

to have particular implications for the reform of society as well as for the reorientation of thought.

The sense of paradox diminishes, although it does not dissipate, when we realize that the claim made on behalf of the second way is a claim about a transitory historical circumstance – our circumstance – rather than a universal claim about humanity and its future.

We should not flatter ourselves into believing that we have already found the formula of freedom, and possess the most valuable differences. We remain unfree, and are becoming less different.

### EMPOWERMENT AND VULNERABILITY

The program of democratic experimentalism has motives that go beyond politics. The themes of false necessity and empowered democracy – the explanatory and the programmatic concerns of this work – lie, all around, on the surface of the argument. The vision of human life and its transformation, underlying these themes, remains only partly expressed. It is nevertheless the overriding concern. From that vision, once made explicit and persuasive, must flow much of the authority of the ideas. From the longings the vision mobilizes, and seeks to interpret, must come much of the energy for the changes in societies and in people that these ideas propose.

Every political project pushes human experience in certain directions, encouraging some possibilities of life and discouraging others. This ineradicable tilt characterizes even the programs that value, as all versions of democratic experimentalism should, diversity and novelty, recognizing the many forms of human greatness.

We cannot separate two sets of elements in our experience – those that constitute a supposedly universal and invariant human nature, and those that exist as creatures of history, culture, and politics. The wall between these domains always crumbles. Even the most intimate recesses of our personal experience remain hostage to the course of politics. Conversely, no great transformative enterprise can achieve either the clarity or the energy it requires, unless it communicates with our innermost longings – the very longings that ruling dogma and established organization refuse to countenance.

There is a vision of the best response to the problems of human life that has reappeared in the moral history of many civilizations, under countless forms. Its hallmark is the quest for invulnerability. It sees us chained, by the marriage of illusion and desire, to an ordeal of disappointment, suffering, and pain. From this ordeal we can escape, it teaches, by a combination of insight and practice.

We must cast away the illusions that support this endless cycle of futile and restless searching. We can then achieve communion with the unchanging, undivided, and universal reality to which we in fact belong. Having evaded vain distraction and longing, we can cast a spell on ourselves – not of fantasy and trickery, but of understanding and acceptance. From this hard-won vantage point, we can practice acts of self-possession and compassion, informed by our discovery of the trials we share with all men and women, or even with all living creatures.

The goal of this conversion of the self, and the sign of success, is invulnerability to the disappointments to which the marriage of our strivings to our illusions condemns us. Serenity, expressed in independence, opening up toward kindness to others, and an embrace of fate – our fate and the universal fate – is the great gift we are to obtain from the achievement of invulnerability.

A story meant to counteract our illusions anchors this response to the human predicament in a larger view of reality. According to this story, the distinctions among phenomena in general, as well as among individuals in particular, are superficial. Only when we take this sham world of distinction seriously do we get hooked on frustrated desire and compulsive striving.

A characteristic version of this idea is the moral and psychological practice recommended by Ancient Greek Stoicism. We can secure independence by overcoming distraction. Engaged fully in the present, undisturbed by remorse or longing, we can realize, through this possession of the moment, communion with universal and undivided reality.

The vision of human possibility to which the arguments of false necessity and empowered democracy contribute, and from which they arise, reverses the ethic of invulnerability and rejects the beliefs on which that ethic depends. Consider, first, the rejection and replacement of the beliefs.

The imagination finds itself in a world marked by the reality of differences, the depth of individuals, and the once-and-for-all, irreversible, and decisive character of historical events. In this world, the differences among things and among people are for real. Among individuals, these differences are deep as well as real.

From every individual person, for all the sameness-producing forces that grind down upon him, can grow an original, someone unlike anyone else who has ever existed. We all live as individuals in historical as well as biographical time: incomplete, mutilated (in a sense I shall soon explore), with a surfeit of possible capacity hovering over our straitened circumstances, and plunged into history, the experience of the events that keep deciding and undeciding

our fate, and might not have happened, or might have happened differently.

