement of gratification etc. – ideals which together amounted to a different conception of freedom: one in which the peace and order of a normative existence would demonstrate itself as superior to the pursuit of selfish desires. The elders were right, and yet the hippies 'proved' them wrong. To this day, the hippy definition of freedom survives more or less intact in our culture as a functional conception of freedom. How?

First of all, dishonesty. The post-1960s generations have not been honest about their experience of freedom. Privately – individually – many have found that their pursuit of freedom did not deliver the satisfactions they craved, but they had invested too much of themselves in the project to admit this. Today, approaching the end of the line, they pursue their totemic objectives with renewed vigour, not primarily out of the desires that once propelled them but more a reflex impulse prompted by nostalgia and cultural obduracy. Thus, they demand gay marriage not because they are convinced of its benefits, but because it would represent another 'victory'. They elect a black president because his colour adds a gracing aspect to their ebbing revolution.

A more fundamental element in the slight-of-hand which led to us continuing to believe in a misconstrued idea of freedom is narcotics. This is an element of the revolution that, although not overlooked, is rarely if ever given its correct place or context. We have fallen – or been guided – into a cultural reflex of talking about certain forms of drug use as 'recreational', essentially a Sixties meme. In fact there is no such thing as purely recreational drug use. All drugs are used because they are useful: they allow the user to achieve some level of exalted serenity by chemical means, and therefore to avoid some of the pain and chaos of life.

The hippie communes of the 1960s, where human freedom was narrowly defined as the pursuit of self-gratification for everyone, were in effect an attempt to debunk and discredit the alleged authoritarianism and prohibitionism associated with tradition and authority (especially of the father) and, more importantly, to demonstrate that the frowned-upon forms of 'freedom' were perfectly functional and harmless. This in turn would 'prove' that the authoritarianism of the elders had been arbitrary and oppressive.

But it is an iron law of life that the pursuit of selfish desires leads ultimately to chaos, grief and pain, firstly for other people who come to be used in your pursuit of satisfaction in this way, and ultimately by yourself. And since this was true also for the hippies in the commune, some method was required to mitigate the negative consequences – or at least the negative feelings they were likely to provoke.

Because the 'peace and love' lifestyle was a recipe for total chaos in the personal lives of those who pursued it, drugs became an essential element of living this freedom, and also of the mechanism of proving the greybeards wrong.

With the aid of drugs, the hippies were able to postpone not gratification, as their fathers had advocated, but the consequences of failing to do so, or at least the negative feelings associated with such negative consequences.

By medicating themselves with what we insist upon calling 'recreational' drugs, the Flower Power generation was able to push out of sight, indefinitely into the future, all the alleged downsides of their definition of freedom. Of course these consequences were bound to come home to roost sooner or later, but when this happened the hippies would have moved on, leaving behind those afflicted by their freedom-searching, who would just have to get on with things. Alternatively, if the law of consequences struck early – in the form of a calamity brought on by the misuse or overuse of drugs – this could be attributed to other factors besides the intrinsic incoherence of the freedom model: the victim was a casualty of personal weakness or over-enthusiasm rather than any flaw in the philosophy.

Now we have imported this logic wholesale into the heart of our cultures: we medicate – either through alcohol or prescription drugs – so as to avoid and postpone the chaos and grief which properly accompanies the senselessness of our governing ideologies. Our civilisation is becoming a single great hippy commune, in which the senselessness of our guiding ideologies is offset by the routine use of chemicals and opiates to maintain an artificial balance in lives that would otherwise succumb to disorder and despair.

