15 The Immanent Frame

1

So we can return to our original question about secularity 3, the conditions of belief which obtain in the modern West. Put simply, the original question was: why is it so hard to believe in God in (many milieux of) the modern West, while in 1500 it was virtually impossible not to?

In the previous chapters, I have been trying to give an answer in terms of the story of how we got to where we are. But "secularization" stories also involve some picture of where this is, of the spiritual shape of the present age (the third story of such theories, as I described this in Chapter 12). That is what I would like to address in this chapter.

We can assemble the pieces of an answer, if we pick up some of the themes that have been discussed in earlier chapters, and lay out the interlocking and mutually reinforcing changes described there.

We spoke about disenchantment. This has many facets. Here I want to mention first its "inner" side, the replacement of the porous self by the buffered self, for whom it comes to seem axiomatic that all thought, feeling and purpose, all the features we normally can ascribe to agents, must be in minds, which are distinct from the "outer" world. The buffered self begins to find the idea of spirits, moral forces, causal powers with a purposive bent, close to incomprehensible.

The rise of the buffered identity has been accompanied by an interiorization; that is, not only the Inner/Outer distinction, that between Mind and World as separate loci, which is central to the buffer itself; and not only the development of this Inner/Outer distinction in a whole range of epistemological theories of a mediational type from Descartes to Rorty;[1] but also the growth of a rich vocabulary of interiority, an inner realm of thought and feeling to be explored. This frontier of self-exploration has grown, through various spiritual disciplines of self-examination, through Montaigne, the development of the modern novel, the rise of Romanticism, the ethic of authenticity, to the point where we now conceive of ourselves as

having inner depths. We might even say that the depths which were previously located in the cosmos, the enchanted world, are now more readily placed within. Where earlier people spoke of possession by evil spirits, we think of mental illness. Or again, the rich symbolism of the enchanted world is located by Freud in the depths of the psyche; and we all find this move very natural and convincing, whatever we might think of his detailed theories.[2]

The buffered identity with its internal spaces has gone along with the changes which have been most suggestively described by Norbert Elias.[3] These involved the development of discipline, of self-control, particularly in the areas of sex and anger. There is an overlap here in the changes described by Elias with those which have been examined by Michel Foucault.[4] But Elias also points to the striking development of a sense of fastidiousness, which involved a withdrawal from earlier forms of promiscuous contact with others, in which people carried out bodily functions before others which are now strictly tabued. People of breeding and education come to insist on privacy, which begins to transform living arrangements in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Privacy allows intimacy, but this is now no longer indiscriminate, but reserved for "intimates". We might say that the earlier field of more promiscuous contact, in which nobles mingled at table and elsewhere with a host of retainers, is now split by a new distinction intimacy/distance.

Intimate space is, of course, social space, in that it is shared with (a few, privileged) others. But there is a close connection between inner space and zones of intimacy. It is in these latter that we share something of the depths of feeling, affinity, susceptibility, that we discover within ourselves. Indeed, without this sharing, be it in prayer, conversation, letters, without the sympathetic reception by close interlocutors, much of our inner exploration couldn't take place. The habits of inwardness are learned partly in intimate exchange, and the modes of exchange themselves become common property through the circulation of new texts, like novels (of which an early form consisted largely or entirely in epistolary exchange).

The buffered, disciplined self, seeking intimacy (although discipline and intimacy can be in tension), also sees him/herself more and more as an individual. We saw this clearly reflected in the understanding of society implicit in what we called the Modern Moral Order. The social orders we live in are not grounded cosmically, prior to us, there as it were, waiting for us to take up our allotted place; rather society is made by individuals, or at least for individuals, and their place in it should reflect the reasons why they joined in the first place, or why God appointed this form of common existence for them. These reasons in the end come down to the good of human beings, not qua fillers of this or that role, but just simpliciter, a human good which is that of all of them equally, even if they don't achieve it in equal measure. (And of course, modern social theory will be split on the issue whether

they can achieve this good as individuals [e.g., Locke, Bentham], or whether they have rather to realize it as some shared, common good [e.g., Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, Humboldt]; but in either case we're talking about a good which pertains to human beings as such.)

Buffer, discipline, and individuality not only interlock and mutually reinforce, but their coming can be seen as largely driven by the process of Reform, as I have been describing it here. The drive to a new form of religious life, more personal, committed, devoted; more christocentric; one which will largely replace the older forms which centred on collective ritual; the drive moreover, to wreak this change for everyone, not just certain religious élites; all this not only powers disenchantment (hence the buffer), and new disciplines of self-control, but also ends up making older holistic understandings of society less and less believable, even in the end nigh incomprehensible.

Individualism, as it emerges from the process of Reform, is first of all that of responsibility. I have to adhere, in a personal commitment, to God, to Christ, to the Church. This can go so far as to put in question the practice of infant baptism, or to make of a personal conversion the condition for Church membership (as in colonial Connecticut). But even where it isn't pushed this far, it plays a crucial role. Each Catholic must confess and be absolved so as to fulfill his Easter duties; one can no longer just go along with the group. But this first individualism develops through that of self-examination, and then self-development, ultimately to that of authenticity. And along the way, it naturally spawns an instrumental individualism, which is implicit in the idea that society is there for the good of individuals.

The obverse of this view of society as made of individuals is the atrophy of earlier ideas of cosmic order, such as those which underlay traditional monarchies. This, in a sense, was another facet of disenchantment, since these notions of cosmic order invoked a teleology in nature, and purposive forces underlying social reality. They form, in a sense, the higher, élite and intellectualized range of the enchanted world, which the peasants lived in the mode of relics and wood sprites.

Cosmic orders were inseparable from earlier understandings of higher time. The modern idea of order thus places us deeply and comprehensively in secular time. But as we saw above, while cosmic orders are thought to maintain themselves, the new Providential social order is meant to be established by human action. It offers a blueprint for constructive action, rather than a matrix of purposive forces already in nature. The new context puts a premium on constructive action, on an instrumental stance towards the world, which the new disciplines have already inculcated.

Now the instrumental stance, and the thoroughgoing secularization of time, go together. Our sense of being comprehensively in secular time is very much reinforced by the very thick environment of measured time which we have woven

around ourselves in our civilization. Our lives are measured and shaped by accurate clock-readings, without which we couldn't function as we do. This thick environment is both the condition and the consequence of our far-reaching attempt to make the best of time, to use it well, not to waste it. It is the condition and consequence of time becoming for us a resource, which we have to make use of wisely and to advantage. And we remember that this too was one of the modes of discipline inculcated by the Puritan Reformers.[5] The dominance of instrumental rationality in our world, and the pervasiveness of secular time go together.

So the buffered identity of the disciplined individual moves in a constructed social space, where instrumental rationality is a key value, and time is pervasively secular. All of this makes up what I want to call "the immanent frame". There remains to add just one background idea: that this frame constitutes a "natural" order, to be contrasted to a "supernatural" one, an "immanent" world, over against a possible "transcendent" one.

Now the irony is, that this clear distinction of natural from supernatural, which was an achievement of Latin Christendom in the late Middle Ages and early modern period, was originally made in order to mark clearly the autonomy of the supernatural. The rebellion of the "nominalists" against Aquinas' "realism" was meant to establish the sovereign power of God, whose judgments made right and wrong, and could not be chained by the bent of "nature". Likewise the Reformers did everything they could to disentangle the order of grace from that of nature.

But this idea, which runs so much against the understandings of an enchanted world, and of cosmic orders, which have been dominant in all previous civilizations, only becomes deeply established in our understanding of our world through the set of connected changes I have just been describing. These represent profound changes in our practical self-understanding, how we fit into our world (as buffered, disciplined, instrumental agents) and into society (as responsible individuals, constituting societies designed for mutual benefit). But they are all the more firmly entrenched in that they dovetail perfectly with the major theoretical transformation of Western modernity, viz., the rise of post-Galilean natural science. This finally yielded our familiar picture of the natural, "physical" universe as governed by exceptionless laws, which may reflect the wisdom and benevolence of the creator, but don't require in order to be understood—or (at least on a first level) explained—any reference to a good aimed at, whether in the form of a Platonic Idea, or of Ideas in the mind of God.

This move was, of course, connected to some of those resumed above. In particular, there was a close connection between modern post-Baconian science and the instrumental stance: Bacon insists that the goal of science is not to discover a noble over-all pattern in things (as he somewhat tendentiously describes the sciences of

Aristotle), which we can take pride in making evident, but the making of experiments which permit us to "improve the condition of mankind". That is why Scheler describes the new sciences as modes of "Leistungswissen".[6]

Now while the new science gave a clear theoretical form to the idea of an immanent order which could be understood on its own, without reference to interventions from outside (even if we might reason from it to a Creator, and even a benevolent Creator), the life of the buffered individual, instrumentally effective in secular time, created the practical context within which the self-sufficiency of this immanent realm could become a matter of experience. And as I indicated above, the new understanding of society allowed space not just for new collective agents (we who come together to found a state, create a movement, set up a church), but also for an objectification of social reality as governed by its own laws (as exceptionless and clear, we hope, as Newton's); and indeed, this objective understanding is essential for the efficacy of our collective action.

And so we come to understand our lives as taking place within a self-sufficient immanent order;[7] or better, a constellation of orders, cosmic, social and moral. As I described them in Chapter 7, these orders are understood as impersonal. This understanding of our predicament has as background a sense of our history: we have advanced to this grasp of our predicament through earlier more primitive stages of society and self-understanding. In this process, we have come of age.

At first, the social order is seen as offering us a blueprint for how things, in the human realm, can hang together to our mutual benefit, and this is identified with the plan of Providence, what God asks us to realize. But it is in the nature of a self-sufficient immanent order that it can be envisaged without reference to God; and very soon the proper blueprint is attributed to Nature. This change can, of course, involve nothing of importance, if we go on seeing God as the Author of Nature, just a notational variant on the first view. But following a path opened by Spinoza, we can also see Nature as identical with God, and then as independent from God. The Plan is without a planner. A further step can then be taken, where we see the Plan as what we come to share and adhere to in the process of civilization and Enlightenment; either because we are capable of rising to a universal view, to the outlook, for instance, of the "impartial spectator"; or because our innate sympathy extends to all human beings; or because our attachment to rational freedom in the end shows us how we ought to behave. These are the most common paths whereby the notion of a normative arrangement of things among humans can be entirely immanentized, no longer to "nature" in general, but to developing human motivation.

The immanent order can thus slough off the transcendent. But it doesn't necessarily do so. What I have been describing as the immanent frame is common to all of us in the modern West, or at least that is what I am trying to portray. Some of us

want to live it as open to something beyond; some live it as closed. It is something which permits closure, without demanding it. Let me try to explore this further.

2

First of all, let me explore the main motivations that people feel on one side or the other. Let's start by asking: how does the immanent frame remain open?

We've already seen various elements of the answer to this in the preceding pages. A good example was the paradigm of what I called in the previous chapter the "neo-Durkheimian" understanding, the "civil religion" of the U.S.A. at its foundation. Here we have the Providentialist reading of the plan that we should follow. God (or Deistically, the Architect of the Universe) is whom we are following in erecting our social order. The general feature that I want to extract from this example is that for many Americans then (and for lots still now) their very sense that there was something higher to aim at, some better and more moral way of life, was indissolubly connected to God.

We might put it this way. It is in the nature of what I have called "strong evaluation", whereby we distinguish good and evil, noble and base, virtuous and vicious, and the like, that it distinguish between terms, one (or some) of which are in some way incommensurably higher than the other(s). That is, the lower are not just quantitatively inferior; there is no way of compensating for the lack of the higher through any accumulation of the lower. On the contrary.

Now wherever the sense of the higher which constitutes such distinctions is somehow ineradicably linked to God, or something ontically higher (transcendent), belief in this higher seems obviously right, founded, even undeniable. For many, their highest sense of the good has been developed in a profoundly religious context: it has been formed, for instance, around images of sainthood; or their strongest sense of it comes in moment of prayer, or liturgy, or perhaps religious music; or their role models were people of strong religious faith. Their sense of the highest good, formed before any defined theological "ideas", is of something consubstantial with God; by that I mean that this good is inconceivable without God, or some relation to the higher. Of course, 'inconceivable' doesn't mean here what it usually means in philosophical discourse, where we are talking about conceptual incoherence, as when someone speaks of "round squares", or "married bachelors". It rather means that they cannot make sense of the good as they experience it without reference to the transcendent in some form.

This connection may be broken by further experience. We may change our view of the highest good; or come to see it as possible in an immanent context. Or we may come to see from our relations to others how experience might be construed

differently, even though we go on feeling that the reference to God makes the best sense of it. Morality without God may be no longer inconceivable, even though still not fully credible for us.

But further experience may also entrench it. And there are cases where it greatly strengthens it, even converts us from an initial stance of immanence. A good example, discussed in the previous chapter, were the conversion experiences of the Great Awakening and its successors, whereby people felt empowered by God or Christ to live up to the demands of discipline and effort that their life laid on them, becoming sober, productive providers, for instance. This kind of experience continues today, as we saw in the spreading wave of Pentecostalism, as well as in extra-Christian forms, as with Black Muslims in the U.S.A. But this is only one among many forms of conversion narrative in modern times.

The neo-Durkheimian case mentioned above provides a further entrenchment. It is not just a matter of my own experience of the good, but something which is woven into a cherished and crucial collective identity, whether it be that of a nation, or an ethnic group, or religious movement. Here is a crucial collective good which seems "consubstantial" with God, or in some essential relation to transcendence.

This kind of consubstantiality is one, positive set of ways in which the immanent frame may be lived as inherently open to transcendence. But it may also be present for us negatively, as something whose lack we feel. I discussed earlier the multiple reactions against what people feel are the reductive forms of the modern moral order and its attendant disciplines and instrumentalities. Certain modes, like utilitarianism, have attracted this kind of hostile reaction, and offer an easy illustration, even though not the only one. We can have a sense of stifling in an order thus reductively conceived: is that all there is? There seems to be no room for generous action, heroism, the warrior virtues, a higher sensibility; or else for a real dedication to humanity, a more demanding ethic of sacrifice; or a sense of a greater whole, a relation to the universe; and the like.

This range of reactions, for instance to utilitarianism, may take us in a number of directions. Some remain within the immanent order, find a more radical and far-reaching understanding of the good, as we have for instance with Rousseau and Marx. But they want to respect the limits set by natural science and law-like social sciences modeled on it; as well as those of the buffered identity. Others remain within immanence, but at the cost of rejecting the moral order of equality and universal welfare, and exalt higher forms of life available only to the minority; here we have forms of the immanent counter-Enlightenment. But some also press towards some recognition of transcendence, or remain in the uncertain border zone opened by Romantic forms of art.

