


5-1993

Living in a Disenchanted World

John Margiotta

College of the Holy Cross, margiotta@outlook.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://crossworks.holycross.edu/fenwick_scholar

 Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), [History of Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Social History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Margiotta, John, "Living in a Disenchanted World" (1993). *Fenwick Scholar Program*. 15.
http://crossworks.holycross.edu/fenwick_scholar/15

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors Projects at CrossWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Fenwick Scholar Program by an authorized administrator of CrossWorks.

Living in a Disenchanted World

John Margiotta
Fenwick Project

Acknowledgments

This project was made possible by the help and support of many people who I now wish to acknowledge. I wish to thank the Center For Interdisciplinary and Special Studies for providing me with the opportunities associated with the Fenwick. Next, I wish to thank Pr. McBride for her support of my project through the Honors Program. I wish to thank my mother, father, brother, and girlfriend for their love and support and I particularly wish to thank my father for paying for my education. Next I wish to thank the group of professors who pushed me to truly educate myself and served as fantastic resources throughout the process: they include Prs. Cording, Dustin, Freeman, Garvey, and Pax. Last and really above all I wish to thank the two men who so many people have asked me how I manage to study with, considering how deeply ideologically divided they are; these men are Prs. Lawrence and Phillips and I manage to study with the two of them because they have taught me, by example, that good intellectual work is as much a product of the heart as it is of the mind. It is to them that I am forever indebted and that I, therefore, dedicate this project.

I first conceived of this project after reading Allan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*. In that book he argues that the western world is in crisis because the three evils of scientific empiricism, philosophical relativism, and the popular morality of the will have undermined the established authority necessary to keep our western democracies from slipping into moral and political anarchy. Bloom maintains that these modes of thought have crippled our ability to believe strongly in anything other than the virtue of tolerance, or the belief that we should not believe too strongly in anything. All who do manage to assert some firm vision of good and evil or some vision of authority to which we must humble ourselves, he remarks, are now disdained as absolutists or fascists. Bloom decries this development and uses his book to identify some of the deleterious effects that this crisis of authority has had and will have on life in the future.

Bloom argues that the most pernicious threat posed by this authority crisis is to the established political order of western democracies; he fears that the predominant cultural relativism threatens our ability to defend the Natural Rights upon which our western democracies, as products of Enlightenment philosophies, were built. He warns us that if we can no longer defend with conviction the idea that certain rights are, to use the language contained in our own Declaration of Independence, "self-evident" and "unalienable," then we are headed down a slippery political

slope which will render us incapable of staving off the most evil of political movements, fascist demagogues, and the like.

The other substantial problem created by cultural relativism has to do with the type of persons our society now produces. Bloom argues that as a result of the contemporary effort to undermine authority and create absolutely tolerant citizens who recognize a plurality of truths, we have, rather ironically, produced a group of very parochial people, people who are parochial simply because they are too lazy and disinterested to educate themselves, to broaden their minds, to learn about either the ideas of their ancestors or the ideas of foreigners. Bloom locates the roots of this insidious laziness in the fact that, as he says, "relativism has extinguished the real motive for education, the search for a good life." In this statement Bloom uses the word "education" in its most capacious sense; he is not speaking merely of what transpires in classrooms, but of education as something like the life-long journey aimed at broadening our own horizons, calling into question our most cherished assumptions by comparing them against other people's assumptions, all done as part of the frantic search to discover Truth, the meaning of life, etc.

Bloom does mention what transpires in the classroom because, as a teacher, he claims to have observed first-hand the relationship between the rise of moral relativism and

the decline in student interest and intellectual curiosity.

Bloom laments:

No longer is there a hope that there are great wise men in other places and other times who can reveal the truth about life -- except for the few remaining young people who look for a quick fix from a guru. Gone is the real historical sense of a Machiavelli who wrested a few hours from each busy day in which 'to don regal and courtly garments, enter the courts of the ancients and speak with them'"(1987:5).

Here, then, we have the portrait of the contemporary western world that Bloom paints; it is a world which can no longer adequately defend its political or legal order against cruder orders and a world which is producing lazy, parochial people who lack any sense of direction in life instead of dynamic, intellectually curious people who are certain what living a good life and being a good person entails.

When I first read Bloom's description of the problems of the modern age I found myself in agreement with him. It seemed to me then, and still does today, that we are living in a time where spiritual and moral homelessness prevails. Many of us find ourselves without firm convictions of right and wrong, or without a clear idea of what to do with our lives. In the recent book entitled *New Developments in Psychoanalysis* some medical doctors describe the problem in this way:

In recent years, psychotherapists have been reporting a decline in the classical neuroses which Freudian analysis was originally designed to treat, and an increase in 'disorders of the self' which are manifested in 'feelings of

meaninglessness, feelings of emptiness, pervasive depression, lack of sustaining interests, goals, ideals and values, and feelings of unrelatedness.' The feeling is widespread that Freudian clinical techniques are of little use in treating problems of the self. These disorders are rooted not in an overbearing cultural superego but in such social factors as 'the lack of stable ideologies and values ... or an atmosphere of disillusionment and cynicism in the surrounding society' (Eagle, 1984:73).