As for the true connection with economics – the issue of the postponement of consequences is writ large here also. Andersen was working from a false dichotomy: the idea that capitalism and liberal revolution are presumed to be opposites – Left and Right. In fact this is a random accident of the short life of actually existing socialism in the Soviet bloc, when expedience threw a certain model of economics together with a certain form of social control. In the West, fashion-conscious mindsets co-opted these perspectives as an absolute definition of the human good, and forgot to update it after the Berlin Wall came down to expose the tyranny and degradation that had lain behind it. In the specific context of the 1960s, there is a more precise connection: in the modern ideology of Cultural Marxism and the influence of the Frankfurt School, matters to which I will return shortly. There is another point that requires to be made concerning the underlying connection between 1960s attitudes to capitalism and to what is called social liberalism. The Woodstock questioner's question was objectively contradictory because it took at face value the 1960s canard that capitalism and cultural liberalism were at loggerheads to begin with. In fact, the two philosophies have something in common: they both depend on the postponement of consequences.

Debt, the very definition of modern money/materialism, is both a reflection of liberal dispositions and a metaphor for the revolution's avoidance of consequences. Just as the so-called 'liberal agenda' (more or less Andersen's list) postpones all costs to be dealt with by posterity, the modern economy pushes its liabilities into the distant future, to be accounted for on a theoretical basis only. But the crux of the matter is not greed, selfishness, or decadence. This is an odd meme of modern ideological society, which adapts certain prohibitions born of religious thinking to fill

gaps as they become visible in its moral or philosophical edifice.

The common denominator to both social liberalism and capitalism gone out of control is a cultural phenomenon of desire misunderstood – a failure to understand that human longing cannot be met by any of the obvious things it fixes upon. To speak moralistically about these matters invites a short-circuit of understanding. The issue cannot be addressed by more rules or the renewal of morals, but only by a reopening of the question: what does mankind actually want? And the deeper problem, which Kurt Andersen did not allude to, is that the understandings about this condition, encoded in rules and proscriptions, were vested in the great religions, which became the most frequent target of post-1960s revolutionary ardour. The abolition of God became, finally, not just a matter of philosophical assertion, but of social reorganization to drive the logic of religious sensitivities out of the public square and underground. First of all, in the new bubble of controlled conversation hosted by the media, the idea of man's subjugation or inferiority to some external power became an acute sense of embarrassment to those who imagined themselves citizens of the modern age. But, interestingly, the period since the 1960s has been characterized by unparalleled attempts to establish alternative, earthly seats of power, to which human beings might hand over control of our lives: the EU, the Internet, the free market, The United States, the motivating power of self-interest. In spite of the spread of rationalism, all our great beliefs continue to be in powers outside of ourselves. The age of individual freedom has yielded a generation which is more passive, less enterprising and possessed of less faith in itself, or in the power of people or peoples, than perhaps any previous generation in the history of mankind.

Another of the legacies of the 1960s ideological culture is what is called 'political correctness' (PC), which the average citizen perceives as a weird and slightly infuriating agenda to stop people talking about certain things, but not necessarily in a bad way. These 'things' form a pattern of sorts, but it is difficult for the uninitiated to say what it is. There is a general sense that it has to do largely with sexual preferences and 'gender stuff', feminist diktats and what is called 'diversity' and 'multiculturalism'. The phrase 'political correctness' has tripped off the lips of alleged conservatives for so long that it is no longer a tool of clarity. 'PC' is generally regarded as an irritating, faintly amusing obsession with the relentless promotion of 'equality', and 'rights' for what are called 'minorities'. Most people are unsure why such areas are subject to a particular regime of untouchability, but don't really worry about it too much because there are lots of other things to be worrying about already and, without going into it too much, they are broadly in favour of things like 'rights' and 'equality'.

What is called 'PC', however, is actually a highly disturbing climate of censorship, by which the advocates of an extreme radical programme of social transformation have succeeded in encasing their ideas and activities under a cloak. In truth, what is called 'political correctness' is actually a kind of force field thrown up around a phenomenon properly called 'Cultural Marxism', directed at changing fundamentally the way Western societies conduct their everyday existences in the most intimate areas of their family and community lives.