As for the positive forms in which transcendence impinges, we see that they are

connected to what we see as the highest good; they figure in the ethical or spiritual dimensions. This is something which applies to our age, to life in the immanent frame, but not at all times and all places. Think of the story told of Boniface among the pagan Germans. He had their sacred oak groves felled—and nothing happened. This was taken as a sign of great power, and led to many conversions, or so we are told. Pre-Axial understandings of power were at work there, a situation so removed from our own as to be difficult to imagine.

But this is not to say that we are utterly confined to factors that fit within the immanent frame, like moral goodness. Sometimes suppressed elements which were prominent in the past and have been sidelined by modern Reform seem to break through again. New centres of pilgrimage arise, out of apparitions of the Virgin: Lourdes, Fatima, Medjugorje, in continuity with much older sites, like Częstachowa and Guadalupe. These pilgrimages themselves are sites of power for those who participate in them. These phenomena have to be put into the context of what Yves-Marie Hilaire calls the "festive",[8] which can also be observed in certain moments of mass celebration which seem to take us out of the everyday. We are not necessarily as "modern" as we think we are.

3

And what pushes to closure, when we go in that direction? Well clearly, corresponding to goods which are consubstantial with the transcendent, stand notions of the good which are intrinsically seen as immanent. From the eighteenth century, from the time of Gibbon, Voltaire, and Hume, we see the reaction which identifies in a strongly transcendent version of Christianity a danger for the goods of the modern moral order. Strong Christianity will demand allegiance to certain theological beliefs or ecclesiastical structures, and this will split a society which should be intent simply on securing mutual benefit. Or else, the demand that we reach for some higher good, beyond human flourishing, at best will distract us, at worst will become the basis for demands which will again endanger the well-oiled order of mutual benefit. Religion in all these menacing forms is what the men of the Enlightenment called "fanaticism".

The sense of being menaced by fanaticism is one great source of the closure of immanence. In many cases we have an initial movement of anti-clericalism, which ends up turning into a rejection of Christianity, or later into atheism. We can trace this, for instance, in the story of anti-clericalism in nineteenth-century France.[9]

But this movement can go farther. It is not just that the good is allegedly threatened by the supposedly better, higher. It may also come to be identified with the rejection of the higher. There is a discourse of Protestantism, in rejection of Catholic

asceticism, which chides monks with refusing the gifts of God in the name of a bo-gus higher vocation. This is continued in the last two centuries by a discourse, now of anti-Christianity, because of its supposed rejection, or relegation, of the sensual. The human good is in its very essence sensual, earthly; whoever identifies a tran-scendent goal departs from it, betrays it.

We touch here on one of the deep sources of the moral attraction of immanence, even materialism; something we can already feel with Lucretius. There is a strong attraction to the idea that we are in an order of "nature", in which we are part of this greater whole, arise from it, and don't escape or transcend it, even though we rise above everything else in it. One side of this attraction is the sense of belonging, be-ing part of our native land; we are one with this nature. We feel this most palpably on summer days, as we sit in a garden, hearing the birds singing and the bees hum-ming. We belong to the earth. Camus evokes this sense most powerfully in his *Noces.*[10] This feeling can only be further strengthened when we reflect how believ-ing we are above this has often pushed us to inhumanity.

Another facet of this same belonging is our sense of wonder that something like ourselves arose out of lower nature. There is a mysterious process here; something deep to understand. We are very drawn to this; we want to explore it. The mechani-cal outlook which splits nature from supernature voids all this mystery. This split generates the modern concept of the "miracle"; a kind of punctual hole blown in the regular order of things from outside, that is, from the transcendent. Whatever is higher must thus come about through the holes pierced in the regular, natural or-der, within whose normal operation there is no mystery. This is curiously enough, a view of things shared between materialists and Christian Fundamentalists. Only for these, it provides proof of "miracles", because certain things are unexplained by the normal course of natural causation. For the materialist, it is a proof that anything transcendent is excluded by "science".

This often brings a tension into materialist discourse, because on one hand they want to stress that in scientifically understood nature, there are no "mysteries". But on the other hand, many feel a strong sense of mystery before the genesis of mind and purpose out of inanimate nature. They are deeply drawn to this dark genesis, and want to try to go further into it, understand it more fully. What is clear is that you altogether void the question with the standard modern notion of "miracle", as punctual intervention interrupting a regular order.

This rejection of "miracle" was a great passion of Ernest Renan, as we can see from his life's work tracing the origin of religions. He couldn't but see the faith as denying the very basic premises of this search, viz., that there is something deep to understand here, which we can only grasp by digging into nature and history. So he was pulled out of faith, and into his own version of "science".[11]

Of course, these latter considerations: belonging to the earth, the sense of our dark genesis, can also be part of Christian faith, but only when it has broken with certain features of the immanent frame, especially the distinction nature/supernature. It is perhaps precisely the ordinary operation of things which constitutes the "miracle".

But leaving this aside for the moment, we can see in the naturalistic rejection of the transcendent that I have been describing the ethical outlook which pushes to closure. Now while many have felt a sense of unease within the modern order with its disciplines and instrumental reason, and have been driven towards an opening to the transcendent, there is also a set of ways in which we can feel comfortable and empowered within this order. I have enumerated them frequently above. The buffered self feels invulnerable before the world of spirits and magic forces, which still can haunt us in our dreams, particularly those of childhood. Objectification of the world gives a sense of power, and control, which is intensified by every victory of instrumental reason.

And then the colossal success of modern natural science and the associated technology can lead us to feel that it unlocks all mysteries, that it will ultimately explain everything, that human science must be developed on the same basic plan, or even ultimately reduced to physics, or at least organic chemistry.

And so we can come to see the growth of civilization, or modernity, as synonymous with the laying out of a closed immanent frame; within this civilized values develop, and a single-minded focus on the human good, aided by the fuller and fuller use of scientific reason, permits the greatest flourishing possible of human beings. Religion not only menaces these goals with its fanaticism, but it also undercuts reason, which comes to be seen as rigorously requiring scientific materialism.

I have been describing here the basic motivations of the two great polar positions. But we must also remember that there always have been a great many people who have been cross-pressured between the two basic orientations; who want to respect as much as they can the "scientific" shape of the immanent order, as they have been led to see it; or who fear the effect of religious "fanaticism"; but who still cannot help believing that there is something more than the merely immanent. The kind of "spiritualist" position that we see with Victor Hugo, for instance, or alternatively with Jean Jaurès, are striking examples.

What emerges from all this is that we can either see the transcendent as a threat, a dangerous temptation, a distraction, or an obstacle to our greatest good. Or we can read it as answering to our deepest craving, need, fulfillment of the good. Or else, since religion has very often been the first: think of the long line that runs from Aztec sacrifice, through Torquemada, to Bin Laden; the question really is whether it is

only threat, or doesn't also offer a promise. (And we might add the question whether *only* religion poses this kind of threat; the twentieth century, through the figures of Stalin, Hitler, and Pol Pot, seems to indicate the contrary.)

I think that which way we go ultimately comes down to our answer to this question. But this doesn't mean that everyone who goes one way or the other, even everyone who makes some kind of crucial turning in life in one direction or the other, has faced this issue in its clearest and starkest way. They have not necessarily stood in that open space where you can feel the winds pulling you, now to belief, now to unbelief, which I described in my lectures on William James as the site he has so masterfully explored.[12]

We don't stand there, because not only is the immanent frame itself not usually, or even mainly a set of *beliefs* which we entertain about our predicament, however it may have started out; rather it is the sensed context in which we develop our beliefs; but in the same way, one or other of these takes on the immanent frame, as open or closed, has usually sunk to the level of such an unchallenged framework, something we have trouble often thinking ourselves outside of, even as an imaginative exercise.

I have already described on the believing side people for whom the good is consubstantial to God, for whom another construal makes no sense. And there are corresponding positions on the side of closure, which I will explore in a minute. In general, we have here what Wittgenstein calls a "picture", a background to our thinking, within whose terms it is carried on, but which is often largely unformulated, and to which we can frequently, just for this reason, imagine no alternative. As he once famously put it, "a picture held us captive".[13] We can sometimes be completely captured by the picture, not even able to imagine what an alternative would look like; or we can be in somewhat better shape: capable of seeing that there is another way of construing things, but still having great difficulty making sense of it— in a sense, the standard predicament in ethnology.

Standing in the Jamesian open space requires that you have gone farther than this second state, and can actually feel some of the force of each opposing position. But so far apart are belief and unbelief, openness and closure here, that this feat is relatively rare. Most of us are at level one or two, either unable to see how the other view makes sense at all, or else struggling to make sense of it.

Our predicament in the modern West is, therefore, not only characterized by what I have called the immanent frame, which we all more or less share—although some features of this need to be challenged or re-interpreted, as we shall see below. It also consists of more specific pictures, the immanent frame as "spun" in ways of openness and closure, which are often dominant in certain milieux. This local dominance obviously strengthens their hold as pictures. The spin of closure which is hegemonic in the Academy is a case in point.

4

But my whole reading here will be challenged. I have distinguished the immanent frame, on one hand, and two equally possible "spins", open and closed, on the other. Some people will undoubtedly feel that the immanent frame calls out for one reading. True, we can adopt the other view by dint of determined (and not quite intellectually honest) "spinning", but one reading is the obvious, the "natural" one. In the nature of things, that claim is made today most often by protagonists of the "closed" reading, those who see immanence as admitting of no beyond. This is an effect of the hegemony of this reading, especially in intellectual and academic milieux. The sense that this reading is natural, logically unavoidable, underpins the power of the mainstream secularization theory, the view that modernity must bring secularity in its train, that I have been arguing against here. This understanding goes back at least to Weber, who speaks sneeringly of those who would go on believing in face of "disenchantment" as having to make an "Opfer des Intellekts" (a sacrifice of the intellect). "To the person who cannot bear the fate of the times like a man, one must say: may he rather return silently, . . . The arms of the Churches are open widely and compassionately for him".[14]

By contrast, my understanding of the immanent frame is that, properly understood, it allows of both readings, without compelling us to either. If you grasp our predicament without ideological distortion, and without blinders, then you see that going one way or another requires what is often called a "leap of faith". But it's worth examining a bit more closely what I mean by that here.

What pushes us one way or the other is what we might describe as our over-all take on human life, and its cosmic and (if any) spiritual surroundings. People's stance on the issue of belief in God, or of an open versus closed understanding of the immanent frame, usually emerge out of this general sense of things.

This take can hardly be simply arbitrary. If pressed, one can often articulate a whole host of considerations which motivate this stance, such as our sense of what is really important in human life, or the ways we think that human life can be transformed, or the constants, if any, of human history, and so on.

But the take goes beyond these particulate insights. Moreover, these themselves can be changed through further events and experience. In this way, our over-all sense of things anticipates or leaps ahead of the reasons we can muster for it. It is something in the nature of a hunch; perhaps we might better speak here of "anticipatory confidence". This is what it means to talk of a "leap of faith" here.

But of course, the term "faith" has a different meaning when we speak of theistic religion. Here it refers to a crucial feature of our over-all sense of things, namely the personal relation of trust and confidence in God, rather than to our motives for taking this stance. It describes the *content* of our position, not the *reasons* for it.

Of course, experience can bring an increase in our confidence in our stance. But we never move to a point beyond all anticipation, beyond all hunches, to the kind of certainty that we can enjoy in certain narrower questions, say, in natural science or ordinary life.

Thus although faith in our second, theistic sense, is peculiar to a certain kind of stance of openness in the immanent frame, both open and closed stances involve a step beyond available reasons into the realm of anticipatory confidence.

And so full lucidity would involve recognizing that one's confidence is at least partly anticipatory, and hence being aware of the Jamesian open space. What I am calling "spin" is a way of avoiding entering this space, a way of convincing oneself that one's reading is obvious, compelling, allowing of no cavil or demurral. I invoked in the previous paragraph the accusation of intellectual dishonesty often hurled at believers from Weber on down to today. My concept of spin here involves something of this kind, but much less dramatic and insulting; it implies that one's thinking is clouded or cramped by a powerful picture which prevents one seeing important aspects of reality. I want to argue that those who think the closed reading of immanence is "natural" and obvious are suffering from this kind of disability.

Of course, so are those who think that the open reading is obvious and inescapable, because, for instance, the existence of God can be "proven". But such people are perhaps less numerous today than their secularist opposite numbers, and certainly cannot approach the intellectual hegemony their opponents enjoy, and so my arguments here will mainly address these latter.

The force of secularist spin can be understood in terms of what I will call "closed world structures" (CWSs), that is, ways of restricting our grasp of things which are not recognized as such. I want in the course of the following pages to examine three broad categories of these, which go a long way to explaining the unjustified force of the mainstream account of secularization, as well as the disinterest in and contempt for religion which frequently accompanies it. Of course, nothing that I will say in the course of this analysis, and hence also exposé of these structures, impugns in any way the conclusions which they support. All CWSs may be illegitimate, and yet there may be nothing beyond the immanent frame. I will not be arguing either for or against an open or closed reading, just trying to dissipate the false aura of the obvious that surrounds one of these.

But before entering on this analysis, another possible misunderstanding must be laid to rest. Surely, our modern man-made world declares the absence of God in something like the same sense that the Heavens for the psalmist declared his glory. As A. N. Wilson put it,

> The nineteenth century had created a climate for itself—philosophical, politico-sociological, literary, artistic, personal—in which God had become

unknowable, His voice inaudible against the din of machines and the atonal banshee of the emerging egomania called The Modern. The cohesive social force which religion had once provided was broken up. The nature of society itself, urban, industrialized, materialistic, was the background for the godlessness which philosophy and science did not so much discover as ratify.[15]

Wilson's portrait of "godlessness" has many facets. On one level, there is the change in urban environment: contrast a mediaeval city crowded around its Gothic cathedral with a modern metropolis. It's not just that skyscrapers now dwarf the cathedral, if one remains. This might be seen as reflecting a new set of meanings which have taken over from the old, say, Capitalism replacing Christianity. But actually, the change is more drastic. It is more like cacophony replacing meaning as such. The shape of the city no longer manifests a single over-arching meaning, but on the one hand, individual great buildings each monumentalize some corporation or triumphant entrepreneur, while on the other, vast areas of the city form a crazy quilt of special purpose constructions—factories, malls, docks—following each some fragmentary instrumental rationality. Rare are the successful whole environments—New Delhi, Chandigar—built in the twentieth century.

On another level, the "atonal banshee of emerging egomania" unavoidably impinges through the ubiquity of advertising and the entertainment media, insistently calling us each to our own satisfaction and fulfillment, linking the powerful forces of sexual desire and the craving for wholeness, constitutive elements of our humanity, to products promoted to the status of icons, and in the process obscuring, emptying, and trivializing these forces themselves.