History is our fate – not because it had to be or needs to be what it is, but because it threatens to make each of us into something little and particular, a bit actor in a script we never wrote and barely grasp, rather than the protagonists of our own lives. We begin to master history by beginning to resist it. By resisting its fatefulness, we make ourselves more human. We demystify and disrespect the naturalized world of practices and institutions, pieties and dogmas, the better to respect people. Then we can worship one another as the context-resisting, -revising, and -transcending agents we really are.

We can no more grow in self-possession by denying and evading this world of time and individuality, of dim insight and lopsided striving, of accident and absurdity, than we can comprehend something by staring at it. The will needs less to put itself under a spell of quietude and resignation than to make common cause with the imagination. By placing the actual under the aegis of the possible, while refusing to corral the possible within a perimeter it can circumscribe, the imagination rescues the will from the choice between blind routine and aimless rebellion, and enables it to find possible next steps instead of reasonless repetition of present practices or blind rejection of the established order.

The essence of moral wisdom is unprotection. To avoid the anticipated death that occurs when we lose contact with the imagination of the possible – and therefore also with the dark, unrealized part of the self – we must throw down our shields. We must be prudent in the little things, but only the better to be foolhardy in the big ones. From our experiments in unprotection comes the possibility of surprise, and hence of self-transformation.

The most important instance of this life-giving unprotection is our acceptance of heightened vulnerability to other people. It is in the zone of heightened vulnerability that we are more able to imagine and to give, receive, or refuse love.

In everyday life, the chief expression of the practice of unprotection is the willingness to endure the risks that every innovation imposes on the established form of cooperation, and the determination to press for a higher form of cooperation: one that is more hospitable to repeated and accelerated innovation, and to the narrowing of the gap between the activities that take the context for granted and the activities that challenge and change it.

Our reward is a style of cooperation that wages no war against plasticity. Because plasticity and cooperation are the two great conditions of practical progress, and their interference with each other is the most burdensome constraint on our emancipation from

poverty, infirmity, and drudgery, no achievement is more important to the improvement of our material circumstances.

The doctrine of unprotection for the sake of vitality and plasticity must, by an apparent paradox, include the acknowledgment of a need for security. We must be secure in a domain of core safeguards, identities, and endowments. Not to turn this need for protection in the service of unprotection into an excuse to mummify character or society is a major task of statecraft and moral prudence.

The idea of unprotection as wisdom opposes the quest for serenity through invulnerability. However, both that idea and this quest respond to the same experience: the torment in which we are placed by the beginning of freedom and of insight, as soon as we have started to loosen the bonds of custom, routine, and conventional imagery. The revolutionary alliance of science and democracy has accelerated this loosening, and brought to a head the great contest between the ethics of serenity and vulnerability.

The aim of the institutional experiments and the moral adventures embraced by those who reject the search for serenity through invulnerability is the carrying of ordinary experience and common humanity to a higher level of power: not just practical capacity (although that as well) but power to transcend the insights and products of established society and culture. This residue, this surfeit, used to be called "spirit." Power to the spirit, so that it can go further toward reconciling itself with others and create a world less hostile to its impatience and its ambition, is the object of the undertaking.

Democracy – based on demophilia, on the tearing down of the false barriers and rigid hierarchies between us, and on the consequent multiplication of ways of working together not predetermined by blueprints of social division and hierarchy – is an important part of the path toward this goal. However, it is only part of the path: neither the whole path nor the destination. In this part of the path, a rigid equality of circumstance matters less than greater opportunity for capable action and self-development. The egalitarian distribution of resources remains secondary to the breaking of all privileged strangleholds on the future-making resources of productive capital, political power, and educational equipment.

The destination is our raising up from the littleness that prevents us from connecting with others without, as the condition of connection, surrendering the claim of spirit: the claim that there is always more in us than there is in all the social and cultural orders we build and inhabit. We claim – each of us individually as well as all of us collectively – to be out of place in a world that refuses to recognize this power in us, and continues to treat each of us as a

doomed and specialized worker in the execution of an inhuman plan.