A standard meme of modern political discourse is the intellectual who, when challenged that some element thrown up by political activism or activity is 'political correctness', simply grins and shakes his head and says: 'If I hear one more time this nonsense about political correctness, I'm going to start screaming!' This manner of implying that PC is simply a perverse and eccentric invention of the enemies of equality' and 'rights' is just one of the weapons in the armoury which

has been developed to protect the very phenomenon being denied. Similarly depictions of a continuing orchestrated conspiracy, which allows activists operating under the general banner of Cultural Marxism to dismiss claims of political correctness as ‘conspiracy theory’. The point is that the conspirators are no longer around and are not needed now, having long ago constructed a mechanism that operates more or less according to its own dynamic.

So, far from being harmless and slightly comic, what is called political correctness is a system of enforced cultural omerta with a view to the undermining of freedom of expression and the imposition of thought control – all directed at the inversion of the traditional social order and the creation of what would amount in effect to a totalitarian state. PC has its roots not in some post-feminist prissiness, but in a hard leftist sect known as the Frankfurt School, which gained serious traction for its ideas in post-WWII American academia. The thinking of the Frankfurt School began as the pursuit of Cultural Marxism in Germany in the 1920s, later moved to Germany to escape Nazism and was adopted by the 1960s counter culture, ostensibly to promote ‘tolerance’ of ‘diversity’ and alternatives to the conservative values of the time.

The Frankfurt School held as a central tenet that the presence in a society of Christianity, capitalism, and the alleged patriarchal-authoritarian family, created a character prone to racial prejudice and fascism. The solution was for the patriarchal social structure to be replaced with matriarchy; the belief that men and women are different with androgyny; and the belief that heterosexuality is normal with the belief that homosexuality is normal. The context of this ideology was the understanding – based on the failure of the working classes of capitalist societies to embrace their historical destinies by following the call of communism, that a Marxist revolution confined to economics would not succeed. Rather than the working class exhibiting a passion for the victory of the proletariat, it became clear that workers just wanted to improve their lives by becoming more prosperous, showing little interest in tearing down the system and taking control of the means of production. Hence, Cultural Marxism, which begat what we now recognise as modern feminism, the ‘gay rights’ movement and, latterly, the initiatives seeking to legitimise a multiplicity of gender types and cast doubts on the very validity of the concepts of masculinity and femininity. Through political lobbying, infiltration of the education system and by shifting the weight of public policy from parliament to court, modern society was persuaded to, in effect, turn its value system inside out. Political correctness, which was the shield designed to protect these initiatives from attack, quickly infiltrated US academia and spread its tentacles across Western societies, gaining a grip on the legal culture of many Western societies through institutions like the United Nations and the European Union. By the early twenty-first century, it had gained a grip on the English-speaking world, through the assiduous lobbying of groups like Amnesty and UNICEF, which most people think of as straightforward philanthropic organisations, and also the influence of the BBC and liberal newspapers like the Guardian and the New York Times, which enable PC thinking to be transmitted to innumerable institutions, including schools, civil service departments, political organisations, police forces, corporations and even armies and churches. From the 1990s, with the ascent to power across Europe of left-leaning parties, Cultural Marxism, driven and camouflaged by political correctness, became the driving force of mainstream politics.

In his book *The Retreat of Reason: Political Correctness and the Corruption of Public Debate in Modern Britain*, Anthony Browne defines political correctness as “an ideology that classifies certain groups of people as victims in need of protection from criticism, and which makes believers feel that no dissent should be tolerated”. Brown plausibly describes a form of censorship

that exempts particular listed categories of human being from the normal attrition of democratic society, and charges some unspecified ‘majority’ with exercising a mandatory sensitivity towards these exemptions. The victims – the alleged casualties of Christian and patriarchal oppression: women, blacks, gays etc – became the alleged beneficiaries of this newly minted Marxist revolution: the new proletariat.