There is certainly a widespread sense of loss here, if not always of God, then at least of meaning. This manifests itself in the massive movement of people as tourists towards the still undamaged sites of earlier civilizations, with their temples, mosques, and cathedrals; as well as in the invocation of these historic sites in contemporary upscale suburbs—for instance, of Tuscany in Sandton, north of Johannesburg. Today's reality is easier to live while dreaming of being elsewhere, or in another stream of time.

But the implication of Wilson's passage, that modern conditions yield an experience of godlessness which secularist theories just ratify, is a bit too quick; and for more than one reason.

First, it quite overlooks other experiences of modernity: for instance, those of citizens of a nation whose political identity is defined in religious or confessional terms—the neo-Durkheimian predicament I described above; or else that of Methodists or Pentecostals, whose ability to meet the disciplines of contemporary life is bound up with Christian conversion, so that an order-sustaining morality is felt as

inseparable from faith. The same unrelated jumble of rational economic actions by individual agents that may appear fragmentary and meaningless to one whose model is the mediaeval city may be lived by the believing entrepreneur or worker as the solid fruits of the disciplines of faith.

But second, even those who see godlessness here will not necessarily opt for the closed perspective on immanence. They may see this as a grievous lack, pointing to a transcendent integrative power which has been neglected.

And indeed, these two reactions may be combined: the celebration of capitalist entrepreneurship being taken as a positive sign of a faithful society, while the sexual excesses of the media bespeak a rebellion against God. It is this kind of double perception which underpins much of the "culture wars" in the contemporary U.S. Or again, we can think of the bitter opposition of the Christian right to gay marriage, which they see as an aberration in a society which hitherto has enshrined "Christian family values".

So the sense of the world as God-forsaken (or meaning-forsaken) doesn't necessarily transmute either logically or psychologically into the closed take on immanence, the belief that there is nothing beyond the "natural" order. The idea that it must be so comes partly from a confusion of disenchantment with the end of religion. This is widespread in the contemporary discussion. Indeed, the terms are sometimes used as synonyms. Even Weber seems to have fallen into this at times.

But I have been using the word here in a narrower sense: disenchantment is the dissolution of the "enchanted" world, the world of spirits and meaningful causal forces, of wood sprites and relics. Enchantment is essential to some forms of religion; but other forms—especially those of modern Reformed Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant—have been built on its partial or total denial. We cannot just equate the two.

The presence of something beyond (what we call today) the "natural" is more palpable and immediate, one might say, physical, in an enchanted age. The sacred in the strong sense, which marks out certain people, times, places and actions, in distinction to all others as profane, is by its very nature localizable, and its place is clearly marked out in ritual and sacred geography. This is what we sense, and often regret the passing of, when we contemplate the mediaeval cathedral. God-forsakenness is an experience of those whose ancestral culture has been transformed and repressed by a relentless process of disenchantment, whose deprivations can still be keenly felt. But it has been part of a move from one religious life to another, long before it came to be (mistakenly) seen by some as a facet of the decline of religion altogether.

Once we set aside the illusion which identifies religion and enchantment, what we have to retain from this whole movement is a certain direction of transformation

in religious life itself. We have moved from an era in which religious life was more "embodied", where the presence of the sacred could be enacted in ritual, or seen, felt, touched, walked towards (in pilgrimage); into one which is more "in the mind", where the link with God passes more through our endorsing contested interpretations—for instance, of our political identity as religiously defined, or of God as the authority and moral source underpinning our ethical life.

The change mustn't be exaggerated. It is somewhat clearer on the level of official theology, the way in which the Churches understand their creeds. But there has always been rebellion on the level of popular religion. The Reformed churches always had to battle with (what they saw as) hold-overs from the old religion. The nineteenth-century, post-Restoration Catholic Church was "forced"—in the eyes of élites—to make allowance for a popular piety of pilgrimage, veneration of relics, apparitions of the Virgin, and the like. More generally, we see today the continuing power of pilgrimage, and in general what I have been calling the "festive". And more recently, in a strange dialectical reversal, we have Pentecostal movements, which integrate ecstatic prayer and miraculous healing, winning converts in traditional Catholic cultures where the established clerical élites look on these practices with suspicion and disdain. What would Calvin have said?

And all this doesn't take account of the continuing importance of "corporal works of mercy" in contemporary Christian practice.

But leaving these aspects and counter-movements aside, official Christianity has gone through what we can call an "excarnation", a transfer out of embodied, "enfleshed" forms of religious life, to those which are more "in the head". In this it follows in parallel with "Enlightenment", and modern unbelieving culture in general. The issue here is not how many positive invocations of the body we hear; these abound in many forms of atheist materialism, as also in more Liberal Christianity. The issue is whether our relation to the highest—God for believers, generally morality for unbelieving Aufklärer—is mediated in embodied form, as was plainly the case for parishioners "creeping to the Cross" on Good Friday in pre-Reformation England.[16] Or looking to what moves us towards the highest, the issue is to what degree our highest desires, those which allow us to discern the highest, are embodied, as the pity captured in the New Testament verb 'splangnizesthai' plainly is.

By contrast, we can look at the "enlightened" ethics of today. On one side, we have a Humean stream, which does indeed, have a place for feeling in ethics, the reaction of sympathy, but accords this no power to discern its good or bad uses. This a calculating reason must determine. And in certain extreme variants, even the most basic "gut" feelings, like our horror at infanticide, are ruled irrelevant. On the other side, we have the Kantian stream, which derives our moral obligations from a consideration of ourselves as pure rational agents.

Modern enlightened culture is very theory-oriented. We tend to live in our heads, trusting our disengaged understandings: of experience, of beauty (we can't really accept that it's telling us anything, unless about our own feelings); even the ethical: we think that the only valid form of ethical self-direction is through rational maxims or understanding. We can't accept that part of being good is opening ourselves to certain feelings; either the horror at infanticide, or agape as a gut feeling.

But the effect of Reform has been that much of modern Western Christianity has been following the same path.

But surely, one might argue, what I have been calling the immanent frame isn't simply neutral. To live in this frame is to be nudged in one direction rather than another. There is a sense in which this is quite true. The immanent frame has come about through the development of certain practices and theoretical insights. The bent of these has been to make us see ourselves as living in impersonal orders, naturally, socially, and ethically, as I described in Chapter 7. This of itself lent greater plausibility to Deism, as against orthodox Christianity; and later this has been drawn on to support atheism, and materialism. Or to take another example, the protocols of modern "scientific" and analytic thinking privilege the impersonal "view from nowhere", the standpoint which is "experience-far". So it tends to make us systematically devalue insights which might challenge the understanding of impersonal order, insights which might arise, for example, out of prayer, or in love relations. In our epoch, the most prestigious, well-established experience-far, impersonal order is that developed out of natural science. Taken on its own terms, as the whole story about us and our world, this can easily be seen as supporting materialism.

So in one sense it is true that living within this frame pushes us to the closed perspective. But this is the sense in which living within the frame is living according to the norms and practices that it incorporates. However, I have been arguing all along that the actual experience of living within Western modernity tends to awaken protest, resistances of various kinds. In this fuller, experiential sense, "living within" the frame doesn't simply tip you in one direction, but allows you to feel pulled two ways. A very common experience of living here is that of being cross-pressured between the open and closed perspectives.

In the following pages, moreover, I want to argue a further point. It is not just that the frame doesn't as such tip us in one direction or the other, that its effect on each person will be coloured by the orientation they have been led to develop. But even when they come to feel it as obviously supporting closure, this doesn't constitute a valid argument. The sense of "obvious" closure is not a perception of rational grounding, but an illusion of what I have been calling "spin".

In other words, while the norms and practices of the immanent frame may incline to closure, this neither decides the effect that living within the frame in fact will have on us, nor even less does it justify the closed take. If this seems "obvious" to us, either in the sense of a surface appearance (as in Wilson's "godlessness" above), or in the sense of imposing itself on reason, this is because we have already taken up a certain stance to it.[17]

5

I want now to examine the illusion of the rational "obviousness" of the closed perspective. My aim is to explore the constitution in modernity of what I will call "closed" or "horizontal" worlds. I mean by this shapes of our "world" (in Heidegger's sense, that is, the "world" in its meaning for us) which leave no place for the "vertical" or "transcendent", but which in one way or another close these off, render them inaccessible, or even unthinkable.

This existence of these has become "normal" for us. But we can bring out again how remarkable this is, if we take a certain distance from it, and return to the major contrast which enframes the argument of this book: we need just to jump back 500 years in our Western civilization (a.k.a. Latin Christendom), as I suggested at the beginning. At that time, non-belief in God was close to unthinkable for the vast majority;[18] whereas today this is not at all the case. One might be tempted to say that in certain milieux, the reverse has become true, that belief is unthinkable. But this exaggeration already shows up the lack of symmetry. It is truer to say that in our world, a whole gamut of positions, from the most militant atheism to the most orthodox traditional theisms, passing through every possible position on the way, are represented and defended somewhere in our society. Something like the unthinkability of some of these positions can be experienced in certain milieux, but what is ruled out will vary from context to context. An atheist in the Bible belt has trouble being understood, as often (in a rather different way) do believing Christians in certain reaches of the academy. But, of course, people in each of these contexts are aware that the others exist, and that the option they can't really credit is the default option elsewhere in the same society, whether they regard this with hostility or just perplexity. The existence of an alternative fragilizes each context, that is, makes its sense of the thinkable/unthinkable uncertain and wavering.

This fragilization[19] is then increased by the fact that great numbers of people are not firmly embedded in any such context, but are puzzled, cross-pressured, or have constituted by bricolage a sort of median position. The existence of these people raises sometimes even more acute doubts within the more assured milieux. The polar opposites can be written off as just mad or bad, as we see with the present Ameri-

can culture wars between "liberals" and "fundamentalists"; but the intermediate positions can sometimes not be as easily dismissed.

What I want to try is to articulate some of the worlds from within which the believing option seems strange and unjustifiable. But this articulation involves some degree of abstraction—indeed, three kinds of abstraction, with the corresponding dangers.

(a) What I shall really be describing is not worlds in their entirety, but "world structures", aspects or features of the way experience and thought are shaped and cohere, but not the whole of which they are constituents. (b) I will not be describing the world of any concrete human beings. A world is something which people inhabit. It gives the shape of what they experience, feel, opine, see, etc. The world of the cross-pressured is different from that of the assured. But what I'm doing is trying to articulate certain world-types ("ideal types" in a quasi-Weberian sense), which may not, will almost surely not coincide with the totality of any real person's world. (c) Thirdly, the articulation involves an intellectualization; one has to get at the connections in lived experience through ideas, and very often ideas which are not consciously available to the people concerned, unless they are forced to articulate them themselves through challenge and argument.

Nevertheless, this effort, I believe is very worth while, because it enables us to see the way in which we can be held within certain world structures without being aware that there are alternatives. A "picture" can "hold us captive", as Wittgenstein put it, in the image I invoked a few pages back.[20] And by the same token, we can gain insight into the way two people or groups can be arguing past each other, because their experience and thought are structured by two different pictures.

What I want to try to lay out is world structures which are closed to transcendence. They arise within what I have been calling the "immanent frame", but give it as I said above a certain twist, a certain spin, not primarily as a conscious theoretical move, but rather through certain deep pictures, which give further specificity to the pictures which underlie the frame itself.

A good sense of how these function can be found in the example I spoke of earlier, that which provides the framework for modern epistemology. I am taking "epistemology" here as more than a set of theories which have been widespread, but also at the level of a structure in my sense, that is, an underlying picture which is only partly consciously entertained, but which controls the way people think, argue, infer, make sense of things.

At its most blatant this structure operates with a picture of knowing agents as individuals, who build up their understanding of the world through combining and relating, in more and more comprehensive theories, the information which they take in, and which is couched in inner representations, be these conceived as mental

pictures (in the earlier variants), or as something like sentences held true in the more contemporary versions.

Characteristic of this picture are a series of priority relations. Knowledge of the self and its states comes before knowledge of external reality and of others. The knowledge of reality as neutral fact comes before our attributing to it various "values" and relevances. And, of course, knowledge of the things of "this world", of the natural order precedes any theoretical invocation of forces and realities transcendent to it.

The epistemological picture, combining as it does very often with some understanding of modern science, operates frequently as a CWS. The priority relations tell us not only what is learned before what, but also what can be inferred on the basis of what. They are foundational relations. I know the world through my representations. I must grasp the world as fact before I can posit values. I must accede to the transcendent, if at all, by inference from the natural. This can operate as a CWS, because it is obvious that the inference to the transcendent is at the extreme and most fragile end of a chain of inferences; it is the most epistemically questionable. And indeed, granted the lack of consensus surrounding this move, as against earlier steps in the chain (e.g., to "other minds"), it is obviously highly problematic.

Now I introduce the epistemological picture in order to bring out some features of the way CWS operate in our time, the way they are on one hand contested, and on the other maintain themselves.

We are all aware of the contestation, because some of the most famous twentieth-century philosophers have taken part in it. And referring to Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty as paradigm cases of the refutation of epistemology, we can see that this view has been comprehensibly turned on its head. (1) Our grasp of the world does not consist simply of our holding inner representations of outer reality. We do hold such representations, which are perhaps best understood in contemporary terms as sentences held true. But these only make the sense that they do for us because they are thrown up in the course of an ongoing activity of coping with the world, as bodily, social and cultural beings. This coping can never be accounted for in terms of representations, but provides the background against which our representations have the sense that they do. (2) As just implied, this coping activity, and the understanding which inhabits it, is not primarily that of each of us as individuals; rather we are each inducted into the practices of coping as social "games" or activities; some of which do indeed, in the later stages of development, call upon us to assume a stance as individuals. But primordially, we are part of social action. (3) In this coping, the things which we deal with are not first and foremost objects, but what Heidegger calls "pragmata", things which are the focal points of our dealings, which therefore have relevance, meaning, significance for us, not as an add-on but from

their first appearance in our world. Later, we learn to stand back, and consider things objectively, outside of the relevances of coping.

(4) In later Heidegger, these significances include some which have a higher status, structuring our whole way of life, the ensemble of our significances. In the formulation of "das Geviert", there are four axes to this context in which our world is set: earth and sky; human and divine.

Although all those who follow something like this deconstruction of epistemology do not go along with this fourth stage, it is clear that the general thrust of these arguments is to utterly overturn the priority relations of epistemology. Things which are considered as late inferences or additions, are seen to be part of our primordial predicament. There is no getting behind them, and it makes no sense to contest them. The "scandal of philosophy" is not the inability to attain to certainty of the external world, but rather that this should be considered a problem, says Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*. We only have knowledge as agents coping with a world, which it makes no sense to doubt, since we are dealing with it. There is no priority of the neutral grasp of things over their value. There is no priority of the individual's sense of self over the society; our most primordial identity is as a new player being inducted into an old game. Even if we don't add the fourth stage, and consider something like the divine as part of the inescapable context of human action, the whole sense that it comes as a remote and most fragile inference or addition in a long chain is totally undercut by this overturning of epistemology. By denying this fourth stage, the new outlook might lend itself to the construction of a new CWS, but it doesn't offer itself as a CWS in the same direct and obvious way as the epistemological picture did.