We must distinguish the attempt to radicalize democratic experimentalism, especially through the path here labeled empowered democracy, from the self-defeating effort to put an imaginary selfless citizen in the place of the real, embodied individual, who pursues distinct interests in different domains of experience. No program based on so one-dimensional a view of personality, and so out of sympathy with the vast expansion of subjectivity, individual freedom, and practical capacity we enjoy in our anti-Spartas, could be feasible or worthy of realization. We must develop these programmatic ideas in a way that secures them against the charge of failing to economize on political virtue and making war on what we are now like. We must be sure that they recognize our contradictory dispositions and our justified resistance to the all-encompassing claims of public life.

The effort to deepen democratic experimentalism should not be identified with the sacrifice of privacy and subjectivity to civic virtue. Similarly, the raising up of the powers of humanity that effort serves should not be mistaken for a self-making and self-empowerment that denies or understates (in the tradition of Rousseau, Emerson, and Nietzsche) the passage of empowerment through accepted vulnerability and intensified connection. Such a view perverts, by its one-sidedness, the truth about us. Its mistake is to fail to represent correctly the relation between our connections with others and our transcendence over context, between our intersubjectivity and our infinity. Its consequence is to freeze an adventure into a posture. It is a posture we are unable to maintain without paying a life-denying price: the denial of opportunities for self-correction.

Once distinguished from this perversion, the ideal of finding light in the shadowy world of the commonplace, and doing justice to the genius of common humanity, can be disentangled into three sets of elements. They span the distance from a practical ambition to a visionary commitment.

The first element is the desire to strengthen our capacities to realize the particular goods of human life, beginning with the material and moral interests we already recognize as ours. Humanity continues to be bent under the yoke of poverty, ignorance, infirmity, and drudgery. Vast multitudes of men and women find themselves without the resources and skills to combine meaningful and respectable work with the provision of their basic material needs, and unable to care for themselves and their families.

The experience of today's richer democracies has shown that it has been possible to lift the vast majority out of destitution without

embarking on the course of institutional and spiritual innovation for which I argue here. However, only small and culturally homogeneous countries, with a long history of equalizing reform, culminating in an inclusive regime of social protection, have been able to moderate the division of society into the three great classes of the idea-manipulating supervisors, the poverty-free but powerless and routine-bound workers, and the downtrodden underclass. The rest of humanity cannot hope to reproduce their circumstances by imitating their arrangements.

Many believe that the extension of property rights, as now designed in the North Atlantic world, the continuation of global economic integration in its present form, and greater, more effective investment in education will suffice to heal the rifts in the richer countries, as well as to cure the evils of extreme world inequality. Here I argue that they are mistaken. We can generalize opportunity and capacity only by insisting on the practice of revolutionary reform: the piecemeal and gradual – but nevertheless cumulative, and therefore ultimately radical – reshaping of our arrangements and assumptions. This is a view that may seem compromised by its association with the theoretical dogmas and political calamities of a recent past.

It nevertheless embodies an indispensable truth that we must rescue from these associations. This truth expresses a matter of fact about the conditions for the achievement of certain practical forms of individual empowerment under the circumstances of contemporary societies. It speaks as well to something deep and permanent about us.

Our interests and ideals, and we ourselves, always remain hostage to the established institutional and ideological settlement. It is not enough to humanize that settlement through compensatory redistribution. We must humanize ourselves by changing the character as well as the terms of the settlement: its relation to the power by which we resist and reform it.

The second element of this aim of doing justice to the greatness of common humanity is the effort to contain the tragic conflict between the enabling conditions of personality. Every feature of our self-development, from the most elementary and material to the most ambitious and spiritual, depends on social bonds. Connections, however, impose chains, subjecting us to the two great oppressive forces of social life: its hierarchies of class and its stereotypes of role. Thus, every advance in connection becomes a surrender to this outer fate. In concert with our inner fate, the rigidification of the personality in a character, this outer fate immobilizes us until time destroys us.

Every attempt to rebel against the external fate of class and role

amounts to a betrayal of loyalties and a threat of isolation. Torn between our need to connect and our impulse to break the chains imposed by social connections, we face a rift in the central requirements of self-assertion.