What has become known as PC, therefore, is not some haphazard set of dissociated civilities, but a climate of censorship imposed culturally to conceal and protect the advance of a coherent programme to supplant Western civilisation with a new society driven by radical egalitarianism enforced by the power of the State. The chilling effect of political correctness is felt as a result of the imposition on politicians, academics, journalists and citizens a climate which conveys to them that it is forbidden to give voice to certain thoughts. Deviation from the principle of PC results in instant vilification and censure, with the increasing risk of loss of position and income. It becomes impossible to raise questions about the spread of a deeply damaging welfare culture, the exponential rise of single parenthood or the consequences of immigration policies which have changed the face of many Western societies. As Cultural Marxism infects the legal systems of many countries, instances of people being investigated by the police and courts for such ‘breaches’ are becoming more and more common. Thus, public debate no longer describes objectively verifiable reality, but an ideologically constructed pseudo-reality in which certain matters become unmentionable and others utterly unchallengeable.

Given the hold of PC over the very tools and thought-systems of our culture, the very idea of the existence of such a programme is easily dismissed. While most people find the PC worldview somewhat obsessive, po-faced, neurotic and faintly risible, they believe that its underlying principles are essentially decent. In part this arises from the bogus insinuation of comparison between the Frankfurt agenda and issues like ending slavery and achieving equal citizenship for black people. What, after all, could be wrong with egalitarianism, and, where equality is concerned, the more radical, surely, the better? What is missed, however, is the selectivity and incoherence of this agenda, which does not promote equality for all, but simply for a narrow set of categories of victim which together constitute the modern equivalent of the proletariat – the historically venerated inheritors of the Marxist remit to overthrow the oppressive classes and usher in a new dispensation of freedom.

In fact, far from promoting true equality, PC promotes a ‘radical egalitarianism’ by appropriating traditional concepts of equality and perverting them into their opposites. Although the Frankfurt School began under the influence of Antonio Gramsci and with a clearly-defined set of intellectual leaders and thinkers – Theodor Adorno, Wilhelm Reich, Eric Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, etc – it is no longer possible to identify a nameable leadership which might plausibly be accused of prosecuting this agenda, which has become so diffused and bound up in culture that subversion is longer necessary. In claiming to oppose past inequalities and tyrannies, Cultural Marxism, moving under cover of the increasingly stringent and arcane rules of political correctness, has created a new tyranny, in which anyone who is not defined under PC terms as a ‘victim’ or member of a ‘minority’ is defined, instead, as the enemy, the oppressor in disguise.

This has come to mean, in substance and in effect, that the PC revolution has as its objective the obliteration of the white male and all values and power systems which are laid at his door, including religion, tradition and the normative family. Perhaps the most awesome achievement of

Cultural Marxism is that, while it can provoke in mainstream society wholesale minor impatience and amusement concerning some 'eccentric' or slightly ridiculous proposals, the PC force filed ensures that it very rarely provokes a mainstream voice into words of support or sympathy for whoever becomes its latest target. This is in part because most people have been conditioned to take less than seriously matters relating to PC values, and in part because people do not want to be tarred with the brush that, by advertising its target as a purveyor of backwardness, bigotry or 'hating', PC actually succeeds in drawing odium, scorn and derision to anyone speaking against it.

Western civilization has already become so contaminated by PC values that any initiative to name it or define it immediately sounds excessively pernicky and hyperbolic. As a result of the manipulation of language and logic already achieved by the Cultural Marxists, any attempt at a critique short-circuits on the host of new definitions we breathe in every day. Thus, a new form of thinking has been comprehensively ring-fenced at the levels of society where important decisions tend to be made about future direction and policy. What appears to begin as a form of courtesy towards vulnerable or marginal elements has become the default thinking of the power centres of society, impossible to challenge without risk of social denunciation. At the same time, the idea that PC could represent such a cover for malignant ideologies appears implausible, since such ideas have now become so diffused and engrained in culture as to require neither formal leadership nor subversive strategy. The real subversion takes place between the ears of people who are unaware that the very words they use to describe reality have been interfered with to make them more useful for certain purposes and utterly incapable of reaching the meanings they once unambiguously conveyed.