We can learn something general about the way CWS operate, suffer attack, and defend themselves, from this example. From within itself, the epistemological picture seems unproblematic. It comes across as an obvious discovery we make when we reflect on our perception and acquisition of knowledge. All the great foundational figures: Descartes, Locke, Hume, claimed to be just saying what was obvious once one examined experience itself reflectively.

Seen from the deconstruction, this is a most massive self-blindness. Rather what happened is that experience was carved into shape by a powerful theory which posited the primacy of the individual, the neutral, the intra-mental as the locus of certainty. What was driving this theory? Certain "values", virtues, excellences: those of the independent, disengaged subject, reflexively controlling his own thought-processes, "self-responsibly" in Husserl's famous phrase. There is an ethic here, of independence, self-control, self-responsibility, of a disengagement which brings control; a stance which requires courage, the refusal of the easy comforts of conformity to authority, of the consolations of an enchanted world, of the surrender to the

promptings of the senses. The entire picture, shot through with "values", which is meant to emerge out of the careful, objective, presuppositionless scrutiny, is now presented as having been there from the beginning, driving the whole process of "discovery".[21]

Once you shift to the deconstructing point of view, the CWS can no longer operate as such. It seemed to offer a neutral point of view from which we could problematize certain values—e.g., "transcendent" ones—more than others. But now it appears that it is itself driven by its own set of values. Its "neutrality" appears bogus.

Put another way, the CWS in a sense "naturalizes" a certain view on things. It tells us, as it were, that this is just the way things are, and once you look at experience, without preconceptions, this is what appears. "Natural" is opposed here to something like "socially constructed"; and from the deconstructing point of view, you have to tell a quite different story of the rise of this outlook. It isn't just that one day people looked without blinkers and discovered epistemology; rather this is the way things could be made to look from within a new historical formation of human identity, that of the disengaged, objectifying subject. The process involves a re-invention, a recreation of human identity, along with great changes in society and social practices. There is no simple stepping out of an earlier such identity into the pure light of bare nature.

It is a feature of our contemporary CWS that they are understood by those who inhabit them in this naturalizing way. It also follows from this that those who inhabit them see no alternative, except the return to earlier myth or illusion. That's what gives them their strength. People within the redoubt fight as it were to the last, and feeblest, argument, because they cannot envisage surrender except as regression. The naturalizing emerges in a kind of narration they proffer of their genesis, which I want to call a "subtraction story".

But to develop this idea I should move to another, richer CWS, or constellation of CWS. It is what people often gesture at with an expression like the "death of God". Of course, this expression is used in an uncountable range of ways; I can't be faithful to all of them, nor even will I be simply following the originator of the phrase (though I think my version is not too far from his),[22] if I say that one essential idea which this phrase captures is that conditions have arisen in the modern world in which it is no longer possible, honestly, rationally, without confusions, or fudging, or mental reservation, to believe in God. These conditions leave us nothing we can believe in beyond the human—human happiness, or potentialities, or heroism.

What conditions? Essentially, they are of two orders: first, and most important, the deliverances of science; and then secondarily also, the shape of contemporary moral experience.

To take up the first, perhaps the most powerful CWS operating today, the central idea seems to be that the whole thrust of modern science has been to establish materialism. For people who cling to this idea, the second order of conditions, the contemporary moral predicament, is unnecessary or merely secondary. Science alone can explain why belief is no longer possible in the above sense. This is a view held by people on all levels; from the most sophisticated: "We exist as material beings in a material world, all of whose phenomena are the consequences of physical relations among material entities",[23] to the most direct and simple: Madonna's "material girl, living in a material world".

Religion or spirituality involves substituting wrong and mythical explanations, explaining by "demons".[24] At bottom it's just a matter of facing the obvious truth.[25]

This doesn't mean that moral issues don't come into it. But they enter as accounts of why people run away from reality, why they want to go on believing illusion. They do so because it's comforting. The real world is utterly indifferent to us, and even to a certain degree dangerous, threatening. As children, we have to see ourselves as surrounded by love and concern, or we shrivel up. But in growing up, we have to learn to face the fact that this environment of concern can't extend beyond the human sphere, and mostly doesn't extend very far within it.

But this transition is hard. So we project a world which is providential, created by a benign God. Or at least, we see the world as meaningful in terms of the ultimate human good. The providential world is not only soothing, but it also takes the burden of evaluating things off our shoulders. The meanings of things are already given. As a well-known contemporary theorist put it:

> I think that the notion that we are all in the bosom of Abraham or are in God's embracing love is—look, it's a tough life and if you can delude yourself into thinking that there's all some warm fuzzy meaning to it all, it's enormously comforting. But I do think it's just a story we tell ourselves.[26]

So religion emanates from a childish lack of courage. We need to stand up like men, and face reality.

Now the traditional unbelieving attack on religion since the Enlightenment contains this accusation of childish pusillanimity. It also involves an attack on religion as calling for terrible self-mutilation, actuated by pride. Human desire has to be checked, mortified. And then this mortification is often imposed on others, so that religion is the source of a terrible infliction of suffering, and the visiting of severe punishment, on heretics and outsiders. This belongs to the "moral" facet of the 'death of God' critique, which I will revert to in a moment. But for the science-driven facet, the basic reason for resisting the truth is pusillanimity.

Unbelief has the opposite features. The unbeliever has the courage to take up an

adult stance, and face reality. He knows that human beings are on their own. But this doesn't cause him just to cave in. On the contrary, he determines to affirm human worth, and the human good, and to work for it, without false illusion or consolation. And that means that in his moral beliefs he is also counter-mortification. Moreover, he has no reason to exclude anyone as heretic; so his philanthropy is universal. Unbelief goes together with modern (exclusive) humanism.

So goes one story. The crucial idea is that the scientific-epistemic part of it is completely self-supporting. That's something the rational mind will be led to believe independent of any moral convictions. The moral attributions to one side or the other come when you are trying to explain why some people accept and others resist these truths. The connection between materialist science and humanist affirmation comes because you have to be a mature, courageous being to face these facts. As to why mature courage embraces benevolence, which figures here in the portrait of this humanism, the answer can simply be that left to ourselves we do want to benefit our fellow humans; or that we have developed this way culturally, and we value it, and we can keep this going if we set ourselves to it.

From the believer's perspective, all this falls out rather differently. We start with an epistemic response: the argument from modern science to all-around materialism seems quite unconvincing. Whenever this is worked out in something closer to detail, it seems full of holes. The best examples today might be evolution, sociobiology, and the like. But we also see reasonings of this kind in the works of Richard Dawkins, for instance, or Daniel Dennett.[27]

So the believer returns the compliment. He casts about for an explanation why the materialist is so eager to believe very inconclusive arguments. Here the moral outlook just mentioned comes back in, but in a different role. Not that, failure to rise to which makes you unable to face the facts of materialism; but rather that, whose moral attraction, and seeming plausibility to the facts of the human moral condition, draw you to it, so that you readily grant the materialist argument from science its various leaps of faith. The whole package seems plausible, so we don't pick too closely at the details.

But how can this be? Surely, the whole package is meant to be plausible precisely *because* science has shown . . . etc. That's certainly the way the package of epistemic and moral views presents itself to those who accept it; that's the official story, as it were. But the supposition here is that the official story isn't the real one; that the real power that the package has to attract and convince lies in it as a definition of our ethical predicament, in particular, as beings capable of forming beliefs.

This means that this ideal of the courageous acknowledger of unpalatable truths, ready to eschew all easy comfort and consolation, and who by the same token becomes capable of grasping and controlling the world, sits well with us, draws us,

that we feel tempted to make it our own. And/or it means that the counter-ideals of belief, devotion, piety, can all-too-easily seem actuated by a still immature desire for consolation, meaning, extra-human sustenance.

What seems to accredit the view of the package as epistemically-driven are all the famous conversion stories, starting with post-Darwinian Victorians but continuing to our day, where people who had a strong faith early in life found that they had reluctantly, even with anguish of soul, to relinquish it, because "Darwin has refuted the Bible". Surely, we want to say, these people in a sense preferred the Christian outlook morally, but had to bow, with whatever degree of inner pain, to the facts.

But that's exactly what I'm resisting saying. What happened here was not that a moral outlook bowed to brute facts. Rather we might say that one moral outlook gave way to another. Another model of what was higher triumphed. And much was going for this model: images of power, of untrammelled agency, of spiritual self-possession (the "buffered self"). On the other side, one's childhood faith had perhaps in many respects remained childish; it was all too easy to come to see it as essentially and constitutionally so.

But this recession of one moral ideal in face of the other is only one aspect of the story. The crucial judgment is an all-in one about the nature of the human ethical predicament: the new moral outlook, the "ethics of belief" in Clifford's famous phrase, that one should only give credence to what was clearly demonstrated by the evidence, was not only attractive in itself; it also carried with it a view of our ethical predicament, namely, that we are strongly tempted, the more so, the less mature we are, to deviate from this austere principle, and give assent to comforting untruths. The convert to the new ethics has learned to mistrust some of his own deepest instincts, and in particular those which draw him to religious belief. The really operative conversion here was based on the plausibility of this understanding of our ethical situation over the Christian one with its characteristic picture of what entices us to sin and apostasy. The crucial change is in the status accorded to the inclination to believe; this is the object of a radical shift in interpretation. It is no longer the impetus in us towards truth, but has become rather the most dangerous temptation to sin against the austere principles of belief-formation. This whole construal of our ethical predicament becomes more plausible. The attraction of the new moral ideal is only part of this, albeit an important one. What was also crucial was a changed reading of our own motivation, wherein the desire to believe appears now as childish temptation. Since all incipient faith is childish in an obvious sense, and (in the Christian case) only evolves beyond this by being child-like in the Gospel sense, this (mis)reading is not difficult to make.[28]

Of course, the change was painful, because one could be deeply attached to this childhood faith, not just as part of one's past, but also to what it promised. Indeed,

this continuing attraction can be an integral part of the new outlook, now figuring as temptation. We can understand the regret, the nostalgia that can accompany the conversion to unbelief, the sense that we do it reluctantly. A. N. Wilson argues in his book *God's Funeral* that the nineteenth century is full of regret and mourning around this very issue, and he cites the Hardy poem of the same title.[29] But the regret is often cast in the mould of sorrow at the loss of a more childish, but beautiful world. (This is, of course, another important late-Victorian theme, which was articulated so powerfully by Barrie in *Peter Pan.*) Hardy expresses both the regret and the childish nature of the lost world in his sympathetic figuration of the old faith in *The Oxen:*

> Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
> >   "Now they are on their knees"
> An Elder said as we sat in a flock
> >   By the embers in hearthside ease.
>
> We pictured the meek mild creatures where
> >   They dwelt in their strawy pen,
> Nor did it occur to one of us there
> >   To doubt they were kneeling then.
>
> So fair a fancy few would weave
> >   In these years! Yet I feel,
> If someone said on Christmas Eve,
> >   "Come; see the oxen kneel
>
> In the lonely barton by yonder comb
> >   Our childhood used to know,"
> I should go with him in the gloom,
> >   Hoping it might be so.[30]

Moreover, the pain itself could work *for* the conversion. It has been noted how many of the crop of great Victorian agnostics came from Evangelical families. They transposed the model of the strenuous, manly, philanthropic concern into the new secular key. But the very core of that model, manly self-conquest, rising above the pain of loss, now told in favour of the apostasy.[31]

So I am less than fully convinced by the major thrust of the "death of God" account of the rise of modern secularity; its account in other words of the modern conditions of belief. What makes belief problematical, often difficult and full of doubts, is not simply "science".

It should be obvious that there are parallels between my critique of the "official story" here, and the deconstruction of epistemology. In both cases, what is being claimed is that some move is being passed off as a simple discovery, which in fact is much more like a new construction; a change that involves also a new sense of our identity and our place in the world, with its implicit values, rather than simply registering observable reality. (To say that these are "constructions" is not to say that the issues here are unarbitrable by reason; that is a "post-modern" fallacy; but their arbitration is much more complicated, like that between Kuhnian paradigms, and also involves issues of hermeneutical adequacy.)[32]

Where the classical epistemologists claimed it as an obvious truth of "reflection", or inner observation, that one was first of all aware of the ideas in our mind; the proponents of the death of God want to see Godlessness as a property of the universe which science lays bare. Where the deconstructors of epistemology want to show how this supposedly obvious truth of reflection in fact only appears so within a certain value-laden construal of agency; so here I am arguing that it is only within some understanding of agency, in which disengaged scientific enquiry is woven into a story of courageous adulthood, to be attained through a renunciation of the more "childish" comforts of meaning and beatitude, that the death of God story appears obvious.

And just as, once the epistemological story is properly in place, and comes to dominate the philosophical discourse, the new construal comes to seem more and more obvious and unchallengeable; so here with the courageous adult agency of disengagement. What was once one possible construction among others sinks to the level of a picture, in Wittgenstein's sense; that is, it becomes part of the unquestioned background, something whose shape is not perceived, but which conditions, largely unnoticed, the way we think, infer, experience, process claims and arguments. From within the picture, it just seems obvious that the order of argument proceeds from science to atheism, through a series of well-grounded steps. For the critic, who sees all too well how ill-grounded some of these steps are, the crucial role of the construal of agency becomes much more salient.

This story of the picture holding us captive may be convincing applied to those who are within an established culture of atheism; but how can it be that people who are converted to this outlook also seem to fall into the picture, and accept the official story? Because it is crucial to this outlook of "death of God" atheism that it understand itself as science-driven; to accept that it has espoused one view of adult agency among possible others would be to admit that there is something here which needs defense which has as yet received none. It is essential to this whole position that the construal of agency here remain at the level of a picture; just as it is essential to the whole tradition of mediational epistemology that the primacy of ideas or of

sentences held true, or whatever it sees as the mediating elements, not be seen as one construal among others, needing defense. As long as these crucial enframing constructions remain pictures, they cannot be challenged; indeed, alternatives to them are impossible to imagine. That's what it means to remain captive.

This is not to deny that science (and even more "science") has had an important place in the story; and that in a number of ways. For one thing, the universe which this science reveals is very different from the centred hierarchic cosmos which our civilization grew up within; it hardly suggests to us that humans have any kind of special place in its story, whose temporal and spatial dimensions are mind-numbing. This, and the conception of natural law by which we understand it, makes it refractory to the interventions of Providence as these were envisaged in the framework of the earlier cosmos, and the connected understanding of the Biblical story. Seen in this light, "Darwin" has indeed, "refuted the Bible".