The effects that Bloom observed in his students do not seem, to me, inconsistent with these observations.

Although I very much agreed with and was excited by Bloom's diagnosis of the condition of the modern world, his book left me very angry because it blamed this condition on the anti-rational philosophies of Heidegger and Nietzsche. You see, at the time that I read Bloom's book, I had spent much of the past two and one half years of my life studying the German philosopher Martin Heidegger and I was, frankly, dismayed by Bloom's representation of him; the Heidegger described by Bloom is, I think, a crude caricature of a thinker whom Hans-Georg Gadamer once called the most important philosopher since Aristotle. It would have been bad, but I could have dismissed it if Bloom was simply accidentally mis-reading Heidegger. However, it did not appear that this was the case. The tone of Bloom's interpretation led me to believe that he was unfairly and intentionally painting a portrait of Heidegger that would allow him to blame Heidegger for giving birth to the moral relativism which Bloom so correctly detests. In short,

Bloom was attempting to read Heidegger in such a way as to make it appear that his philosophy had contributed to, if not actually brought about, the spiritual and moral crisis that now afflicts the modern western world.

The thing that shocked me most about his indictment of Heidegger was that in 1947 Heidegger warned that "homelessness was coming to be the destiny of the world." He was speaking of spirirtual and moral homlessness. Given that fact, it seemed to me, that he deserved credit for seeing that the world would one day end up resembling the world Bloom describes so well in the first thirty pages of his book. Since I was bothered by Bloom's interpretation of Heidegger, I thought that I would set about writing a corrective. I would paint a different portrait, one that would go so far as to say that not only is Bloom wrong in blaming Heidegger for causing our current moral and spiritual crisis, but that Heidegger's philosophy should be read as the antidote to the modern condition. This is how my project was born, basically as an attempt to defend a philosopher whom, for some strange reason, I had come to love during my first two years of college.

It did not take me long to learn that though Bloom and Heidegger agreed on the condition of the modern age they were worlds apart in identifying the cause of our contemporary spiritual homelessness. For Bloom the cause lay in Heidegger's rejection of the philosophies of the Enlightenment, and for Heidegger it was precisely those

Enlightenment philosophies he had rejected, particularly the glorification of Reason, which had created our homelessness in the first place. When it became clear to me how different Bloom and Heidegger were, it also became clear that my project could not be an effort to fuse the two men; I had to take a stand on the side of Heidegger and argue that the Enlightenment was itself the father of all that Bloom so detested.

I found allies for my cause in a group of thinkers who have been labeled "communitarians". Communitarians, like Heidegger, concern themselves precisely with the relationship between modern progress and spiritual homelessness. Among the modern-day writers, both on the left and the right, who have been labeled as communitarians are Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, Robert Bellah, Alisdair McIntyre, Michael Sandel, Robert Nisbet, and Charles Taylor. Though their concerns with the modern age often differ, they are united on two fronts: first, they agree that modern progress has a dialectical nature in that the increased autonomy of individuals, while good, has also led to a world in which individuals are unable to find a sense of purpose or life-direction. It is a disenchanted world, a morally neutral world that has no intrinsic order. Second, they assert that the disenchantment of the world came as a result of the calculated efforts of Enlightenment philosophers, and that if we are to find our way out of the modern spiritual

crisis, we will first have to understand the tradition, i.e. the Enlightenment, which is responsible for creating it.

To suggest that an episode in the history of philosophy is responsible for causing contemporary social problems, may seem ridiculous to some people. MacIntyre addresses this problem:

What I am going to suggest is that episodes in the social history which transformed, fragmented and, if my extreme view is correct, largely displaced morality...were episodes in the history of philosophy, that it is only in the light of that history that we can understand how the idiosyncrasies of everyday contemporary moral discourse came to be...Yet how can this be so? In our own culture academic philosophy is a highly marginal and specialized activity. Professors of philosophy do from time to time seek to wear the clothes of relevance and some of the college-educated public are haunted by vague cartoon-like memories of Philosophy 100. But both would find it surprising and the larger public even more surprising if it were suggested, as I am now suggesting, that the roots of some of the problems which now engage the specialized attention of academic philosophers and the roots of some of the problems central to our everyday social and practical lives are one and the same. Surprise would only be succeeded by incredulity if it were further suggested that we cannot understand, let alone solve, one of these sets of problems without understanding the other (1981:36).