A variant of this rift with decisive consequence for material progress is the tension between the requirements of cooperation and innovation on which all practical progress depends.

Another variant of the same rift is the burden that our belittlement by the divisions and hierarchies of social life places on our ability to give and receive love. Philosophers have told us repeatedly that in love we can most fully acknowledge one another as the context-transcending originals each of us really is. This fact helps to make love rather than altruism – the imagination and acceptance of the other rather than the restraint on self-interest – the organizing center of moral life.

However, we have not yet become these beings – not fully. We must make ourselves into them by all the acts of collective and personal self-transformation with which the arguments of this book are concerned. Our moral and political histories engage each other.

Beyond the strengthening of particular capacities to realize the particular goods of human life, we must seek so to arrange society that we lower the price, in subjugation and depersonalization, that we must pay in order to connect. By diminishing the tribute we must pay to class, role, and routine, we limit – although we can never abolish – the conflict between the enabling conditions of self-assertion. By moderating this conflict, we enlarge our freedom. We become better. We become more.

The third part of the goal from which this program draws its authority and its light is the effort so to reimagine and remake the world – the secular world of society we inhabit – that it becomes less unsuited to us, as beings who, by virtue of the most important and godlike attribute of our humanity, exceed any particular world. An order that recognizes and nourishes our capacity to judge, to resist, and to reform order is what we must have if we are to engage without self-denial and self-belittlement. We can then live out the truth about ourselves, more fully and single-mindedly, and find it confirmed by daily experience, rather than confined to our fantasy life of escape and adventure.

The conception composed of these three sets of elements, each supervening on the one before, is a normative vision, informed by an understanding of transformative possibility. This normative vision resists being grasped in the vocabularies of rule, virtue, or happiness.

Not rule – because the conception allows no translation into a closed set of norms. It contains, on the contrary, an antinomian

impulse, suggesting the provisional and conditional authority of any system of rules.

Not virtue – because all the would-be virtues matter less than the alliance of the imagination and the will. This alliance enables us further to lower our shields and better to reconcile the clashing requirements of self-assertion. It allows us to sacrifice serenity to vitality. It will not always be clear, in this change of heart and of course, when virtues amount to vices and vices to virtues.

Not happiness – because in abandoning the ideal of invulnerability, we court sufferings and joys that force the connotations of that word. Once tasted, they must seem irresistible to a being that is infinity imprisoned in the finite.

In stating this vision, we have reason to worry. Are we falling back into a romantic-heroic view of life that takes inadequate account both of our embeddedness in the societies and cultures, the races and the roles, the families and the jobs that define us, and of the many-sided and contradictory character of our interests and anxieties? Are we shifting onto politics and the historical world a weight that they cannot bear, and that only intimate experience and personal connection and commitment can support? And do we not then fail to take to heart the terrible lesson about the alliance of evil, illusion, and hope that history keeps teaching us?

Every vision of human possibility and the reshaping of social life must be tested by its ability to distinguish rightly between the inalterable conditions of existence, which we must accept, and the reformable order of society, which we must improve.

The countries that now present themselves as models to the rest of the world fail both these tests. In the present hegemonic power, for example, there is a widespread reluctance to subject institutions to the scrutiny and testing that Americans have lavished on other aspects of their experience. The rigidification of institutional arrangements contrasts with the popularity of practices of physical, psychological, and spiritual self-help that sometimes deny both our interdependence and our mortality. An individualistic Pelagianism coexists with an institutional idolatry.

Two species of the failure to hold the alterable conditions of social life to account that play an important role in the argument of false necessity are institutional fetishism and structure fetishism. Institutional fetishism is the failure to understand that abstract institutional conceptions like “representative democracy” or “market economy” lack any single, natural or necessary expression in a set of rules, practices, and institutions. Structure fetishism – the higher-order equivalent to institutional fetishism – is the failure to acknowledge that we can change the quality as well as the content

of the institutional and ideological orders within which we move: their relation to the power by which we challenge and change them, and thus the sense in which they are there, entrenched and imposed on us as natural facts.