For another thing, the development of modern science has gone hand in hand with the modern understanding of the human epistemic predicament, which I described above in Chapter 7. This has generated its own ethic, that of the austere, disengaged reason I described above. But all this still doesn't amount to an endorsement of the official story, that the present climate of unbelief in many milieux in contemporary society is a response to the strong case for materialism which science has drawn up during the last three centuries.

The connection is rather that which I have been exploring in the first part of this chapter. Modern science, along with the many other facets described—the buffered identity, with its disciplines, modern individualism, with its reliance on instrumental reason and action in secular time—make up the immanent frame. This can be lived in many ways. Some are open to transcendence, and some move to closure. The two we have just been looking at which push to closure, seen as value-soaked construals of agency, draw on notions of the good which have unavoidably played a big role in the immanent frame: such as disengaged reason, the courage to let go of comforting illusions, the reliance on one's own reason against authority, to name just some. It is possible to live these in tandem with others, which modify or limit them; or one can make them central, without rival. Going this second route can easily lead you to the construals of agency which sustain the closed world systems I have just been examining. Living from out of this sense of agency gives a certain spin to the immanent frame, which then seems to reflect back to us the validity of our closed image of it. Science, modern individualism, instrumental reason, secular time, all seem further proofs of the truth of immanence. For instance, natural science is not just one road to truth, but becomes the paradigm of all roads. Secular time, seen as homogeneous and empty, is not just the dominant domain of present-day action, but is time itself. Our stance entrenches us in a picture, which we eventually become unable to challenge.

6

But now, a crucial part of my argument for the "deconstruction" of the death of God view, is that the arguments from natural science to Godlessness are not all that convincing. Leaving aside the challenge that someone might raise who found these arguments more compelling, we might object to my presumption in refusing the interpretation that death of God protagonists put on their own position. So what if the arguments aren't compelling, might they not nevertheless be the arguments which move them?

In fact, why shouldn't bad arguments have an important effect in history, as much if not more than good arguments? In a sense, this objection is well taken; and in a sense, therefore, the official story is also true. Since lots of people believe that they are atheists and materialists because science has shown these to be irrefutable, there is a perfectly good sense in which we can say that this is their reason.

But an explanation in terms of a bad reason calls for supplementation. We need an account of why the bad reason nevertheless works. This is not necessarily so, of course, in individual cases. Individuals can just take some conclusion on authority from their milieu. Just as we laypeople take the latest report about the micro-constitution of the atom from the Sunday paper, so we may take it on authority from a Sagan or a Dawkins that Science has refuted God. But this leaves still unexplained how an authority of this kind gets constituted. What makes it the case that we laypeople, as also the scientific luminaries, get so easily sucked into invalid arguments? Why do we and they not more readily see the alternatives? My proffered account in terms of the attraction of an over-all ethically-charged vision of agency is meant to answer this deeper question.

I am not arguing that an account of someone's action in terms of erroneous belief always needs supplementation. I may leave the house without an umbrella because I believe the radio forecast to be reliable, and it predicted fair weather. But the difference between this kind of case and the issue we're dealing with here, is first, that the weather, beyond the inconvenience of getting wet today, doesn't matter to me in anything like the same way, and second, that I have no alternative access to this afternoon's weather than the forecast.

This latter is not simply true in the question of belief in God. Of course, as a layperson, I have to take on authority the findings of paleontology. But I am not similarly without resources on the issue whether what science has shown about the material world denies the existence of God. Because I can also have a religious life, a sense of God and how he impinges on my existence, against which I can check the supposed claims to refutation.

I want to draw the Desdemona analogy. What makes *Othello* a tragedy, and not just a tale of misfortune, is that we hold its protagonist culpable in his too-ready be-

lief of the evidence fabricated by Iago. He had an alternative mode of access to her innocence in Desdemona herself, if he could only have opened his heart/mind to her love and devotion. The fatal flaw in the tragic hero Othello is his inability to do this, imprisoned as he is in a powerful code of honour—an imprisonment undoubtedly aggravated by his outsider's status and sudden promotion.

The reason why I can't accept the arguments that "science has refuted God", without any supplement, as an explanation of the rise of unbelief is that we are on this issue like Othello, rather than the person listening to the forecast as he hesitates before the umbrella stand. We can't just explain what we do on the basis of the information we received from external sources, without seeing what we made of the internal ones.

All this doesn't mean that a perfectly valid description of an individual's experience might not be, that he felt forced to give up a faith he cherished, because (as he thought) the brute facts of the universe contradicted it. Because once you go this way, once you accept unbelief, then you will probably also accept the ideology which accords primacy to the external sources, which depreciates the internal ones as incompetent here, indeed, as likely sources of childish illusion—following our own modern code of honour, that of the adult, rational subject of knowledge. It now looks ex post facto as though there was no rational alternative—and so it seemed as well to Othello. But we who have seen this happen need a further account why Desdemona's testimony wasn't heard.

But Desdemona's voice must be very faint within the modern horizon. This is the new view of the human epistemic predicament which I described at the end of Chapter 7. We start from our understanding of human individuals united in societies of mutual benefit, and capable of grasping and controlling Nature, through the use of disengaged reason. In Newton's day, this could still yield arguments demonstrating a benevolent creator. But two hundred years later, both features of this conclusion were in question: first, that the existence of Design requires a creator, and that what is created shows evidence of benignity. The updated version of the horizon of argument often takes a materialist cast, which makes natural science the royal road to truth in all domains. From this point of view, considerations of experienced meaning can only be advanced in an argument about God or human purpose if they have already been scientifically validated. By the very nature of things, arguments in this frame tend to privilege the "experience-far" considerations of natural science over the experience-near. Desdemona's voice suffers from the blight of systematic mistrust.

Thus, once one has taken the step into unbelief, there are overwhelming reasons why one will be induced to buy into the official, science-driven story. And because we very often make these choices under the influence of others, on whose authority

we buy the official story, it is not surprising that lots of people have thought of their conversion as science-driven, even perhaps in the most dramatic form. Science seemed to show that we are nothing but a fleeting life-form on a dying star; or that the universe is nothing but decaying matter, under ever increasing entropy, that there is thus no place for spirit or God, miracles or salvation. Something like the vision which Dostoyevsky had in the Museum in Basel before the Dead Christ by Hans Holbein,[33] of the absolute finality of death, which convinced him that there must be something more, might easily have the opposite effect, of dragging you down and forcing an abandonment of your faith.

But the question remains: if the arguments in fact aren't conclusive, why do they *seem* so convincing, where at other times and places God's existence just seems obvious? This is the question I'm trying to answer, and the "death of God" doesn't help me here; rather it blocks the way with a pseudo-solution.

So my contention is that the power of materialism today comes not from the scientific "facts", but has rather to be explained in terms of the power of a certain package uniting materialism with a moral outlook, the package we could call "atheist humanism", or exclusive humanism. What gives the package its power? I have been trying to answer this above in terms of certain values which are implicit in the immanent frame, such as disengaged reason, which pushed to the limit, generate the science-driven "death of God" story.

But we should also look at the second level of the "death of God" account, the one which starts from our contemporary moral predicament. The conclusion here is the same as with the argument from science, that we can no longer rationally believe in God; but the starting point is now the ethical outlook of the modern age.

Now it is true that a great deal of our political and moral life is focussed on human ends: human welfare, human rights, human flourishing, equality between human beings. Indeed, our public life, in societies which are secular in a familiar modern sense, is exclusively concerned with human goods. And our age is certainly unique in human history in this respect. Hence, perhaps not surprisingly, some people see no place in this kind of world for belief in God. A faith of this kind would have to make one an outsider, an enemy of this world, in unrelenting combat with it. Thus one is either thoroughly in this world, living by its premises, and then one cannot really believe in God; or one believes, and one is in some sense living like a resident alien in modernity. Since we find ourselves more and more inducted into it, belief becomes harder and harder; the horizon of faith steadily recedes.[34]

Now this adversarial picture of the relation of faith to modernity is not an invention of unbelievers. It is matched and encouraged by a strand of Christian hostility to the humanist world. We have only to think of Pius IX, fulminating in

his *Syllabus* of 1864 against all the errors of the modern world, including human rights, democracy, equality, and just about everything our contemporary Liberal state embodies. And there are other, more recent examples, among Christians as well as believers in other religions.

But this convergence between fundamentalists and hard-line atheists doesn't make their common interpretation of the relation of faith to modernity the only possible one. And it is clear that there are many people of faith who have helped to build and are now sustaining this modern humanist world, and are strongly committed to the modes of human well-being and flourishing that it has made central. Once again, the "death of God" account leaps to a conclusion which is far from being warranted. It is possible to see modern humanism as the enemy of religion, just as it is possible to take science as having proved atheism. But since the conclusion is in neither case warranted, the question arises why so many people do so. And that brings me back to the central issue I've been raising.

This moral version of the "death of God" account seems plausible to many people, because they make an assumption about the rise of modernity, which helps to screen from them how complex and difficult this quest is. The assumption is what I have called "the view from Dover Beach": the transition to modernity comes about through the loss of traditional beliefs and allegiances. This may be seen as coming about as a result of institutional changes: e.g., mobility and urbanization erode the beliefs and reference points of static rural society. Or the loss may be supposed to arise from the increasing operation of modern scientific reason. The change may be positively valued—or it may be judged a disaster by those for whom the traditional reference points were valuable, and scientific reason too narrow. But all these theories concur in describing the process: old views and loyalties are eroded. Old horizons are washed away, in Nietzsche's image. The sea of faith recedes, following Arnold. This stanza from his *Dover Beach* captures this perspective:

> The Sea of Faith
> Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
> Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
> But now I only hear
> Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
> Retreating, to the breath
> Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
> And naked shingles of the world.[35]

The tone here is one of regret and nostalgia. But the underlying image of eroded faith could serve just as well for an upbeat story of the progress of triumphant scientific reason. From one point of view, humanity has shed a lot of false and harmful

myths. From another, it has lost touch with crucial spiritual realities. But in either case, the change is seen as a loss of belief.

What emerges comes about through this loss. The upbeat story cherishes the dominance of an empirical-scientific approach to knowledge claims, of individualism, negative freedom, instrumental rationality. But these come to the fore because they are what we humans "normally" value, once we are no longer impeded or blinded by false or superstitious beliefs and the stultifying modes of life which accompany them. Once myth and error are dissipated, these are the only games in town. The empirical approach is the only valid way of acquiring knowledge, and this becomes evident as soon as we free ourselves from the thraldom of a false metaphysics. Increasing recourse to instrumental rationality allows us to get more and more of what we want, and we were only ever deterred from this by unfounded injunctions to limit ourselves. Individualism is the normal fruit of human self-regard absent the illusory claims of God, the Chain of Being, or the sacred order of society.

In other words, we moderns behave as we do because we have "come to see" that certain claims were false—or on the negative reading, because we have lost from view certain perennial truths. What this view reads out of the picture is the possibility that Western modernity might be powered by its own positive visions of the good, that is, by one constellation of such visions among available others, rather than by the only viable set left after the old myths and legends have been exploded. It screens out whatever there might be of a specific moral direction to Western modernity, beyond what is dictated by the general form of human life itself, once old error is shown up (or old truth forgotten). E.g., people behave as individuals, because that's what they "naturally" do when no longer held in by the old religions, metaphysics and customs, though this may be seen as a glorious liberation, or a purblind enmiring in egoism, depending on our perspective. What it cannot be seen as is a novel form of moral self-understanding, not definable simply by the negation of what preceded it.

The analogy should be evident between the moral death of God story, and its science-driven stable-mate, as well as epistemology. All make a crucial move which they present as a "discovery", something we "come to see" when certain conditions are met. In all cases, this move only looks like a discovery within the frame of a newly constructed understanding of ourselves, our predicament and our identity. The element of "discovery" seems unchallengeable, because the underlying construction is pushed out of sight and forgotten.

In terms of my discussion a few pages ago, all these accounts "naturalize" the features of the modern, liberal identity. They cannot see it as one, historically constructed understanding of human agency among others.

On this "subtraction" view of modernity, as what arises from the washing away of

old horizons, modern humanism can only have arisen through the fading of earlier forms. It can only be conceived as coming to be through a "death of God". It just follows that you can't be fully into contemporary humanist concerns if you haven't sloughed off the old beliefs. You can't be fully with the modern age and still believe in God. Or alternatively, if you still believe, then you have reservations, you are at last partly, and perhaps covertly, some kind of adversary.

But of course, as I have argued at length elsewhere,[36] this is a quite inadequate account of modernity. What has got screened out is the possibility that Western modernity might be sustained by its own original spiritual vision, that is, not one generated simply and inescapably out of the transition. But this possibility is in fact the reality.

The logic of the subtraction story is something like this: once we slough off our concern with serving God, or attending to any other transcendent reality, what we're left with is human good, and that is what modern societies are concerned with. But this radically under-describes what I'm calling modern humanism. That I am left with only human concerns doesn't tell me to take universal human welfare as my goal; nor does it tell me that freedom is important, or fulfillment, or equality. Just being confined to human goods could just as well find expression in my concerning myself exclusively with my own material welfare, or that of my family or immediate milieu. The in fact very exigent demands of universal justice and benevolence which characterize modern humanism can't be explained just by the subtraction of earlier goals and allegiances.

The subtraction story, inadequate though it is, is deeply embedded in modern humanist consciousness. It is by no means propounded only by the more simplistic theorists. Even such a penetrating and sophisticated thinker as Paul Bénichou subscribed to a version of it in his *Morales du grand siècle:* "L'humanité s'estime dès qu'elle se voit capable de reculer sa misère; elle tend à oublier, en même temps que sa détresse, l'humiliante morale par laquelle, faisant de nécessité vertu, elle condamnait la vie." (Humanity respects itself from the time that it is capable of overcoming its poverty. It tends to forget, along with its material distress, the humiliating morality by which, making a virtue of necessity, it condemned life.)[37] Modern humanism arises, in other words, because humans become capable of sloughing off the older, other-worldly ethics of asceticism.

Moreover, this story is grounded in a certain view of human motivation in general, and of the well-springs of religious belief in particular. This latter is seen as the fruit of misery and the accompanying self-renunciation is "making a virtue of necessity". Belief is a product of deprivation, humiliation and a lack of hope. It is the obverse of the human desire for flourishing; where we are driven by our despair at the frustration of this desire.

Thus human flourishing is taken as our perennial goal, even though under eclipse in periods of misery and humiliation, and its content is taken as fairly unproblematic, once one begins to affirm it.

This excessive reliance on a subtraction story is related to the object of my earlier complaint, in the first chapter, viz., that this kind of account gives too much place to changes in belief, as against those in experience and sensibility. We can see how these two mistakes (if they are such) are connected. The subtraction story gives too little place to the cultural changes wrought by Western modernity, the way in which it has developed new understandings of the self, its place in society, in space and in time. It fails to see how innovative we have been; its tendency is to see modernity as the liberating of a continuing core of belief and desire from an overlay of metaphysical/religious illusion which distorted and inhibited it.