On this issue, I am, to be brief, in complete agreement with MacIntyre and other communitarians: the modern philosophical and religious crisis described by Bloom has its roots in developments within the history of philosophy. I will now attempt to articulate the communitarian vision of how Enlightenment philosophy has led the western world into an age of philosophical and religious homelessness.

The communitarian version of western history is very different than the typical one. Most members of liberal democracies agree with the vision of history expressed by Richard Rorty:

We Deweyans have a story to tell about the progress of our species, a story whose later episodes emphasize how things have been getting better in the West during the last four centuries...(1991 B:212).

Charles Taylor writes the following about the typical modern person's vision of history:

Insofar as we can look optimistically on the human story, it must be one of progress, of the successive unchainings of reason, leading to successive discoveries of truth, and hence overcomings of error (1989:352).

While most moderns hail the events circa 1789 as the birth of the best era in the history of the human race, communitarians sound almost apocalyptic in recounting the same events. In opposition to Rorty and other liberal democratic thinkers, they argue that the Enlightenment ushered in a dark era in the history of the human race. This dark era, the modern age, is defined by the death of all that was good: the death of transcendent standards and goals, the death of god, the death of ahistorical truth, the death of community, the death of authenticity, and the death of heroism. The new world is defined by the dictatorship of rationality, the rise of rugged individualism, the leveling of all distinctions which accompany the dictatorship of

liberal tolerance, the rise of utilitarianism as the defining moral philosophy, and of pragmatism as the dominant general philosophy.

Judging from the divergence in opinion over the Enlightenment, one might be led to think that the argument between communitarians and the proponents of the Enlightenment is one about what happened historically during the time of the Enlightenment. This is not the case. Each side agrees that the Enlightenment was a time in which people gained their individual political freedom, religion and philosophy lost their authority, superstition gave way to reason, and authoritarian dictatorships gave way to democratic governments which promised tolerance and benevolence. On these matters, there is little to dispute. But, the communitarians and proponents of Enlightenment bitterly dispute the merits of these developments.

If we are to get any sense of the importance of this debate for our philosophical and social problems, then we must remember that the content of the argument is not historical, it deals with timeless questions like "what constitutes a good society?" and "how should one live?" The historical element in the debate is only important in so far as most communitarians point out that members of today's western world have no idea that their common sense assumptions about what constitutes a good society and a good life are products of a moment in the history of philosophy. This moment was one, during the European Enlightenment, in

which philosophy actually became political doctrine, thus explaining how what we now consider to be an activity carried on at the periphery of a society could exert such influence at that time in history.

The central issue of debate between communitarians and proponents of the Enlightenment amounts to a question concerning the nature of enlightenment. For the communitarians the question posed so famously by Kant in his essay, *What is Enlightenment?*, is as apropos today as it was then. In fact, many would argue that it is more important to ask it today because most people have forgotten that there is more than one answer to the question. In his famous essay Kant defines enlightenment in this way:

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: Sapere aude. Have courage to use your own understanding!
(1970:54).

Although Kant viewed the French and American revolutions as decisive steps toward man's emergence from self-incurred immaturity, he did not believe that the success of those revolutions led us into an enlightened age. Instead, he argued that enlightenment was a continuous process leading to further self-emancipation. As time went on, he believed, people would become more liberated from superstition and

prejudice as well as more eager to act as their own masters, unafraid to think for themselves.

What stood in the way of progress, Kant argued, was man's laziness:

Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why such a large proportion of man, even when nature has long emancipated them from alien guidance, nevertheless gladly remains immature for life...Thus it is difficult for each separate individual to work his way out of the immaturity which has become almost second nature to him. He has even grown fond of it and is really incapable for the time being of using his own understanding, because he was never allowed to make the attempt. Dogmas and formulas, those mechanical instruments for rational use (or misuse) of his natural endowments, are the ball and chain of his immaturity (Kant, 1970:54-55).

The idea that "dogmas and formulas...are the ball and chain" of man's immaturity was widely accepted by Enlightenment thinkers. The more intriguing assumption of Enlightenment philosophers was that this immaturity led to violence. Charles Taylor writes that the unspoken assumption of the Enlightenment movement was that

Moved by fears and blinded by the superstitions of religion, humans have been terribly cruel; victims of false beliefs about the good, they have done themselves and others great involuntary harm; locked into a parochial allegiance by custom, they have treated outsiders callously (1989:330).

Here we see that these promoters of reason and intellectual self-reliance believed that nothing provokes violence as quickly as belief in false ideologies and religion. This belief persists today. We citizens of secular democracies look upon the Middle East as proof that mixing politics and religion is a deadly practice. Just as we look upon the

Middle East as proof that a secular state is less violent, the Enlightenment philosophers took account of the fact that they were part of a generation of people who arrived on the scene after two hundred years of religious and civil wars. Many historians argue that these wars had produced levels of civilian violence not achieved again until the twentieth century. The Enlightenment proponents of the eighteenth century wanted to cut the roots of this violence by attacking what Isaiah Berlin called

the dark mysteries and grotesque fairy tales which went by the names of theology, metaphysics, and other brands of concealed dogma or superstition with which unscrupulous knaves had for so long befuddled the stupid and benighted multitudes whom they murdered, enslaved, oppressed, and exploited(1956:113).