One of the characteristics of this culture is incoherence. It is important to understand that this can appear as both a collateral element and also as a deliberately induced condition. For example, the Cultural Marxist ideology insists on a gender balance in all areas of employment and public life. The only place it does not insist on such a balance is in parenting, where it is no longer even desirable that the parents of a child be a man and a woman, ie. the actual father and mother of the child or children. Modern society is told that it must 'get over its obsession with biological parenthood'. Similarly in politics, where parties must now nominate a minimum number of female candidates – and yet, the same ideology, in a parallel reality, insists that there is no such thing as a fixed gender. A man can become a woman, or a woman a man, and this is a matter of personal choice.

One of the things I sometimes put to my self-styled 'liberal' friends is a proposition considering the nature of their liberalism. I say to them: 'So, you lay claim to advocating the rights of certain categories of people, including in particular: women, black or dark-skinned people, poor people and gays. Okay, so two of your gay friends – say two men, a lawyer and an architect who between them earn over €500,000 per annum – get married and decided to 'have a family'. They opt for surrogacy and decided to go to India, where they hire the womb of a 19 year old woman – an impoverished brown-skinned woman – who, persuaded with what is for her a queen's ransom but for the two gay men a pittance, comes to be cooped up in a dedicated facility for six or seven months as she gestate the baby which will be taken away by this gay couple in return for perhaps two weeks' of their joint salary, 80 per cent of which this young woman will have to hand over to the operators of the facility. When the baby is delivered, he or she will be taken back home by the gay couple; the woman will never lay eyes on her baby again and the baby will never know his or her mother's name. For the first time since the abolition of slavery, our societies are permitting,

indeed encouraging, the emergence of a new form of trading in human flesh. And the people who support this development feel entitled to call themselves liberals because they support the demands of homosexuals.

In this new and heavily camouflaged tyranny, we are as children whose whims are pandered to for as long as they acquiesce in the ruling ideology. Individualism, personal identity, rights, equality and, above all, freedom are extended provided that (a) there is no conflict with the ruling ideological ethos; (b) the 'equality' is question is as defined and laid down in the unwritten but well-ventilated rules. The rights and freedoms extended in the name of Cultural Marxism are now implicitly understood to derive from the munificence of the state, rather than from any prior source, or from within the human person himself. They are concessions by the power, of whose generosity and enlightenment they represent incontrovertible evidence. The Faustian pact thus signed between the citizen and the state, the fixedness of the relationship between the two, and the limits which it lays down remain obscured behind a rhetoric and agenda of freedom that appear to be irrefutable.

To call this a tyranny risks ridicule, but only such a word is capable of adequately capturing its scope and nature. It is unlike the classical tyrannies in that its use of force is covert and contingent. For the most part it protects itself by enabling the distraction or anaesthetization of its subjects. In the minority of cases where this fails, it is capable of summoning up a mob to denounce, shame and ostracize. After this, for the determined dissenter, lies banishment and, where necessary, the threat of criminalization and all this entails.

In effect, technology is the new way in which humanity postpones consequences. We live in a virtual world, hiding from the real one. This feels free, but only because we have increasingly unreliable models with which to compare it. Reality begins to fade from our memories, and gradually we are enslaved to the will of those who wish to exploit us more effectively.