In diminishing the discontinuity between the normal activities by which we reproduce an order and the exceptional ones by which we change it, by making our revisionary work an extension of our everyday jobs, we not only strengthen our capacity to realize particular goods; we also express and develop our most creative freedom: the freedom to master the context of action.

Easier said than done: institutional and structure fetishism turn out to be imprinted on the most influential traditions of social thought, including those that have guided the left. We continue to use the words and concepts of these traditions while professing to disbelieve in the rigorous theoretical assumptions that would support their use. We are less disillusioned than confused.

Our confusion helps to justify our institutional conservatism. Supposing, mistakenly, that real institutional change (as opposed to reformist tinkering) would mean the replacement of one indivisible institutional system by another (e.g. capitalism by socialism or socialism by capitalism), we conclude that such change is now neither feasible (in this age of relative peace) nor desirable (on the evidence of the calamitous consequences of revolutionary institutional change in the past century).

The generic character of the evil produced by the failure to challenge and improve what can be changed in the practices and institutions of society is entrapment. When we are entrapped, we cannot properly worship one another as the context-transcending beings we really are: our worship becomes misdirected from people to the arrangements and assumptions in which people are sunk. Our task is to deny reverence to the structures, the better to revere people.

There is entrapment in a divisive and specialized order of society and culture. That is the form of entrapment that the radicalization of democratic experimentalism most directly undermines. The concepts of institutional and structure fetishism describe two of its more important manifestations in our ideas. They show how we become accomplices to our own enslavement.

We are also entrapped, more generally, by the naturalization of the social world through repetition. Repetition in society and culture is a kind of incantation, leading us, through our inability to produce or endure permanent novelty and to be ever new, to accept a habitual form of life as a second nature. We spring the trap by changing the relation between repetition and disruption. We must so reform our arrangements and practices – including our practices

of discourse in technical disciplines like legal analysis or political economy – that the very activities by which we reproduce our second nature create opportunities and provide tools for its fragmentary, but motivated and cumulative remaking.

Such practices will not suffice to create their own agents. We must form these agents. We must educate them in a high-energy politics. We must endow them with resources that guarantee each individual an independent stake in the activities of a democratized market. We must develop schools that rescue the child from its family, its class, its culture, and its historical epoch. Such a school insists on being the voice of the future within the present. It treats every child as an ignorant and tongue-tied prophet.

By springing the trap – both the manifest trap of entrenched social hierarchy and division and the hidden, omnipresent trap of unthinking repetition – we change the conditions of engagement in social life. We make it possible to go further in distinguishing entrapment from engagement. The great sadness of the historical world has been the practical difficulty for the individual of separating them in his everyday life, not just in the moments of joy or compassion when he experiences himself as most godlike.

In struggling with our second natures, to prevent them from containing and killing us, we must nevertheless accept the inalterable conditions of existence. We can reject these conditions only by giving ourselves over to some self-destructive and isolating illusion.

What are these unchanging circumstances? And what role can the advance of the overthrow of false necessity and the advance of democratic experimentalism play in our response to them? In what spirit does a man who wrestles with his second nature embrace his condition?

The first inalterable circumstance is death, imposing on each human life the shape of an irreversible and unrepeatable course, subjecting what we hold dear, and our very selves, to the destructive work of time, and establishing a daunting contrast between the preciousness of the span we are allotted and the banality of the misdirected efforts with which, for the most part, we fill this span.

All societies and cultures conspire to arm us against the dread we feel at the prospect of this absolute limit, which not only annihilates our identities in a moment but also denies us the second chance we all think we deserve. The engagement in work and in love that makes the approach of this limit tolerable remains shadowed by the intimation of a disaster we are powerless to prevent.

This disaster is not just the disappearance of the self; it is our inability to control the effect of time on everything and everyone that matters most to us. Thus, in gaining a greater collective context

in which we act and think, we are forced to remember that this context is placed within a universal reality whose future we are unable to direct, whose purposes and end we are unable to discern, and whose meaning for us we are unable to settle.