This assault was aimed at both the ideas of theology, metaphysics, etc. and their proponents, priests and Kings. Basically, the attack was directed at all recognized authority. This is why it is quite natural that French Enlightenment philosophy led to a political revolution in which church and state were divided and the King, who was then thought to be the representative of God, was dethroned in favor of democratic rule.

This separation of church and state, it was believed, would lead to a more peaceful world. Richard Rorty argues that the founding fathers of America believed in and eagerly promoted the ideas of the Enlightenment. He remarks that

"Thomas Jefferson set the tone for American liberal politics when he said 'it does me no injury for my neighbor to say that there are twenty Gods or no Gods'"(1991 B:175). He cites this statement as proof that from our founding to this day, we Americans have shared the Enlightenment belief "that politics can be separated from matters of ultimate importance -- that shared beliefs among citizens on such matters are not essential to a democratic society"(1991 B:175).

While today the majority of Americans defend the division of church and state, circa 1776 the idea of a secular society, one in which the individual spheres of human experience are isolated from religion, represented a radical departure from all medieval and current practices. Thus, while we modern Americans view the split between religion and politics as traditional, Jefferson and other founding fathers were renegades when they proposed to privatize religion, "to view it as irrelevant to social order, but relevant to, and possibly essential for, individual perfection" (Rorty, 1991 B:175). We modern Americans cannot help but forget just how radical the idea of a secular state was circa 1776. It was not merely a radical political idea, it signaled a change in the way members of a citizenry were supposed to conceive of their places in the world. Charles Taylor explains:

Modern freedom was won by our breaking loose from older moral horizons. People used to see themselves as part of a larger order. In some

cases, this was a cosmic order, a "great chain of Being," in which humans figured in their proper place along with angels, heavenly bodies, and our fellow earthly creatures. This hierarchical order in the universe was reflected in the hierarchies of human society. People were often locked into a given place, a role and station that was properly theirs and from which it was almost unthinkable to deviate. Modern freedom came about through the discrediting of such orders. But at the same time as they restricted us, these orders gave meaning to the world and to the activities of social life. The things around us were not just raw materials or instruments for our projects, but they had the significance given them by their place in the chain of being...The discrediting of these orders has been called the "disenchantment" of the world. With it, things lost some of their magic(1992:3).

For most Enlightenment philosophers, the American constitution was a dream realized. In America people were free to be who they wanted to be, not whom any metaphysical order or authoritarian ruler determined that they would be. This meant that people were finally, in theory, free from the dogmas that dictated how they were to live out their lives. In the vacuum of authority, people were now expected to mature quickly, to be responsible for directing their own lives, choosing their own dreams, etc. While some Enlightenment thinkers hail the birth of America as a great triumph, this is a point that communitarians dispute. For communitarians, the same events that proponents of Enlightenment hold dear are perceived to be the dawn of the modern descent into spiritual crisis.

The modern descent into spiritual crisis, communitarians argue, begins at that moment in history when "transformed

rules of morality have to be found some new status, deprived as they have been of their older teleological character and their even more ancient categorical character as expressions of an ultimately divine law" (MacIntyre, 1981:62). In the new world Enlightenment philosophers came to agree that the famous Biblical narrative of Abraham and Isaac represented a vision of morality that society wants to cast as dark-age. In the modern age, even philosophers, like Kant and Mill, who disagreed on almost every issue in philosophy,

stood together in insisting that questions of good and evil cannot be reduced to divine prescription and proscription. It must always be possible for us to ask whether God's commands are themselves good; and if an evil deity commanded us to do his bidding, the moral course would be to resist (Bentham and Mill, 1987:19).

In *After Virtue* MacIntyre argues that our western world has not yet recovered from this complete debunking of traditional moral authority:

The problems of modern moral theory emerge clearly as the product of the failure of the Enlightenment project. On the one hand the individual moral agent, freed from hierarchy and teleology, conceives of himself and is conceived of by moral philosophers as sovereign in his moral theory. On the other hand the inherited, if partially transformed rules of morality have to be found some new status, deprived as they have been of their older teleological character and even more ancient categorical character as expressions of an ultimately divine law. If such rules cannot be found a new status which will make appeal to them rational, appeal to them will indeed appear as an instrument of individual desire and will. Hence there is a pressure to vindicate them either by devising some new teleology or by finding some new categorical status for them. The first project is what lends its importance to utilitarianism; the second to all those attempts to follow Kant in presenting the authority of the appeal to moral

rules as grounded in the nature of practical reason. Both attempts, I shall argue, failed and fail(1981:62).