But the new ways in which we experience our world and the human condition: for instance, as autonomous subjects, as beings who can revel in choice, as citizens among others in a sovereign people, as potentially in control of history; all these and others are only comprehensible if we see them in the context of the great cultural changes, the new understandings of self, agency, time, society which Western modernity has generated. By ignoring or flattening out all these changes, a subtraction story makes it hard to conceive the changes in human experience. It is left only with an account in terms of altered beliefs.

This is one kind of account of the rise of modern secularity, and my attempt in this book has been to offer another, I think more convincing one. What we are dealing with are what are often called "master narratives", broad framework pictures of how history unfolds. These have come under some considerable attack in our time, and are thought to be (ideally) a thing of the past.[38] But my contention will be that, so far from being passé, these master narratives are essential to our thinking. We all wield them, including those who claim to repudiate them. We need to be lucid about what we are doing, and ready to debate the ones we're relying on. Attempting to repudiate them just obfuscates matters.

I have been tracing the outlines of one such narrative, an account of the coming of modern secularity, which in its general form is widely and deeply implanted in modern humanist culture. It tends to have four connected facets: (a) the "death of God" thesis that one can no longer honestly, lucidly, sincerely believe in God; (b) some "subtraction" story of the rise of modern humanism; (c) a view on the original reasons for religious belief, and on their place in perennial human motivations, which grounds the subtraction story. These views vary all the way from nineteenth-century theories about primitives' fears of the unknown, or desire to control the elements, to speculations like Freud's, linking religion to neurosis. On many of these accounts, religion simply becomes unnecessary when technology gets to a certain

level: we don't need God any more, because we know how to get it ourselves.[39] These theories are generally wildly and implausibly reductive.

They issue in (d) a take on modern secularization as mainly a recession of religion in the face of science, technology and rationality. In the nineteenth century, thinkers like Comte confidently predicted the supersession of religion by science, as did Renan: "il viendra un jour où l'humanité ne croira plus, mais où elle saura; un jour où elle saura le monde métaphysique et moral, comme elle sait déjà le monde physique" (a day will come when humanity will no longer believe, but it will know: a day when it will know the metaphysical and moral world, just as it already knows the physical one).[40] As against this confident projection into the future, today everybody thinks that the illusion has some future; but on the vision I'm describing here it is in for some more shrinkage.

These four facets together give an idea of what modern secularization often looks like from within the camp of exclusive humanism. Against this, I have been offering a rather different picture.[41]

7

I have been looking at the two sides of the "death of God" perspective, and the way in which they "naturalize" various facets of the emerging identity of Western modernity. It turns out that there is a shift in the centre of gravity of the two accounts. The first, or science-driven side, which argues for materialism, seems to be based on epistemological claims. Materialism itself is an ontological thesis: everything which is, is based on "matter", whatever that means. But the argument here is ultimately epistemological, in that the ontological thesis appeals to the successes of science. It is because the paradigm examples of valid knowledge in the modern world (supposedly) take the realities they study as made exclusively of matter, that we are supposed to conclude that everything is matter.

But even if the premise about modern science is true, the conclusion doesn't follow; and I argued that those who buy the argument are induced to overlook its shortcomings because they are convinced (again without full justification) by the whole take on the human ethical predicament which is part of the materialist package. This presents materialism as the view of courageous adults, who are ready to resist the comforting illusions of earlier metaphysical and religious beliefs, in order to grasp the reality of an indifferent universe. Now this take is linked to a story, that of our rising to the point where we become capable of identifying, and then resisting these earlier illusions. This is the story which Kant made famous in his influential definition of Enlightenment, as the emergence of human beings from a state of tutelage for which they were themselves responsible, a *selbstbeschuldigte Unmündigkeit*

(a self-responsible nonage). The slogan of this age was: sapere aude! Dare to know.[42] A growth of knowledge was essential to come to this stage, but this was inseparable from a new form of courage, which allows us to take responsibility for our own take on reality and on our place in it.

This means that a crucial part of this new conviction rests on a narrative, a view of how we got to where we are. And when we get to the second, moral side of the "death of God" perspective, we find that narrative has moved front and centre. Here it takes the form of a subtraction story; but we can see how these two narrations, that of courageous coming to adulthood, and that of subtraction of illusion, belong together. They are two sides of the same coin. What we got rid of were the illusions, and it took courage to do this; what is left are the genuine deliverances of science, the truth about things, including ourselves, which was waiting all along to be discovered.

"Coming of age", subtraction, these are two faces of this powerful contemporary story. But it is much richer than these, and it would be useful to explore a bit further other facets. I want to look here at two widespread and rhetorically convincing narrations, which have sunk to the level of unchallenged common sense in many milieux; that is, have become background "pictures" in something like Wittgenstein's sense.

The first concerns mainly our social and political condition. I argued earlier that we now understand ourselves as living in societies which are made up of equal individuals. Our belonging to society has become disconnected from the various networks, especially kinship relations, which we are involved in, and particularly from those networks which involve hierarchical relations, especially of the kind which were central to pre-modern "feudal" society. This is not to say that networks and hierarchy do not exist, but only that the modern imaginary sees them as disconnected from social belonging at the level of the nation, or the economy, or the public sphere. We belong to these larger wholes directly, that is, our access to them is not mediated by these networks. These wholes are held together by a "sociability of strangers".[43]

This tells the bare bones of the story, and very much from the outside. The actual account of the transition as it has been lived, is often a story of great moral enthusiasm at a discovery, at a liberation from a narrower world of closer, claustrophobic relations, involving excessive control and invidious distinctions; and at the same time it has been lived as a liberation into a new broader space, in which masses of people come together outside of the old distinctions, and meet as fellow citizens, as fellow human beings, in a new enterprise, like that of the nation, or the revolutionary party, the "party of mankind". We mustn't forget, of course, that from the other

side, the party of those who resisted these changes, it has often been experienced as a catastrophic break-down of the most crucial and elementary social bond.

The paradigm example here is the French Revolution, in which people were liberated out of their "estates" into the new space of "la nation", bonded by the new trinity of "liberty, equality, fraternity". There is an immensely powerful moral inspiration here, which has meant that this radical move has been repeated again and again; first of all, obviously in other "nations" which undertook revolutions, or at least constituted themselves anew on the new basis; and at the same time, this was happening in the new parties which aspired to lead these revolutions, whether they succeeded or not. The partisans, from nationalist movements like "Young Italy" in the early nineteenth century, right on through the revolutionary anarchist and Bolshevik parties of the twentieth century, and into the terrorist movements of to-day, see themselves as stepping out of the older, narrower, often network, certainly hierarchical structures, into a broader space of equal comradeship, foreshadowing the new space of the reconstituted nation, or the new purified Islam.[44]

We can see this also in a series of "youth cultures", which have involved a rebellion against the hierarchical role ascription of the family, and a shift to an identity as a member of a larger fraternal movement. The last great one which shook our societies in the West, in the 60s and 70s, was certainly of this kind, challenging authority and attempting to dissolve the distinctions between teacher and student, student and worker, men and women; between work and play, means and ends; all in order to enter a new order in which all could be human together. The Utopian nature of the enterprise may dominate our memory of it, but the direction of shift it called for, its membership in a chain of such shifts out of distinction into a new space of freedom and equality, should not be forgotten.

And it was preceded by a number of such movements earlier, particularly among minorities who felt disadvantaged in a larger society. Yuri Slezkine, in his profound book on Jews in Russia in the twentieth century, has documented this with great clarity. Young Jews were responding to the hope of a new kind of space, one of openness and equality, a space which would be universal, and which would leave behind forever what they came to see as the narrow, cramped life of the ghetto.[45]

If we focus on this powerful moral attraction of a new, less cluttered, more universal and fraternal space, we find something which has wide resonances in human history. Something like this has happened again and again: Buddha's followers stepping out of the caste dharma into the new space of the Sangha; those of Christ following the lead of the parable of the Good Samaritan, until Paul can say: "in Christ is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, man nor woman"; those of Muhammad, who see the new space of Islam, as beyond all tribes and nations; likewise, the appeal of Stoicism.

The power which this kind of move seems to have for us as a species could tell us something important about ourselves, if only we could define it more exactly. I don't pretend to do that here, but it does seem to me that the power can't be explained just by the negative move, the breaking out from the skein of distinctions and restrictions. It is true that breaking free from them can produce great excitement, as we see in carnivals, for instance, or in some outbreaks of violence. Bataille has written about this kind of power. But this seems to me different from the steady sense of reaching something higher, which attaches to the moves I have been describing above, as well as to modern social imaginaries.

The power has to be accounted for partly, even largely, by the positive attraction of the space we are released into: the space of the search for Enlightenment, of salvation, or of submission to God, or the cosmopolis of Gods and humans, to take the four examples above.

What is the power which inheres in the modern spaces of stranger sociability? It must have something to do with the enhanced sense of collective power and efficacy which arises here. Coming together as a people, a nation promises a new kind of efficacy to those who associate in this way. Instead of being subject, the people is sovereign. Of course, this promise is often thwarted in fact, by élites, by bureaucratic structures, by the people's own apathy. And yet the promise is still there, two hundred years on, as we can measure perhaps in the bitterness of the disappointment, when it fails to materialize. And, of course, it is partly materialized, as one can see in comparing democratic societies to those ruled by irresponsible cliques of power-holders.

Something to do with this, but not everything. There is also the fact that this new kind of efficacy also presents itself as based on justice, equality, liberty, end even solidarity. It is the novel mix of these two goods, agency and justice, as we could sum them up, which accounts for the moral power of the new spaces.

Once this new form establishes itself as superior, normative, then the modern conceptions of justice, in terms of equality and non-discrimination, begin to take hold. The subtraction story would have it that we always shared these intuitions, only they were over-ridden and sidelined by various illusory metaphysical and religious doctrines endorsing hierarchy and élite rule. But this is not what happened. In the former differentiated and hierarchical societies, like pre-modern European kingdoms with their different orders, or the Ottoman Empire with its hierarchically arranged millets, there was another conception of justice, which was of course not always followed. It took as given the differences, and defined a justice between the orders or millets which took account of these. European peasants rebelling against landlords didn't usually challenge the fact of hierarchy, only an excessively repressive and exploitative application of it: the landlords were accused of illegitimately in-

creasing burdens, of introducing corvée where there was none historically. Everywhere the "moral economy" took account of supposedly established custom, which was itself hierarchical.

Before justice could be conceived in the modern way, which makes, for instance, Rawls' work seem so truistic for many contemporaries, this whole way of understanding society had to give way before the modern one. A new kind of space had to be created, which had the immense combined draw of its superior efficacy, as well as its own forms of justice, liberty, and solidarity. Once more the attempt to understand the rise of modernity just in terms of subtraction, without taking account of new and unprecedented creation, grievously distorts.

Pre-moderns could be as untroubled by the fact of systemic inequality between orders and peoples and religious groups, which were part of the order of things, as contemporary ultra-liberals can be untroubled by a capitalism which generates a destitute underclass, which is also seen as part of an order in which the idle and undisciplined get their just deserts.

It is the power of these new spaces which explains how the shifts continue, recruiting new populations, but also taking the same ones through more and more radical challenges to hierarchy and difference. Once one moves into the new space, then almost any traditional difference can potentially be portrayed as an unjust imposition, granted that conditions are ripe. And so there can be a late-developing move for gender equality, well after the founding moves of the new social imaginary, but more immediately following women's entry into the work-force, their acquiring education, and so on. A new vector operates in modern history, and the possibility exists of challenging the fruit of previous revolutions on their inadequate fulfillment of their own principles—as the young did in the sixties. The vector is defined by a series of moves of the form "Xer than thou".

The shift from the earlier moves I cited: Buddhist, Christian, Stoic, Muslim, which are the classic steps in the Axial Revolution, on one hand, and the rise of the modern social imaginary on the other, brings into existence a different kind of individualism. The first, Axial moves were the charter for what Dumont calls "l'individu-hors-du-monde". The Bhikkhu, the monk, the sanyassin, the Sufi saint, steps outside the regular order of what still remains a hierarchical society. The modern shift is the charter for "l'individu-dans-le-monde"; the social "world" is now seen as made up of individuals, which associate for mutual benefit.

Four strong benchmarks of the new order are: liberty: the move is meant to liberate; power: it is meant to empower; mutual benefit: this is the basic point of the society; and reason: whether freedom, power, mutual benefit has been achieved, or how to achieve them, is meant to be arbitrable by rational discussion. Their achievement is meant to be something demonstrable. These, as well as the basic

premises of equality, and the foregrounding of rights, are the crucial constitutive concepts of the new understanding.

Now these are, of course, "Enlightenment" values. This is enough to set many people off on a narrative of political modernity which sees it as arising against, in combat with, and/or at the expense of "religion". But this needs to be examined more exactly.

It is indeed the case that this modern form arises in a struggle with the thicket of structures and rules which came before. The ancien régime operated on a number of easily identifiable counter-values: (1) those which made the structures and rules valuable in themselves, say, because based on the cosmic order, or the real differences between groups, races, genders; (2) the notion that there is something higher, more important than mutual benefit; and (3) some features of the human good were actually condemned: for instance, sensuality; hence a disposition to asceticism.

Now all these have been defended by Churches and other religious leaders, as I described above. The Catholic Church under Pio Nono is a sufficiently persuasive example of this, and there are many others. So the secularist reading is far from an invention. But it is also far from the whole story. The origins of the modern idea of moral order among Christian (or at least theist) thinkers, like Locke; the existence of Christian Democracy in our day; all these show that oppositions (1) and (3) from a religious perspective are far from a necessary feature of reality. (2) of course is something that any religious belief with a transcendent dimension would have to retain, but then it is far from obvious that this threatens what is good in the Enlightenment package above. On the contrary, it may even offer some insight into the limitations of these Enlightenment values taken as totally sufficient.

So the story of the rise of modern social spaces doesn't need to be given an anti-religious spin. But there are motivations to go this way; and like any spin, we can easily see how the wide acceptance of one such, and the relegation of religion which this involves, could harden into a "picture", which appears obvious and unchallengeable. The point of tracing this facet of the narrative of modern secularity is not that it shows this to be any better founded than the story of materialism and science or that of modernity as subtraction. Rather it is that taking up this facet shows how once a secularist spin has been taken, this anti-religious story has all the force and moral power which attach to the inauguration of these spaces of citizen sociability.