The first and most fundamental response we must give to this situation is to accept it. All attempts at escape, through efforts at self-salvation and denials of death, harm the good of understanding and living a human life in the light of its dramatic limitedness and irreversibility. They weaken our hold on this good without delivering us from the evil of annihilation. As a result, we diminish our ability to devote ourselves to tasks and attachments. That devotion alone confirms us in the sentiment of being and the reality of freedom.

The second response to death and finitude supervenes on the first, and is shaped by it. It is the effort to establish the social arrangements and practices allowing more people to resolve, more fully and more often, the conflict between the enabling requirements of self-assertion: the need for connection to others, without the surrender to a social and cultural script marking, for each of us, the limits of experience and vision. Every aspect of the campaign to deepen democracy and radicalize experimentalism contributes to this end.

Even the hero, the genius, and the saint cannot solve this problem for themselves, except imperfectly: the works of heroism, genius, and saintliness look outward to other people, the non-heroes, non-geniuses, and non-saints, from whom, however, they also separate the protagonist. Because he can never adequately answer the question: where are the others?, he cannot solve the problem of how to live as mortal and embodied spirit.

The third response to death and finitude, extending the second under the circumstances of contemporary life, is to replace war by service as the collective occasion for the overcoming, through sacrifice, of banality and belittlement. Life is nothing if not sacrificial, and no life can be judged fully lived unless a person has been able, at certain times, to give himself to something greater than himself, and has felt the spirit within him beat against the cage. No one, rich or poor, famous or unknown, should have to go down into the grave without having lived these moments of self-transcendence, and felt the force of the fire within.

In the past, war has been all too often the collective occasion for such experience. Mandatory as well as voluntary social service can take the place of war as the shared opportunity for sacrificial devotion. Everyone, everywhere in the world, should have to spend a year or two of his life, in young adulthood, serving the needs of the needy. If he is professionally educated, he can work in the area

of his specialty. If he is not, the commitment to serve can become an occasion for remedial training in a skill that is useful to those who require help – from education to health, from homebuilding to care for the sick and the old. Every country, rich or poor, should send part of its youth to do social service in other countries, rich or poor, learning languages and understanding differences in the process.

A vast increase in our powers of compassion, sustained by practical arrangements nourishing our ability to imagine the otherness of other people, to raise them up, to recognize and respect the god within, is what we need. In this climate of broadened imagination and magnanimity, the rest will also become possible.

If the limit imposed by death and finitude is one of the inalterable conditions we must accept, the other condition is the shape taken by a human life under the pressure of this limit and in the circumstances of embodied spirit, no less embodied than spirit. We begin like hapless gods, discovering as children a world in and against which we need not yet struggle. From this paradise of imagination, we are exiled into a world of striving. We must cease to be everyone, and become someone.

This someone is the product of a mutilation, a cutting away of human possibilities, for the sake of effective engagement in a world that resists and frustrates our striving. The mutilation we undertake for the sake of fecundity of action leaves us separated from the selves we can no longer be. What is, and can and should be, our relation to these suppressed and unrealized possibilities of life we see reflected back to us in the lives of other people?

As we grow older, a mummy may form around us. Rather than dying all at once, we begin to die many small deaths. The mummy forms both from without and from within. From without, it is the second nature of our station in society, and of the routines and repetitions of daily life. This adaptation drives us into a funnel of narrowing possibilities. From within, it is the second nature of our character, which is the rigidified form of a personality: the repertory of our habits of thought and action, translated into a way of living and of feeling among other people.

Just as each of us begins to become his station, so – even more intimately and completely – he becomes his character. The two second natures work together to undermine the condition of spirit, which is surfeit and incongruity. They suppress contradiction and simplify possibility, delivering death by installment.

Combined, the two second natures are our fate, and we would be right to hate them if we could not change their place in our lives. We would be right to hate them as the little and masklike

version of our self that has kidnapped and imprisoned the bigger self each of us really is.