In this passage we get a good sense of the spirit of the communitarian argument about the negative consequences of slaying authority in the age of Enlightenment: the efforts to slay authority and disenchant the world have left people more free, but it has never become clear what they are free to do. Where the enemy was once over zealous commitment to ideology or religion, the problem now was that all beliefs were rendered absolutely subjective and, largely, thought to be self-created. The correspondence theory of truth, the theory which tells us that our beliefs correspond to the ways things really are, was rendered an artifact of the dark-ages. To be enlightened eventually became, because of the enormous stress on autonomy, synonymous with being certain that there was no such thing as Truth. Truth was too dangerous, a loaded term that could return us to the dark days of religious wars which the Enlightenment was conceived to move us away from.

This interpretation of the events of the Enlightenment has substantial consequences for all of us who are today concerned, as Bloom is, by the rise of cultural relativism and the prevalence of philosophical homelessness. It is clear that many people are concerned by these developments because Bloom's book seemed to spawn the recent "culture war" genre of books which pit relativists or

pragmatists against realists, conservatives against liberals, traditionalists against post-moderns, oppressors against oppressed, etc. In addition to that, the language of "culture war" that has been so prevalent in the academy over the last few years finally came to the public's attention when Pat Buchanan boldly declared war on all non-traditional lifestyles at last year's Republican National Convention. If there is one book that has galvanized the sides of this debate it is Bloom's simply because so many people have read and discussed it.

For the mainstream public the issue has been framed as a question concerning the self-image of our society and ourselves. We must ask ourselves whether or not the way we do things is the universally true way. We either believe, with Bloom, that our values and our cultural practices are derived from "the way things are" and that these practices and beliefs somehow correspond to some self-evident universal reality or, alternately, we think of our practices and beliefs as absolutely relative, mere products of historical circumstance and personal preference. These are the two poles with which we are confronted and, since language dictates the realm in which discussion can take place, we must choose between these two poles and fight for our beliefs.

Unfortunately for us, over the last few years very little debate has been given to whether or not these poles make any intellectual or historical sense; instead,

intellectuals and politicians have been very happy to fit themselves into one pole or the other and spend time excoriating those on the opposite side. Popular media commentators like Bill Buckley and George Will took up Bloom's position and proclaimed themselves the conservators of our western Enlightenment heritage while a slew of feminists, gay activists, and other liberal leaders took up the mantle of destroying the Enlightenment patriarchy and its oppressive cultural vision. Though no book has sold as well as Bloom's did, it is clear that plenty of people have made a tidy wage by selling the latest and cleverest polemic that keeps the divisions I spoke of above alive and well.

The consequence of taking the communitarian reading of the Enlightenment seriously is that we can see that the two contemporary philosophical camps represented by liberals and conservatives which seem so widely divided and mutually exclusive represent, ultimately, a phony dichotomy. What I mean to say is that if we are to believe the communitarian version of history, then we must see that the Enlightenment tradition which Bloom and his friends desperately seek to preserve is the very tradition of thought that has spawned cultural relativism, scientific empiricism, and the general antipathy towards authority that they so detest. Just as Bloom is busy defending the tradition which gave birth to everything he hates, the liberals who fashion themselves as post-moderns, anti-Enlightenment philosophers, and the like are busy extending the mantle of what they profess to hate,

namely, the Enlightenment. The consequences of the communitarian vision of the Enlightenment are clear: if you believe, as Bloom does, that we have lost moral direction in the western world, that we have gone too far in subverting authority, that we are a lost species of people, then the worst thing that you can do is become a Bill Bennett, i.e. a defender of the Enlightenment, because you are then defending that tradition of thought which has led us into this morally directionless time. If, on the other hand, you wish to fight oppression, subvert authority and the like, then do not pretend that you are post-modern because you are fulfilling the dream of the Enlightenment, the dream that we can free ourselves from anything that constricts our ability to become the person that we wish to be.

Now, what I have just stated may meet with some furious objection or just plain confusion. Not many people can imagine that William Bennett and George Will are promoting a subversive cultural philosophy or that Richard Rorty and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. are purveyors of Tradition. Not many people can imagine it because so much time has passed between 1789 and the present that the Enlightenment ideas which once horrified conservatives like Edmund Burke whose book, *Reflection on the Revolution In France*, still stands as the most famous rejection of the French Revolution and the mantle of Enlightenment philosophy ever written, now constitute the ideas which conservatives believe need to be conserved. This is the terrible trick that history has

played on conservatives; the ideas and philosophies that they are now conserving are, in fact, relativistic, anti-authority, anti-hierarchy, and revolutionary in nature. When George Will describes himself at one and the same time as a defender of the Enlightenment and a Burkean there is something sad about it because, as Robert Nisbet has written, in Burke's eyes the French Enlightenment represented the most arrogant, tradition-leveling movement known to history:

Not since Reformation insurrections in the name of God, Burke thought, had a revolution occurred in Europe so monolithically consecrated to the salvation of man and to his complete spiritual remaking. Precisely as Anabaptists had been willing to lay waste to all that interfered with their creation of the New Christian Man, so the Jacobins, Burke perceived, were willing to destroy all institutions that interfered with the making of Revolutionary Man (Nisbet, 1986:5).