I mentioned above the modern idea of a people as agent of collective empowerment. But the power of this new space also has another aspect. The people as "nation" is often seen as the bearer of a certain language or culture. The world is lived and sung in a way which is special to our nation and its language. Such is the basic idea behind the Herderian notion of the nation. So the desire to join this new space

can also have this other meaning: that one wants to get close to the source of this special way of living and singing. This can be the "people", in the sense of the common people, unspoiled by the élites (who may have capitulated, and are talking French or English among themselves, despising the common tongue). Or it may be that the process of bringing the genius of the language to expression in high culture is already begun; and very often this process is seen as issuing from the work of a foundation figure, a Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Pushkin, Mickiewicz, Petöfi. The new space is then defined by speaking (or perhaps writing in) this newly enhanced vernacular. Slezkine discusses this phenomenon in an interesting way.[46]

8

There is another facet of this narrative of secularity which it is worth mentioning here, because of its ubiquity and importance in the "closed" spin on immanence. The story line here is this: once human beings took their norms, their goods, their standards of ultimate value from an authority outside of themselves; from God, or the gods, or the nature of Being or the cosmos. But then they came to see that these higher authorities were their own fictions, and they realized that they had to establish their norms and values for themselves, on their own authority. This is a radicalization of the coming to adulthood story as it figures in the science-driven argument for materialism. It is not just that freed from illusion, humans come to establish the true facts about the world. It is also that they come to dictate the ultimate values by which they live.

Of course, these two formulations can come very close to the same thing for someone who holds that it is science, in some sense, which establishes what is morally right. Utilitarians often hold something like this: it is axiomatic that the right thing to do is to act so as to bring about the greatest happiness (to adopt this traditional formulation), and it is up to the various special sciences, as well as common-sense empirical investigation, to establish what will in fact bring this about. In this case, the dramatic claim to establish our own standards comes down to the thought that we no longer receive these norms from an authority outside of us, but rather from our own scientific investigations. We might say that we take them from reason, or from our own reason. But it is clear that we don't decide ourselves what is right; this is determined by the facts of the case.

In a parallel way, Kant would claim that while we legislate the moral law, this is established by reason; only now it is not just the facts of the case, but the nature of reason, which requires that we act on universalizable maxims. We can't decide what is right, but only will to follow it, acting out of our nature as rational agents, as against beings with desires.

But part of the dramatic force of this narrative line is lost here. What is striking about it is the claim to issue the norms we live by on our own authority. This thought can set off a tremor, a frisson in us, as we sense how much we are defying an age-old sense of higher, more-than-human authority; and at the same time, it can galvanize us with a sense of our own responsibility, and the courage we need to take it up. Beyond this, we can be struck by the sense that we stand, as it were, before a normative abyss, that this blind, deaf, silent universe offers *no* guidance whatever; we can find here an exhilarating challenge, which inspires us, which can even awaken a sense of the strange beauty of this alien universe, in the face of which we stake our claim as legislators of meaning.

This same story can be told at different levels of radicality. At its most humdrum, a contemporary Humean might reflect on Hume's debunking of rational vision as the basis for morality. This rather resides in ordinary human sentiment, in a certain innate propensity to approve and disapprove of actions in function of their conducing or not to the happiness and well-being of humans. Our innate feelings of sympathy ensure that we will not be actuated here merely by our own happiness, but rather by the general utility.

Now here we are plainly not able to decide what is good and right. This is determined, for one part, by our innate tendency to approve what brings happiness, and for another part, by our reason insofar as we use this to determine what does in fact conduce to human welfare. But seen from another side, it is clear that this position departs crucially from traditional ethics. It not only debunks the claim that our standards are determined by something higher, be it the will of God, or the nature of the cosmos, or the Idea of the Human, or whatever, but it also dissipates the aura of irrecusable authority which depends on this higher source. Our moral impulses are natural, just like all our other impulses; they are part of how human beings function de facto, like our sexual constitution, and our need for self-esteem and recognition, and all the rest.

But of course, moral demands claim to be higher, over-riding, to be those we really ought to listen to, even when other desires clamour to ignore them. That is part of what we mean by morality. And by and large a Humean moral philosopher will not want to reject this claim; she will aspire to live her life in response to it. But then she will be aware that it is not the universe, or God, but ultimately she herself who is assenting to accord moral demands this status. In this sense, some kind of decision is called for.

And this decision requires a certain kind of courage; because so deeply ingrained in our history and culture, perhaps even in our make-up, is the connection between higher source and over-riding claim, that the debunking of all outside sources can easily induce in us a failure of nerve. We have to have the courage to re-affirm on

our own authority (some of) the moral rules which used to hold as commands of God or Nature.

Now we can generalize this notion of self-authorization beyond the narrowly Humean moral philosophy, and we come to the position ably articulated by Isaiah Berlin at the end of his "Two Concepts of Liberty":

> In the end, men choose between ultimate values; they choose as they do, be-cause their life and thought are determined by fundamental moral categories and concepts that are, at any rate over large stretches of time and space, a part of their being and thought and sense of their own identity.

Here Berlin invokes "the ideal of freedom to choose ends without claiming eternal validity for them". He acknowledges that this was not recognized in the past, and may not be in the future, "but no sceptical conclusions seem to me to follow".

> Principles are not less sacred because their duration cannot be guaranteed. In-deed, the very desire for guarantees that our values are eternal and secure in some objective heaven is perhaps only a craving for the certainties of child-hood or the absolute values of our primitive past. "To realise the relative valid-ity of our convictions", said an admirable writer of our time, "and yet to stand for them unflinchingly, is what distinguishes a civilised man from a barbar-ian." To demand more than this is perhaps a deep and incurable metaphysical need; but to allow it to determine one's practice is a symptom of an equally deep, and more dangerous, moral and political immaturity.[47]

The narrative line I have been describing is beautifully invoked here: from child-hood to adulthood, from barbarity to civilization, we climb to the point of being capable of self-authorization. But it is clear that, although there are important choices to be made (Berlin is well known for his thesis of the irreducible conflict be-tween values), nevertheless much of what we accept as normative is deeply anchored in our past and identity.

Self-authorization can be given a more radical twist, if we think of the values which we endorse as not so continuous with our past and what we have become. Authors who sense themselves to be in a revolutionary situation can more easily see themselves as espousing a more radically new position; say, a new humanism, over against a theistic ethic, or one based on the Great Chain of Being; or a humanism of a particular temper, over against other, more influential forms.

We find a stance of this latter kind in Albert Camus, for instance, whose human-ism was partly defined in opposition to the "progressive", Communist-leaning, rev-

olutionary humanism espoused by Sartre. In Camus, the sense is strong that this self-authorization takes place over against a universe which is silent and indifferent, and which defeats all attempts to find some meaning in it. It is in this sense the site of "absurdity". But realizing this fully, and rising to the challenge, and espousing one's own ethic in the teeth of this absurdity, can yield the courage and inspiration to struggle against the force of meaningless adversity. Dr. Rieux in *La Peste* is an exemplary hero of this stance. To project some false meaning onto the plague, for instance, that humans are being punished for their sins, is not only to give in to illusion, but also to lay down one's arms in the struggle.

Camus' position, because of its articulacy and rhetorical force, is worth examining in a little more detail. His crucial move is to articulate the sense of the human condition, after the end of religious-metaphysical illusions, with the notion of the "absurd". The absurd "naît de cette confrontation entre l'appel humain et le silence déraisonnable du monde"[48] (the absurd is born of this confrontation between the human call and the unreasonable silence of the world).[49] We feel called to happiness, *jouissance.* This is not just a desire, but a sense that this is our normal condition; that this is what we are designed for. And beyond that, we feel an imperious demand in us to make sense of the world, to find some unified meaning in it. We have, in other words, an intuition about the meaning of things, written into our inescapable life experience.

But then the claims to fulfillment and meaning are brutally denied by an indifferent universe. It owes us nothing, and its operations randomly favour and then crush our aspirations. The nascent sense of meaning meets an enigma which defies all over-all meaning. The attempts at sense-making are continually and utterly frustrated. This is the contradiction which Camus names "absurd".

Of course, there is a seeming contradiction in this claim itself. Those who are chary of Camus' dramatization of the human condition have not been slow to point this out. If the point is that, contrary to Christianity and a host of metaphysical views, the universe is indifferent and void of meaning, it doesn't make sense to speak of absurdity either. Absurdity exists where there is reason to expect meaning, and nonsense appears instead. How can there be an expectation of meaning in a universe which is by hypothesis devoid of it?

Camus' point here is phenomenological. It is part of our life-experience to expect, strive, hope for happiness and meaning. Seen in the view from nowhere, the universe is just indifferent, and there is no point speaking of the absence of meaning. But as we live it, the expectation, the demand for meaning is ineradicable; the universe as lived is "absurd". "Ce monde en lui-même n'est pas raisonnable . . . Mais ce qui est absurde, c'est la confrontation de cet irrationnel et de ce désir éperdu de

clarté dont l'appel résonne au plus profond de l'homme."[50] (This world in itself is not reasonable. . . . But what is absurd is the confrontation between this irrational reality and the wild longing for clarity whose call resonates in the depths of the human heart.)[51]

To make the demand for meaning is not an optional stance. It is central to our humanity:

> Je peux tout nier de cette partie de moi qui vit de nostalgies incertaines, sauf ce désir d'unité, cet appétit de résoudre, cette exigence de clarté et de cohésion. Je peux tout réfuter dans ce monde qui m'entoure, me heurte ou me transporte, sauf ce chaos, ce hasard roi et cette divine équivalence qui naît de l'anarchie.[52]

> (I can negate everything of that part of me that lives on vague nostalgias, except this desire for unity, this longing for resolution, this need for clarity and cohesion. I can refute everything in my surrounding world that clashes with me or enraptures me, except this chaos, this sovereign chance and this divine equivalence that springs from anarchy.)[53]

How to respond to this? The traditional response has been to negate absurdity, to affirm cosmic meaning. Or perhaps better put, throughout its whole early development, the human race lived within socially-constructed projections of meaning on the world which quite occluded the issue which we moderns have to face. One way to react today is to try to rehabilitate these projections, or devise new ones. Continuing belief in Christianity is an attempt to retain an old form, but orthodox revolutionary Marxism represents a new attempt to do the same thing. In the end of history, after the Revolution, everything will make sense (if we forget details like accidents and premature death).

Another strategy is to downplay the importance of the earthly happiness we desire and feel ourselves made for. The fact that this is frustrated is not all that important, because we have something much more important to strive for: salvation, the Revolution. Obviously, these two go together, they are two sides of the same coin. To affirm that the universe is meaningful, when it negates the first-off claim that we make of it in our desire for happiness, must mean to displace the sought-for meaning elsewhere. Something else matters more than our ordinary fulfillment.

Camus rejects both facets of this strategy. We must never denigrate happiness, "il faut aimer la nature, avoir une sagesse de la vie dans l'immédiat et pas dans le lointain" (we must love nature, have a wisdom of life in its immediacy, and not from a distance).[54] This is what Camus referred to as his "Hellenism". We can see something of the same idea as other modern critics have raised with the idea of "pa-

ganism", we try to go back behind the transformation perspective of Christianity, and once more restore ordinary human flourishing to its rightful place as our highest end.

Taking up this utterly lucid stance, we have a sense of our own dignity as clear-sighted beings, capable of facing the painful truth. Camus speaks of "honour":

> Noblesse oblige à l'honneur. Mais l'homme oblige à la noblesse. . . . Vigny a très bien vu que l'honneur était la seule morale possible pour l'homme sans Dieu. Les raisons de l'homme ne tiennent pas debout. C'est l'homme qui tient debout à leur place.[55]

> (Nobility obliges one to honour; but being a man obliges one to nobility. . . . Vigny saw very well that honour was the only possible morality for the man without God. For man's reasons cannot stand by themselves; it is man who stands by himself in their place.)[56]

But this is not all. To have rehabilitated ordinary happiness binds us to all; it brings us together with others in an effort to fight for this happiness wherever it is endangered. This is a fight which we will lose in the end, but which allows for many provisional victories. These are all we have; we shouldn't squander them.

In this response, we see the negation of a third feature which Camus sees in religio-metaphysical projections of meaning; not only covering up the absurd, not only denigrating happiness, but also denying the fulfillments of whatever meaning we believe in to those who refuse to accept our creed. To free oneself of these projections is to be able to accede to a real universality. "Il faut bien . . . faire ce que le christianisme n'a jamais fait: s'occuper des damnés."[57] (One must . . . do what Christianity has never done: take care of the damned.)[58]

Camus is expressing here his variant of what we called in the earlier discussion this sense of breaking out into a new space between human beings, which carries with it a new wider solidarity. This is the space he calls "la révolte". "Il me semble trouver dans le mouvement de la révolte le lieu commun où les hommes se rejoignent."[59] (I believe we find in the movement of revolt the common ground on which men can unite.) Revolt against what? Against absurdity itself; instead of just passively bearing the denial of our aspirations to happiness; and avoiding even more the false solutions which cover up the absurd and promise some illusory substitute to a favoured group, the effective rebellion means fighting the battles we can fight, for the limited, provisional happiness we can achieve, wherever this is to be found, and whoever will be the beneficiaries, without exclusion. "Sachant qu'il n'est pas de causes victorieuses, j'ai du goût pour les causes perdues: elles demandent une âme

entière, égale à sa défaite comme à ses victoires passagères."[60] (Knowing that there are no victorious causes, I have a taste for lost causes. They demand a soul without fissure, the equal of defeat, as well as of its temporary victories.)[61]

This passionate sense that the provisional, limited happiness and well-being should never be sacrificed in the name of the great over-all solution, was what made Camus unable to follow Sartre in his support for Communism, and brought about the painful rupture between the two erstwhile friends and allies.[62]

So revolt, which Camus says at one point "n'est que l'assurance d'un destin écrasant, moins la résignation qui devrait l'accompagner" (is but the assurance of a crushing fate, minus the resignation that ought to accompany it), is the only stance worthy of the human being. To take it up "lui restitue sa grandeur. Pour un homme sans oeillères, il n'est pas de plus beau spectacle que celui de l'intelligence aux prises avec une réalité qui le dépasse. Le spectacle de l'orgeuil humain est indépassable. . . . Appauvrir cette réalité dont l'inhumanité fait la grandeur de l'homme, c'est du même coup l'appauvrir lui-même."[63] ([This stance] restores to life its greatness. For a man without blinkers, there is no finer sight than that of an understanding at grips with a reality which transcends it. The sight of human pride is unsurpassable. . . . To impoverish that reality whose inhumanity constitutes human greatness is tantamount to impoverishing man himself.)[64]

There is an inspiring ideal of courage, akin to Stoicism, in this position, which we find renewed in a number of ways in our time. One struggles for the good, with no guarantees of success, indeed, even with a certainty of ultimate failure; not only in the sense that the indifferent universe will ultimately do away with all the works of humankind, but also because one will accept no transcendent hope beyond history, that works of good will can be taken up into eternity. It is the very height of human morality, because at the apex of ungrounded self-authorization, to be totally committed to the right, even in the face of certain defeat. Derrida espoused a position somewhat like this.