In many ways, the most accurate prophecy of the totalitarianism which now envelops us is to be found not in George Orwell, who is identified with the brutalising dystopianism of 1984, but in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, written in 1931. Whereas Orwell anticipated a world dominated by fear and torture, Huxley foresaw a world in which mankind would be imprisoned by things that seduced us, including technology, amusement, sedation and diversion. Set in London in 2540 AD, the novel anticipates developments in reproductive technology, sleep-learning, psychological manipulation, and classical conditioning that can be used to impose the will of the few upon the many. In *Brave New World*, there is no such thing as marriage or sexual fidelity. The society is run by a benevolent dictatorship, and the subjects are maintained in a state of pseudo-contentment by conditioning and narcotics – a drug called 'soma'. Huxley outlines the ultimate oxymoron, a benign dystopia, a society in which children are mass-produced by in vitro fertilization techniques and, allocated to different castes which correspond to the various future production needs of industrial society, conditioned for their future roles. Visiting the United States was a major influence on Huxley, who when he first went there was perturbed and fascinated by the way consumerism and advertising had rendered the population supine and docile. He also feared that the world would come to be dominated by the ideas of the technological philosopher Frederick Taylor, who devised the principle of mass production first successfully utilized by Henry Ford to manufacture the Ford Model T.

To understand this benign tyranny – this real life Brave New World – we need but look at what happens to things that start off being one thing and very quickly become another. One of the symptoms of our post-Sixties actually existing utopianism is that, whereas many of our real freedoms are being increasingly circumscribed, these constrictions are being defined and understood as new freedoms.

Many of the technologies we use, which we fondly imagine are increasing our freedoms, are doing the precise opposite. Many internet users, for example, imagine that the world wide web remains unchanged from the way it was described in its early days, as an unrestricted and diversity-fostering information highway. In fact, over the past seven years or so, due to the pressure to ‘monetise’ – i.e. to make bigger and bigger profits from advertising revenues – the web has become involuted and convergent, narrowing the horizons of its users rather than broadening them. The main cause of the change is the ‘personalization’ of Google searches, which causes each search made by an individual to be tailored to that person’s known ‘likes’ and interests, a process which remains invisible, even from the user who may well believe that his searches are throwing up the same things as everyone else’s. Until December 2009, all searches were governed by Google’s Page Rank algorithm, which delivered the same results to everyone entering the same words. Starting on December 4th 2009, Google began using information like log-in details and what the user had searched for previously to decide what he or she would like to throw up in this latest search. Resulting from this customization of searches, what we searched for in the past has since determined what we hear about in the future, eliminating all possibility of serendipity and isolating us in cultural and ideological bubbles. The invisibility of this process is even more worrying: Google doesn’t tell you how it reads your profile or why it’s giving you the results it is. You may not even know that it’s making any kinds of assumptions about you. Google’s CEO Eric Schmidt expressed his delight at this development by declaring that what its users wanted was for Google to ‘tell them what they should be doing next’.

The nature and implications of this trend were made clear by Eli Pariser in his 2011 book *The Filter Bubble – What the internet is Hiding from You*, which describes the future ‘algorithm society’, in which everyone will hear about only those things they are already known to agree with. Pariser fears a drying up of democratic exchange, which is obviously already happening. ‘Democracy,’ writes Pariser, ‘requires citizens to see things from one another’s point of view, but instead we’re more and more enclosed in our own bubbles. Democracy requires a reliance on shared facts; instead we’re being offered parallel but separate universes.’ Information about web-users has become one of the most lucrative resources in the world, and is being used to precision-target increasingly customized advertising. The use of cookies and tracking beacons means that every clue dropped – even unwittingly – by every user can become a commodity. Even when you remain anonymous to the Great Outdoors, internet operators can still harvest your personal details and sell them to the highest bidder – usually corporates with stuff to sell.

The implications of this go beyond isolating each person in his individual bubble, from which he communicates only with those of like-mind. The result, inevitably, is a reduction of the variety and vibrancy of public discussion. Pariser quotes sociologist danah boyd, speaking at the 2009 2.0 Expo: ‘Our bodies are programmed to consume fat and sugar because they’re rare in nature. In the same way, we’re biologically programmed to be attentive to things that stimulate: content that is gross, violent or sexual and that gossip which is humiliating, embarrassing or offensive. If we’re not careful, we’re going to develop the psychological equivalent of obesity. We’ll find ourselves

consuming content that is least beneficial for ourselves or society as a whole.’ Here we can detect the shadow of what is actually a new definition of ‘freedom’: the enjoyment of things that are restricted, unapproved or forbidden – because they are restricted, unapproved or forbidden. We have moved beyond the achievement of pleasure in the conventional ways, into a kind of fetishized experience of enjoying what is illicit or unapproved for no other reason.