No matter how long ago it happened, communitarians remind us, the ideas of the Enlightenment are still revolutionary in spirit and, therefore serve no real purpose for conservatives but to further the cultural relativism and ideological instability which they detest.

Our present cultural debate only became possible by forgetting that the main idea of the French Enlightenment was that accepted authority could and should be undermined in order to set the individual free, to make him or her more autonomous and independent-minded than medieval societies

had previously allowed. Robert Nisbet reminds us that there are two ways to view European history:

if we value the emergence of the individual from ancient confinements of patriarchal kinship, class, guild, and village community, the outcome of modern European history must appear progressive in large degree...If, on the other hand, we value coherent moral belief, clear social status, cultural roots, and a strong sense of interdependence with others, the same major events and changes of modern history can be placed in a somewhat different light. The processes that have led to the release of the individual from old customs and solidarities have led also to a loss of moral certainties, a confusion of cultural meanings, and a disruption of established social contexts (1953:69-70).

In the same book Nisbet tells us that "So far as western society is concerned, the frame of reference for all of these contrasts is the transition from medieval to modern Europe. It is the social structure of the Middle Ages, real or imagined, that can be contrasted against the modern society of atomized individuals who are free to reason for themselves." Yet, though Nisbet can see that moral clarity is not and cannot be a legacy of the Enlightenment, Bloomians fight on, defending that which creates the culture that they so despise. That this happens so often is the result of the tragedy of the modern age: the Enlightenment has become exactly what the German philosophers Horkheimer and Adorno predicted it would become, totalitarian.

What I mean by this is that certain modes of thought characteristic of the Enlightenment so dominate our ways of thinking that no one, not even the most outspoken critics,

of Enlightenment can really break free from its hold. Bloom is stuck: we see that he values Natural Rights too much to actually endorse a return to the medieval, yet he despises the atomization which naturally follows from granting all people full autonomy. On the other side we see it too: anglo/American feminists appeal to Natural Rights conceived by Enlightenment philosophers in order to destroy the oppressiveness of that very same Enlightenment. It is strange, but all over we see that people are too fully and blindly immersed in the modern world view to seriously entertain any radical new way of being.

Even the communitarians, with the exception of Heidegger who has a valuable lesson to teach them, fall prey to engaging in a criticism of Enlightenment which is shot through with Enlightenment ways of thinking. Indeed, we will see, the whole way that they conceive of the problem is characteristic of the Enlightenment modes of thought they so disparage. Throughout the communitarian literature we see, as in the above quote by Nisbet, comparisons of the Enlightenment age versus the medieval age carried out in a style akin to the cost-benefit analysis method, a method uniquely Enlightenment in character. So, for instance, Richard Rorty writes that the real question communitarians should be asking themselves is "whether disenchantment has, on balance, done us more harm than good, or created more dangers than it has evaded(1991 B:194). MacIntyre plays into Rorty's hands by weighing moral clarity against

personal autonomy and deciding that medieval people had it better and that we should do everything we can to return to their way of living.

What MacIntyre fails to see is that in taking up Rorty's question he is bound to analyze modernity through its totalitarian lens. First he provides a cost-benefit analysis of the modern age based on notions of harm and good that are seen by most, maybe even him, to be completely arbitrary. This is what leads to Nisbet's assertion that the medieval versus Enlightenment debate amounts to a question concerning which lifestyle one prefers. To reduce the debate to a matter of preference, even if one were able, as MacIntyre is, to show why one should prefer it, is to reveal that one views the world as members of Enlightenment societies do: as a place in which people create ways of being rather than discover the True way to be.

In addition to this mistake, but related to this view of the world and our place in it, MacIntyre makes another move which leaves him thoroughly enmeshed in the Enlightenment. In laying out his story of how a group of philosophers conspired to create the modern moral crisis and how we should now do everything we can to return to another way of living, he reveals that he, like other Enlightenment philosophers, believes that human beings are the creators of history rather than the pawns of it. This is the quintessential belief of the Enlightenment: the world can be ordered by human beings. It is this view of the world which

has led us into an age where all hope for change is directed toward politicians who seek to alter and manipulate history and toward science and technology which increasingly strip the world of its mystery in order to show us how all things can be ordered and manipulated. When MacIntyre and other communitarians fall prey to the rhetoric of cause and effect and then recommend ways to change our lot, they are acting just as modern politicians and scientists do and they, therefore, become Enlightenment thinkers too.