Camus, Derrida, and others ended up authorising an ethic which has deep roots in our civilization, a humanism which takes up some variant of the modern moral order, that our actions and structures should conduce to the benefit of all. But Nietzsche conceived of a kind of self-authorization which deliberately rejected universal benefit, egalitarianism, democracy, as so many obstacles on the road to self-overcoming. Here we have another pitch of radicality, which is ready to make a total break with the founding principles of our civilization. This is not a mere recasting of these, however far-reaching, as one sees with Marx, but a head-on rejection. From this sense of radical self-authorization an exhilarating sense of freedom, power and beauty can arise, as we can see in this closing passage from *The Will to Power:*

And do you know what "the world" is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror? This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself; as a whole, of unalterable size, a household without expenses or losses, but likewise without increase or income; enclosed by "nothingness" as by a boundary; not something blurry or wasted, not something endlessly extended, but set in a definite space as a definite force, and not a space that might be "empty" here or there, but rather as force throughout, as a play of forces and waves of forces, at the same time one and many, increasing here and at the same time decreasing there; a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and a flood of its forms; out of the simplest forms striving towards the most complex, out of the stillest, most rigid, coldest forms towards the hottest, most turbulent, most self-contradictory, and then again returning home to the simple out of this abundance, out of the play of contradictions back to the joy of concord, still affirming itself in this uniformity of its courses and its years, blessing itself as that which must return eternally, as a becoming which knows no satiety, no disgust no weariness: this my *Dionysian* world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of twofold voluptuous delight, my "beyond good and evil", without goal, unless the joy of the circle itself is a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will towards itself—do you want a *name* for this world? A *solution* for all its riddles? A *light* for you, too, you best-concealed, most intrepid, most midnightly men?—*This world is the will to power—and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides![65]

The dawning sense in modern times that we are in a meaningless universe, that our most cherished meanings find no endorsement in the cosmos, or in the will of God, has often been described as a traumatic loss, a second and definitive expulsion from paradise. But in Nietzsche's portrayal, virtually a hymn of praise, we sense another reaction: exhilaration. It is partly the very spectacle of immensity and power, but there is also the almost giddy sense that in this massive turbulence, all meaning is up to us. This can appear as the ultimate emancipation, freeing us from all exogenous significance.

So we see that the narrative of self-authorization can be told in many registers, some very radical. But the story is often told without distinguishing between these different forms, as a kind of generic story, pointing to the obvious fact that, with the de-

mise of God and the meaningful cosmos, we are the only authorising agency left. Thus Alain Renaut:

> L'*humanisme,* c'est au fond la conception et la valorisation de l'humanité comme capacité d'*autonomie*—je veux dire . . . que ce qui constitue la modernité, c'est ce fait que l'homme va se penser comme la source de ses représentations et de ces actes, comme leur fondement (sujet) ou encore comme leur auteur . . . L'homme de l'humanisme est celui qui n'entend plus recevoir ses normes ou ses lois ni de la nature des choses (Aristote), ni de Dieu, mais qui les fonde lui-même à partir de sa raison et de sa volonté. Ainsi le droit naturel moderne serait-il un droit subjectif, posé et défini par la raison humaine (rationalisme juridique) ou la volonté humaine (volontarisme juridique).[66]

> (Fundamentally, *humanism* is the conception and valorization of humanity in its capacity for *autonomy.* What I mean . . . is that what constitutes modernity is the fact that man thinks of himself as the source of his representations and acts, as their foundation (subject) or their author. . . . The man of humanism is the one who no longer receives his norms and laws either from the nature of things (Aristotle) nor from God, but who establishes them himself on the basis of his reason and will. Thus modern natural right is a subjective right, posited and defined by human reason (juridical rationalism) or by human will (juridical voluntarism).

Self-authorization is just taken here as an axiomatic feature of modernity, whether it be through reason or will. This is a tremendously widespread narrative nowadays; it crops up everywhere. Wherever it is accepted, it in turn seems to make the closed take on immanence equally axiomatic. The entire ethical stance of moderns supposes and follows on from the death of God (and of course, of the meaningful cosmos). This gives a twist to the story of modernity as adulthood, which imparts drama, a call to steadfast courage, even the exhilaration of total emancipation.

The sense that we have reached maturity in casting aside faith can be played out in the register of disengaged reason, and the need to accept the deliverances of neutral science, whatever they be. This was the thrust of the first set of CWSs which I described above. But there can also be the sense that adulthood above all means being able to face the loss of meaning in things, being ready to find or project meaning in face of a universe which itself is without sense. Here the virtues may not, or not simply, be those of disengaged reason, and scientific responsibility. Indeed, the sense may be that we have to avoid a too simple reliance on science in the search for

meaning. The main virtue stressed here is the imaginative courage to face the void, and to be energized by it to the creation of meaning. Nietzsche and his followers are crucial protagonists of this spin on immanence. And Camus, as we saw above, offered another very influential version of it.[67]

But how coherent is this view of the creation of meaning and value in face of the void? Certainly, as an account of what happened in the early stages of modernity, it verges on fantasy. If you had tried to explain to Locke or Grotius that this is what they were doing, they would have stared at you in incomprehension.

But leaving this aside, how coherent is the claim itself? Can the values we take as binding really be invented? Or in the less radical version of Berlin, where we admit that they emerge from our past and our identity, what does it mean to endorse them in their temporality and relativity? Of course, I see that my standard for a good human life has no application before or after there are humans. I also can recognize that the ethic of authenticity I endorse made no sense to people in other cultures and times. But that doesn't prevent me from thinking that these standards are rooted in what we are, even in human nature, to use the traditional expression, and that they need to be sought after, discovered, better defined, rather than being endorsed.[68]

Moreover, what are we to make of the aura surrounding these standards, the fact that they command my admiration and allegiance? That is, after all, what the references to God and the cosmos were attempting to make sense of. It is not at all clear that Humeans, Kantians, let alone Nietzscheans, can offer a more convincing account of this than the traditional ones.

And finally, who has decreed that the transformations we can hope and strive for in human life are restricted to those which can be carried out in a meaningless universe without a transcendent source?

The narratives of self-authorization, when examined more closely, are far from self-evident; and yet their assuming axiomatic status in the thinking of many people, is one facet of a powerful and widespread CWS, imposing a closed spin on the immanent frame we all share.

9

I have been outlining four facets of a take on modernity which make it appear as a closed immanent order. I have called these "closed world structures", because they (wrongly) make this take seem obvious, unchallengeable, axiomatic. These facets are in a sense variants on a narrative of coming of age, moving from a childlike to an adult consciousness. In the first facet, which makes the claim that science has shown that God cannot exist, or at least that religion is irrelevant to life, the story of matu-

ration is in the background, but it plays a crucial role in the acceptance of this way of thinking. The second is a narrative of subtraction, but this too is minimally argued, and serves more as the unnoticed background to the narratives people tell. The third and fourth offer fuller narratives, with a lot of rich detail, of the rise of modern political-moral spaces, on one hand, and of the authorization of values by the autonomous self. But they are linked together as stories of maturation, of which they present different sides.

I have articulated these facets in some detail, partly in order to show that they function as unchallenged axioms, rather than as unshakeable arguments, and that they rely on very shaky assumptions, are often grounded on illegitimate naturalizations of what are in fact profound cultural mutations, and in general survive largely because they end up escaping examination in the climate in which they are taken as the undeniable framework for any argument. But my goal has also been to give some sense of how lively and powerful these narrations can be, how exciting and engaging, in particular the last two, and how they associate the closed take with various virtues, mainly those of courageous, clear-sighted adulthood. It is easy to see how, if no other considerations impinge, they could generate anticipatory confidence in a take of closure within the immanent frame. But as supposed conclusive proofs they don't make the grade.

The narrative dimension is extremely important, because the force of these CWS comes less from the supposed detailed argument (that science refutes religion, or that Christianity is incompatible with human rights), and much more from the general form of the narratives, to the effect that there was once a time when religion could flourish, but that this time is past. The plausibility structures of faith have collapsed, once and for all, irreversibly. We see this sense among many nineteenth century figures, concerning faith in a personal God (as against some kind of impersonal force). Arnold thought that the older form of religion was irretrievably a thing of the past, as did Hardy, and in another way, William James.

And the same kind of supposition is widespread today, now in favour of atheism, or materialism, relegating all forms of religion to an earlier era. In a certain sense, the original arguments on which this narrative rests cease to matter, so powerful is the sense created in certain milieux, that these old views just *can't* be options for us.

I could in fact have gone much farther in exploring further facets of the outlook of closed immanence. I discussed in detail the epistemological doctrines associated with it, but a lot needs to be said as well about the widespread take on moral philosophy today, with its exclusive focus on questions of obligatory action, the question of what is the right thing to do. It in fact abandons wider issues of the nature of the good life, of higher ethical motivation, of what we should love. The wider focus is evident in the founding philosophies of Western ethics, in the ancient world. But

modern discussions, which tend to concentrate on the range of doctrines descended from Utilitarian thinkers and Kant, have very much narrowed the field.[69] Of course, underlying this change are massive shifts in the understanding of human agency and the human good, but these deeper changes are pushed into the background and "naturalized", so that it just seems evident that what is centrally at stake in morals must be either utility, or utility plus the requirements of freedom, and/or those of rational argument. In any of these formulations, the basis of ethics is seen as something obvious, and there seems no call to examine the understanding of the incomparably higher underlying all this, much less raise the question whether it points to something transcendent.

And, of course, there are other modes of CWS, powered by other senses of agency and our predicament. But enough has been said to give the flavour of this stance to modernity.

Now in milieux in which this stance dominates, it can seem very hard to understand why anyone can believe in God, unless through a failure of reason, or a culpable self-indulgence. And yet even there, as in the islands of unchallenged faith, there is a lively sense that the alternative exists, and some nagging doubts may be induced by this.

In a sense, the alternative can't disappear, because it is part of the official story itself. Following some of the versions of the "secularization" story, religion should just eventually disappear altogether, as we saw in the quote from Renan a few paragraphs ago. The illusion is finally dispelled, and humanity puts it behind them. As we could argue that particular forms of belief or particular religious functions have quite disappeared. We could perhaps imagine a humanity for whom "religion" just meant one of the "higher" forms, which had completely forgotten about shamans and shamanism. (I'm not sure that even this can really be relegated in this way, but we can imagine it for the sake of argument.)

Or in the contemporary form proposed by Bruce above, the prospect that religion might disappear under the force of scientific refutation is abandoned, but the prediction is that in humanity's search for meaning in the future, religious answers will be relegated to the margins.

But religion as a whole disappear or be marginalized in this fashion? At first sight, there seems to be a difficulty with this, in that the very self-understanding of unbelief, that whereby it can present itself as mature, courageous, as a conquest over the temptations of childishness, dependency or lesser fortitude, requires that we remain aware of the vanquished enemy, of the obstacles which have to be climbed over, of the dangers which still await those whose brave self-responsibility falters. Faith has to remain a possibility, or else the self-valorizing understanding of atheism founders. Imagining that faith might just disappear is imagining a fundamentally differ-

ent form of non-faith, one quite unconnected to identity. It would be one in which it would be as indifferent and unconnected to my sense of my ethical predicament that I have no faith, as it is today that I don't believe, for instance, in phlogiston, or natural places. This I suppose is something like what Bruce is predicting.

Perhaps some people see themselves as approaching this condition today; people who say: "I'm not religious", in the same tone of voice as they might say: I don't like turnips, or Elvis Presley. My guess is that if pressed to look at the issues, even they would begin to sense that they stood in one or other relation to faith as an identity-defining issue. And certainly the argument about faith and unbelief which circulates in our culture, the moves from one to the other which people make, are all understood on this ethically-charged level. Religion remains ineradicably on the horizon of areligion; and vice versa. This is another indication that the "official story" needs to be understood on a deeper level, as I have been suggesting above.

10

All this may perhaps give us a sense of what it can mean to stand in the Jamesian open space I spoke of above (section 3), where the winds blow, where one can feel the pull in both directions. To stand here is to be at the mid-point of the cross-pressures that define our culture.

The experience in this space may take many forms. But I want to single out two versions, which each reflect a direction one may be leaning. The first is familiar from the preceding discussion; those who want to opt for the ordered, impersonal universe, whether in its scientist-materialist form, or in a more spiritualized variant, feel the imminent loss of a world of beauty, meaning, warmth, as well as of the perspective of a self-transformation beyond the everyday. The attraction of these cherished goods is closely linked to the past, often to the childhood of the chooser—which is, of course, what helps ultimately to discredit them. Even after the die is cast, the force of these rejected aspirations recurs in the form of regret and nostalgia. Which is why the nineteenth century shows that continuing strand of regret, even bereavement, which Wilson spoke of,[70] one of whose most poignant expressions is Hardy's poem *God's Funeral:*

     'So, toward our myth's oblivion,
  Darkling, and languid-lipped, we creep and grope
  Sadlier than those who wept in Babylon,
  Whose Zion was still an abiding hope.

     'How sweet it was in years far hied
  To start the wheels of day with trustful prayer,

> To lie down liegely at the eventide
> And feel a blest assurance he was there!
>
> 'And who or what shall fill his place?
> Whither will wanderers turn distracted eyes
> For some fixed star to stimulate their pace
> Towards the goal of their enterprise?' . . .[71]

This sense of loss can perhaps never be stilled, only swept away or swallowed up (and for how long?) in the exhilaration of total emancipation.

The second version is what those experience whose strongest leanings move them towards at least some search for spiritual meaning, and often towards God. These are haunted by a sense that the universe might after all be as meaningless as the most reductive materialism describes. They feel that their vision has to struggle against this flat and empty world; they fear that their strong desire for God, or for eternity, might after all be the self-induced illusion that materialists claim it to be.

This has been a familiar predicament during the last two centuries. Czeslaw Milosz, following Erich Heller, speaks of the "Romantic crisis of European culture", unleashed by "the dichotomy between the world of scientific laws—cold, indifferent to human values—and man's inner world".[72] This may not be the best name for this stream of sensibility, but Milosz captures the sense of threat to the central meanings of life, as well as the refusal to confine these to a lost past, and the determination to recover a new way of expressing and validating these meanings. His prime examples—and there are many others—are Blake, Goethe, and Dostoyevsky, but of course the list has to include Milosz himself.

The understanding that this is a continuing struggle, that the vindication of faith is not complete emerges, for instance, in Dostoyevsky's famous saying that if he had to choose between Christ and the truth, he would choose Christ.[73] Confidence here must remain always anticipatory. Parallel to the continuing regret of ex-believers is this sense that the struggle for belief is never definitively won.

These two forms of experience stand among the many which belong to what Milosz, following Heller, calls the "Disinherited Mind".