We cannot lift the imperative of mutilation. We must accept it as part of the price of embodiment and engagement. However, we can work to change the relation of the mutilated self – the self we became – to the selves we left aside. We can keep the frontier between the realized and the abandoned, or not yet achieved, selves open. We can teach ourselves to feel the hurt at the point of amputation, and to experience the ghostly movement of the missing limb. Then we can learn to use what we have lost.

We do so in one way, through the advance of democratic experimentalism, by weakening the hold of the outer second nature, the logic of the social station we occupy, on our capacities for initiative and connection. We do so in a second way, through the ethic of accepted vulnerability, by struggling against the dictatorship of our inner second nature, the personality frozen into a character. And just as the influence of an ethic of accepted vulnerability helps, from a distance, in the struggle against the outer second nature, so the deepening of experimentalist practices and democratic institutions helps to form the people who are strong enough to deny the last word to the inner second nature.

The point is not to prevent repetition, nor to deny the role of habit, as a principle of economy in action and accumulation in virtue. It is to form the capacities and the ideas, and to multiply the situations, that enable us to pierce the wall between the one self each of us has become and the range of experience from which he had to turn away.

In a world of democracies, each nation develops in a different direction the powers and possibilities of humanity, as culture and as institution. Each makes prophecy gain ascendancy over memory. Each allows the individual to escape, thanks to what must become his universal right to live and work elsewhere. Each must so value diversity and contradiction in its internal life that every rift can serve as an occasion to incorporate, reinterpret, and reconstruct what some other nation has worked out. Thus, tinkering through recombination, the daily bread of a practical experimentalism, is made to serve the purpose of a larger diversity. Each nation, in making itself different, sees itself partly reflected in other nations.

By analogy, we must imagine the same solution in the world of individuals, struggling through and against their own characters to form these characters, yet also periodically to put them under pressure, to shake them up, to bring into view and grasp possibilities of experience of some of the selves we forswore. In this way, we rip up the mummy from the inside, and make sure we die only one death.

We turn against ourselves. This work of self-disruption has two sources.

The first source of our attack on ourselves is our ambivalence toward one another. What we want from one another has no limit: nothing would ever be enough to assure each of us that he has a place in the world, or to console him for finitude and death. As a result, everything we receive from one another, even the most selfless acts of love and devotion, seems like a down payment on a transaction that cannot be completed. For how could it ever be completed, if it demands unconditional companionship and acceptance from others who share with us the same divine attributes of inexhaustible uniqueness, depth, and obscurity? If we try to protect ourselves by standing under the cold light of distance and indifference, we can neither reap the full benefits of cooperation nor win the yet greater riches of love.

As we move closer together, drawn by need and attraction, we pass by steps into an experience of two-tongued passions, of violent reversals, of hidden reservations. Infinitely needy of one another, we can never either give or receive enough.

Imprisoned in our individual minds and wills, yet finding in contact with other minds and wills that we cannot get answers to our questions, we try to place ourselves under spells and restraints. We accustom ourselves to prudent degrees of distance. Then we rage and rebel against our own stratagems of self-protection.

The second source of our turning against ourselves is our inability either to accept the particular worlds we build and inhabit, or to do without them. Just as we are ambivalent to one another, so we are ambivalent to our created worlds of society and culture, raising them up and smashing them, in big and little ways, and uncertain whether to revere or defy them.

Without a particular place, a home for action and belief, we are powerless and lost. How could any place do justice to us? There is always more in us, in each of us as well as in all of us collectively, more that we have reason to want, to do, and to feel, than there could ever be in any place, than it could ever allow. So we must turn against it, and, in turning against it, turn against ourselves. The godlike excess of the person and his mind, his excess over all rule and structure, makes the conflict inescapable.

Together with the natural facts of death and loss, this ambivalence of ours toward one another and toward our shared worlds and works, this relentless self-overturning, gives us our untold sorrows. It multiplies opportunities for evil, arising from distance, difference, and fear. It opens us to the new experience and to the other person, making possible imagination and love.

This turning against ourselves is the problem and the solution,  
our ordeal and our salvation.

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