The modern thinker who was able to avoid this pitfall is Heidegger, the philosopher around which this project was originally conceived. It was he who not only saw the deleterious effects of Enlightenment, but who refused to play the blame game or the solution game which the communitarians fall prey too. He refused to blame the development of the age of Enlightenment on any human beings because he saw that to blame people for bringing about such a tremendous cultural shift is already to give them too much credit; it is, in short, already to believe that human beings are the lords of the earth and History.

Heidegger held to his unusual insight that told him that if we are hoping for a spiritual renewal, then we must make room for God to return by first recognizing that we are not gods ourselves. This is not to say that if such a recognition were to take place that our spiritual crisis would immediately end or that God would come back from the dead, it would merely, Heidegger argued, set the stage for

such events. Over and over in his essays on technology he warns that we have lost site of the fact that we are not gods, or, as he puts it, lords of the earth. In "The Question Concerning Technology" he argues that technology has given us so much power to order our surroundings by dominating Nature that we have come to think of ourselves as lords over all beings and over that which used to evoke fear and reverence in us, i.e., Nature.

What Heidegger sees that other communitarians do not is that, to use an example from MacIntyre, to credit utilitarians with creating the spiritual pathos prevalent in the modern world is already to view history secularly, as though God, or Being, or History, or anything more powerful and greater than human beings had nothing to do with it. Heidegger chose the opposite tact: he argued that the Enlightenment is merely one epoch in the historical revelation of Being or God, an epoch in which Being is revealing itself in its oblivion. In other words, this is an age in which God is choosing to withhold himself. Various schools of thought are not, as MacIntyre argued, responsible for creating the modern age; instead, they are mere reflections of the spirit of the age, a spirit whose origin is unrelated to human creation. In other words, modernity, Enlightenment, the dictatorship of reason, and the rise of all of these constitute our shared tragic destiny, a destiny that has been sent to us by something which is greater than us and which we cannot comprehend. We

are, plainly, incapable of creating something so great and encompassing as the age of Enlightenment; it had to have been sent. To think otherwise, Heidegger would argue, is ludicrously arrogant and indicative of the Enlightenment mode of thinking about human power.

Real change, Heidegger saw, would only come if human beings could be made to see how foolish our modern view of human power really is: we are not lords or gods, he asserts, but servants of Being or God. Though the end of the Enlightenment era cannot, he would argue, be brought about by philosophers, or thinkers, or any other group of human beings, there is work to be done if one hopes for the birth of a new age. The work is to restore a sense of humility to the human race. It is to be accomplished by rejecting both the idea that it is human beings who have created the mess that is the modern age and the more dangerous idea that human beings can, somehow, fix it.

The insight that Heidegger has which other communitarians and liberals and conservatives do not have is that human beings, for all their pretense to the contrary, are incapable of creating anything so grand as a cultural transformation; this was true in 1789, before that, and today. Heidegger wants us all to feel the same indebtedness to something greater than ourselves that poets and artists feel. It is poets and artists, Heidegger argues, who think in a radically different way than people of the Enlightenment. Poets and artists know that all creation is

inspired, that artists do not create, but serve as conduits through which Being or God or something divine reveals itself. One need only recall the importance of the poetic muse to recognize that poets are keenly aware of the poverty of their own ability to create; poets have long depended upon something greater than themselves, something divine in nature, to make their work possible.

In one of his late writings, "Conversations on a Country Path About Thinking," Heidegger describes the human being in this way: "man is he who is made use of for the nature of truth"(Heidegger, 1966:84-85). This fact, Heidegger believed, the great poets and artists already know, but the rest of us must learn. Learning this, and, for those who know its truth, teaching this is what will set the stage for the arrival of a new epoch, one that provides us with some options of how to be and how to live that are not accessible to us while living under the dictatorship of reason.

Heidegger is often disparaged for leaving us little to do in light of the fact that he concluded late in life that "only the gods can save us." People accuse him of promoting anything from slothful indifference to moral and political anarchy with that stand. What is missed in these condemnations, I believe, is that Heidegger does not think that we are doing anything as grand as we believe right now. To do nothing actually means, simply, to realize how little we are doing at the present time and how foolish we are for

believing otherwise. We must, he believes, be made to see that we exert very little control over our own historical circumstances.