One of the key factors in the drifts being accentuated by the world wide web is what Ron Inglehart calls ‘postmaterialism’, which I should quickly add is very far from being a post-consumer society. This is really the culmination of the drifts began in the 1960s, with of course their roots in the Enlightenment and in the development of the technological society, which freed mankind from manual labour and allowed him to live without muscles or loss of sweat.

In the past, we bought things because we needed them; now people mainly buy things as a form of self-expression. When people don’t have to worry about having their basic needs met, they have more time to consider lesser issues, including how their opinions and tastes serve to add value to their constructed identities. In *Modernisation and Postmodernization*, Inglehart says that it is possible to predict, based on economic indicators, which issues are most likely to be germane to the politics of various societies. Postmaterialists, he says, care a great deal less than their parents about authority, tradition and traditional institutions, are more ‘tolerant’ of difference, and put personal identity at the top of their indicators for satisfaction and success. Of course, ‘tolerance’ here, as with the word ‘equality’ means something different than it used to. Once, tolerance meant not interfering with, or attempting to suppress, beliefs that contradicted one’s own, but, under Cultural Marxism, this has given way to a profound intolerance masquerading as tolerance, which holds that everything ought to be tolerated except the views of those who disagree with us. This is part of the senselessness I spoke of earlier.

In this new climate, political leadership and the public’s responses to hot button political issues have to do less with the nature or needs of society, and more and more to do with aspiration in the personal zone: how you would like to be seen by your peers. Opinions about public matters in our ‘liberal’ cultures have somehow become unmoored from conviction or analysis, becoming badges of identity, like T-shirts or hairstyles. People affect philosophies or positions in order to look good, to complement their clothes and cars. (“Look at me! – I’m a NYT-reading pro-Palestinian vegetarian!”; “Does my bum look big in this pro-choice secular atheism?”) The complacency bestowed by six decades of relative peace and comparative prosperity has rendered most of our populations incapable of imagining anything terrible happening in the world they inhabit; therefore, there is no need to be aware of the content of issues, which simply provide the threadbare fabric of ideological raiment.

This is the meaning of the push of gay marriage, which is really the culmination of 1960s senselessness in a single issue.

Gay marriage, far from being part of some revolutionary programme of freedom, is central to the dismantling of the culture based on the idea of rejecting the old kind of freedom. It is really the Trojan Horse by which an entirely new concept of family life is being transported into the heart of modern civilisation. It involves not so much a valourisation of homosexuality for the sake of homosexuals, but for the sake of repudiating and dismantling the traditional concepts which have allowed human societies to cohere and hold together for millennia.

Brendan O'Neill, editor of the UK website Spiked describes the process as follows:

'Gay marriage has emerged as the perfect means through which our post-traditional, relativistic elites can both subtly denigrate older values and also impose a set of whole new values, related to viewing traditional married life and family integrity as problematic, and therefore more individuated, changeable forms of human relationships as good. And because this is fundamentally about eradicating old moral values and enforcing new ones, it constantly verges on being coercive, expressing a hostility towards its opponents that tends to treat them, not simply as wrong or pesky, but as actual blocks, as 'ideological enemies', to the elite's attempted enforcement of a new moral outlook.

'We have seen', he elaborates, 'the weaponisation of homosexuality, the transformation of it by sections of the political and media classes into the focal point for the expression of hostility to the straight world – which means not just people who are sexually straight, but also so-called straight culture and straight values, straightlacedness itself, ways of life that are based on commitment, privacy, familial sovereignty, things that tend to be viewed by the modern cultural clerisy as outdated or, worse, dangerous and destructive. The sacralisation of homosexuality corresponds precisely with the growing denigration by the state and others of the sphere of the family and the ideals of lifelong commitment, because celebrating gayness has become the main and most PC means through which traditional values might be dented and traditional identities called into question, even thrown open to heightened official scrutiny.