The consequences of this view are serious: he is calling for us to give up the liberal notion that we can bring about heaven on earth and the communitarian or conservative notion that we can turn back time so that we can recapture heaven on earth. We are not so powerful as to do either of these; nor were we so powerful, as the communitarians assert, to bring these circumstances upon ourselves. It is the belief in this power, finally, which is the root cause of our own spiritual homelessness and which prevents us from even creating the type of circumstances under which the gods might choose to return and, thus, relieve us of our spiritual suffering. Our hope lies, finally, in the dim chance that we can learn to dwell, as Heidegger did, poetically. To live in a disenchanted world, we need to open ourselves to the mystery that this disenchantment itself "happened" to us. It was, as Heidegger would say, granted to us, as the latest and perhaps deepest form of enchantment itself.

Sources Consulted

- Barlett, Donald L. and James B. Steele. 1992. America: What Went Wrong? Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel.
- Bellah, Robert, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, Steven M. Tipton. 1985. Habits of the Heart. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.
- _____. 1991. The Good Society. New York: Vintage Books.
- Bennett, William J. 1992 The Devaluing of America: The Fight for Our Culture and Our Children. New York: Summit Books.
- Bentham, Jeremy and John Stuart Mill. 1987. Utilitarianism and Other Essays. Edited by Alan Ryan. London: Penguin Books
- Berlin, Isaiah. 1970. Four Essays On Liberty. New York: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 1956. The Age of Enlightenment. Chicago: Mentor.
- Bloom, Allan. 1987. The Closing of the American Mind. New York: Simon and Schuster Inc.
- _____. 1990. Giants and Dwarfs. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Burke, Edmund. 1989. "Reflections on the Revolution in France" In Two Classics of the French Revolution: Reflections on the Revolution in France and The Rights of Man. New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday.
- De Tocqueville, Alexis, 1966. Democracy in America. Trans. by George Lawrence. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.
- Dewey, John. 1939. Freedom and Culture. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- _____. 1960. Theory of the Moral Life. Intro by Paul Isenberg. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Eagle, Morris N. 1984. Recent Developments in Psychoanalysis: A Critical Evaluation. New York: McGraw Hill

- Foucault, Michel. 1986. "What is Enlightenment?" In The Foucault Reader. Ed. Paul Rabinow. Hamondsworth: Penguin.
- Gless, Daryl J. and Barbara Hernstein Smith, eds. 1992. The Politics of Liberal Education. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1977. Basic Writings from Being and Time to the Task of Thinking. Edited with general intro. and introductions to each selection by David Farrell Krell. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers Inc.
- _____. 1966. Discourse on Thinking. A translation of Gelassenheit by John M. Anderson and E. Hansfreud. New York: Harper and Row.
- _____. 1977. The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays. Trans. with an intro. by William Lovitt. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.
- Horkheimer, Max and Theodore Adorno, ed 1991. Dialectic of Enlightenment. Trans. by John Cumming. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.
- Horkheimer, Max. 1947. Eclipse of Reason. New York: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 1972. Critical Theory: Selected Essays. Trans. by Matthew J. O'Connell and Others. New York: The Seabury Press.
- Hunter, James Davidson. 1991. Culture Wars The Struggle to Define America. New York: BasicBooks.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1970. Political Writings. Edited with an intro. and notes by Hans Reiss. Trans. by H.B. Nisbet. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.
- Kirk, Russell. 1953. The Conservative Mind. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1981. After Virtue. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.
- _____. 1988. Whose Justice? Which Rationality? Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Malachowski, Alan, editor. 1990. Reading Rorty. Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Mill, J.S. 1989. On Liberty with The Subjection of Women and Chapters on Socialism. Edited by Stephen Collini.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nisbet, Robert. 1986. Conservatism: Dream and Reality.
Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

_____. 1953. The Quest for Community. Oxford: Oxford
University Press.

Oakley, Francis. 1992. Community of Learning: The American
College and the Liberal Arts Tradition. Oxford:
Oxford University Press.

Oakeshott, Michael. 1991. Rationalism in Politics and Other
Essays. Foreword by Timothy Fuller. Indianapolis:
Liberty Press.

Phillips, Kevin. 1993. Boiling Point: Democrats,
Republicans, and the Decline of Middle-Class
Prosperity. New York: Random House.

_____. 1990 The Politics of Rich and Poor:
Wealth and the American Electorate in the Reagan
Aftermath. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

Rorty, Richard. 1982. Consequences of Pragmatism.
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

_____. 1989. Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

_____. 1991 A. Essays On Heidegger and Others. Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press.

_____. 1991 B. Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sandel, Michael. 1982. Liberalism and the Limits of Justice.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Saul, John Ralston. 1992. Voltaire's Bastards: The
Dictatorship of Reason in the West. New York: The
Free Press.

Taylor, Charles. 1992. The Ethics of Authenticity.
Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

_____. 1989. Sources of the Self. Cambridge, Mass.:
Harvard University Press.

Weber, Max. 1958. The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit
of Capitalism. Trans. by Talcott Parsons with
an intro. by Anthony Giddens. New York: Charles
Scribner's Sons.