'This is what explains both the peculiarly speedy and strikingly authoritarian way in which gay marriage has been adopted by governments across the West who otherwise care little for freedom and choice - because officials recognise in it the opportunity to push further their instinctive hostility towards traditional communal and familial ideals that to a large extent exist outside of the purview of the state. Understanding the impulse behind Western officialdom's feverish adoption of gay marriage is key to understanding what makes this new institution so illiberal and intolerant. Its great driving force is not any commitment to civil rights but rather an urge to coerce, a desire to reshape the views and ideals and habits of the public, to enforce a new morality that elevates individuation over family life, risk-awareness over commitment, and an openness to being guided through life by experts over loyalty to one's family unit or community.

'So when you criticise gay marriage, you're not just criticising gay marriage, you're challenging a new moral framework carved out by those who apparently know better than us what our private lives and relationships should and shouldn't look like. You're not just an opponent of gay marriage - you're a moral heretic whose very thoughts and behaviour are seen as deviant, as running counter to a new, apparently better kind of morality.'

What O'Neill so accurately describes is the latest staging post of the Sixties revolution, the one so inadequately, or naively, or disingenuously, described by Kurt Anderson. In effect the project involved dismantling everything that lies at the core of human society, and replacing it with something that is merely alleged to be more 'progressive'. This claim to 'progressiveness' is an arbitrary insinuation, based on the self-interested claims of a tiny element of society, and without any objective evidence to support it. To suggest, as they do, that the existing model is morally derelict because it 'excludes' homosexuals from family life is both bogus and dishonest, because family life self-evidently derives from the sexual complementarity of men and women – and nothing else.

Working from the reduced lexicon of the enfeebled ‘tolerated’ opposition that pertains in this new tyranny, it is weakly asserted that such interference in the human edifice is untested and fraught with risk, by virtue of being prima facie rooted in no concept of natural or evolutionary reality. But this is merely to scratch the surface what is being foisted upon our societies is a new anthropology, directed at transferring the custodianship of human reality from God to men – and not so much to me as to certain men. In effect we are talking about a form of culturally pursued suicide of the species, a dismantling of everything on which the survival of humanity depends. An entirely bogus insistence on ‘human rights’ or ‘civil rights’ is being used as a battering ram to demolish the existing model, as though it were dysfunctional or corrupt, and replace it with something which has no basis other than in the spurious claims of its advocates.

Among the advance documentation for this meeting today I came across the following passage: ‘A characteristic of post-modern society is not to accept any limits for what concern its operative principles of autonomy and freedom, which means, in other words, that man is himself, both in morals and in metaphysics, autonomous. This presupposes necessarily that there is no order in nature and that it is the man himself who defines all the criteria. It is clear how difficult it could be to find a common ground of dialogue with such a point of view. The question is then: according to your opinion and experience, what can be the way, if there is one, to build a constructive discussion with the post-modern society? How to deal with it without on one side degenerating into a confrontational approach and on the other side creating a dialogue where, in order not to offend the other party, it is not possible to express his own identity and opinion?’

This logic is, with respect, rather typical of the propagandized mentality of the modern moment. It assumes the sincerity of the ‘offended’ when in fact what we are encountering is a kind of strategic taking of offence by ideological protagonists in order to bully us towards an entirely different kind of society, without meaningful discussion or analysis. The only remedies we have are ones proposed by Father Giussani many years ago: reason and courage. The reason to analyze what is happening, separate it into its constituent elements, and the courage to speak the truth which will become self-evident again when we do this. There is no way of doing this while avoiding confrontation, Confrontation is essential if we are to avoid the desperate consequences which will surely follow.